



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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NEWS RELEASE

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After four decades, USDA dams still silent protectors of SuAsCo watershed towns

Ten dams built by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service (SCS) between 1962 and 1987 in the Sudbury-Assabet-Concord rivers watershed – also known as the SuAsCo watershed – are today providing an estimated \$1.7 million in annual flood damage reduction benefits in eastern Massachusetts, according to the agency, now called the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Because of the wet conditions earlier this spring and last winter, NRCS is assisting the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, which owns the dams, in monitoring the structures to ensure that the dams continue providing flood protection to this continuously growing area west of Boston. The two agencies routinely check the dams after significant storms.

“Significant urban development has occurred in the watershed since the time these dams were built,” said Cecil B. Currin, Massachusetts State Conservationist for NRCS. “In addition to checking these dams after storms, we are evaluating the effects of land use changes on these dams and assessing any rehabilitation needs.”

The SuAsCo dams control a drainage area of some 65 square miles and provide available flood storage of more than four billion gallons. That capacity was needed this spring when rains fell on saturated ground and combined with snowmelt, increasing the amount of surface runoff from the watershed, according to the NRCS.

The dams were constructed by SCS through a project planned in 1958 by the Middlesex and Worcester conservation districts to protect the area from the type of destruction caused by Hurricane Diane three years earlier. The flooding from that storm resulted in an estimated \$2 million (\$14 million in 2005 dollars) in damage to homes, businesses, roads, bridges, and farms.

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“These 10 structures helped reduce the peak flows and flood levels downstream and provided flood damage reduction benefits, particularly on the Assabet River,” said Currin. “These dams are silent protectors for the SuAsCo watershed communities.”

Storm rainfall recorded by the National Weather Service and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) within and around the watershed was 0.5 to 1.5 inches on March 28th and 29th, and an additional 1.2 to 1.4 inches on April 2nd and 3rd. The rivers in this watershed filled to just above flood stage, according to the USGS.

If rehabilitation is needed on any of the SuAsCo dams, the state may request federal funding and technical assistance through the NRCS Watershed Rehabilitation Program.

The 377-square mile SuAsCo watershed encompasses, partially or wholly, 36 Massachusetts towns. The dams are located in the towns of **Berlin, Framingham, Marlborough, Northborough, Shrewsbury, Stow, and Westborough.**

NRCS, a federal agency that works hand-in-hand with Massachusetts citizens to improve and protect the commonwealth’s soil, water and other natural resources, is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. Since 1935, private landowners and communities have voluntarily worked with NRCS specialists to prevent erosion, improve water quality and promote sustainable agriculture.

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