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USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PERSONNEL INSPECTING WATERSHED DAMS IN NORTHEAST GEORGIA

ATHENS, GA Sept. 23, 2009—James E. Tillman, Sr. announced today that agency personnel from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are inspecting watershed dams after torrential rains have drenched the northern part of the state.

“So far, we have inspected dams in 25 counties to check for breaches and not one of our dams has been breached,” Tillman said.

"I am pleased to hear that out of over 280 Natural Resources Conservation Service dams in counties affected by the flooding in Georgia, not a single one has been breached. I commend the USDA for inspecting these dams so quickly and for continuing to monitor them,"--U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson.

Watershed dams consist of a pool where water is stored and an overflow area known as a spillway. As water levels increase, the excess water flows into the spillway. This slows the water down. Not only does it prevent further flood damage, it also gives those downstream more time to get to safety if necessary.

“While there is flooding downstream of our structures, the flood level is lower due to our dams being in place,” said Henry McFarland. McFarland is the State Engineer for the agency. “At least a portion of the storm runoff is still stored in our dams and will gradually be released over the next few days,” he added. “About 60 of the watershed structures have water flowing into the spillway as they are designed to do when water volume exceeds that of the pool,” McFarland added.

“I applaud the efforts made by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service to make certain our watershed dams are secure after the recent devastating floods in northern Georgia,” said U.S. Senator Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. “Infrastructure systems like this are in place to protect the residents in surrounding communities from further damage caused by severe weather and I thank USDA for taking proactive measures to make sure they are safe.”

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When the flood waters recede, the agency will do a more comprehensive evaluation of each structure to check for damage and make repairs if necessary.

Since 1953, NRCS has built over 350 structures in Georgia—designed primarily to protect prime farmland. Over the years, roads, homes, and businesses have been built downstream creating a potential for increased damages in a flood event. The agency is in the process of rehabilitating these dams and upgrading them to protect life and property.

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