

# Sandstone Creek Watershed Project

## Roger Mills and Beckham Counties, Oklahoma

Protecting Our People - Protecting Our Natural Resources



*This is one of 129\* examples of how local, state and federal government agencies have worked together to utilize the Natural Resources Conservation Service Watershed Program to address natural resource needs and improve the quality of life for thousands of Oklahomans.*

### Sandstone Creek Watershed Project

The Sandstone Creek Watershed Project consists of 42 flood control dams (23 in Roger Mills County and 19 in Beckham County). The dams were constructed between 1950 and 1970 by the Upper Washita Conservation District with the assistance of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Watershed Program.

The watershed encompasses 65,000 acres located in a rectangle formed by the towns of Cheyenne, Sayre, Elk City and Hammon. Drainage from the watershed enters the Washita River eight miles southwest of Hammon.

Severe flooding and erosion occurred in the watershed prior to construction of the dams. From 1920 to 1939 flooding occurred in the watershed an average of nine times a year. One hundred and eighty-four flood producing storms occurred during this twenty year period. Damage from these floods ranged from slight from the small floods to disastrous proportions from floods like one that occurred in 1934 where the entire 4,700 acres of floodplain was flooded.

Floods occurred even during the Dust Bowl years. A storm in April of 1934 produced 11 inches of rain in the watershed causing the Washita River to flood at Carnegie, Oklahoma, 117 miles downstream. Seventeen people in Hammon lost their lives from the storm when flood waters flowed out of the Washita River banks in the middle of the night.

Sandstone Creek Watershed Dams No. 12, 16A and 17A were recently rehabilitated to bring them up to current dam safety criteria for high hazard dams (dams where lives would be at risk if they suddenly failed). The height of the dams were raised, the earthen spillways enlarged and the principal spillways replaced. Rehabilitation ensures the dams remain safe and extends their benefits for another 100 years.



Sandstone Creek Watershed Dam No. 17A during rehabilitation.

### Sandstone Creek Watershed Project Benefits

- Provides \$356,500 in average annual benefits from reduced flood damages
- Provides flood protection for 4,700 acres of floodplain
- Provides flood protection for county roads and bridges
- Provides flood protection for 60 farms and ranches
- Impounded water has created fish and wildlife habitat, waterfowl nesting areas and livestock water
- Sedimentation is reduced by 296,000 tons annually

The Sandstone Creek Watershed Project is one of 129\* projects in Oklahoma that have been planned and implemented by local people with assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

2,107 NRCS-assisted flood control dams have been constructed in 61 Oklahoma counties. These watershed projects that also include thousands of conservation practices provide over \$81 million in average annual benefits.

For additional information about watershed projects in the state visit the Oklahoma Conservation Commission website at: <http://conservation.ok.gov> or visit your local conservation district and NRCS office.