

Investment in Infrastructure: Focus on Dams

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The Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) today releases new numbers on the national cost of rehabilitating the nation's non-federal dams and recommends a federal program to fund rehabilitation of dams, which will encourage state parallel funding programs, provide for cost sharing and stretch the funding pool to maximize the number of dams that will be rehabilitated.

As the new Congress and Administration focus funding on infrastructure improvements and the American Society of Civil Engineers releases its 2009 Infrastructure Report Card, US dam safety officials announce new estimates for upgrades to non-federal dams: The total cost of needed dam repairs nationwide is \$50 billion, including \$16 billion for high-hazard-potential dams. These cost estimates have increased significantly since the Association's 2003 report (\$36 billion for all dams and \$10.1 billion for high-hazard-potential dams).

Of the \$16 billion directed toward high-hazard dams (those whose failure would likely cause loss of human life), roughly \$8.7 billion is needed to repair publicly owned dams with the remaining \$7.3 billion needed for privately owned dams.

Further, in order to eliminate the existing backlog of 1819 deficient high-hazard-potential damsⁱ over the next ten years, the number of high-hazard-potential dams repaired will need to be increased by an additional 270 dams per year above the number currently being repaired - at an annual cost of \$850 million. ASDSO estimates that, in 2007, about \$700 million was spent collectively to rehabilitate about 341 dams (according to state data on dam rehabilitations completed during that year).

The nation's approximately 85,000 regulated dams provide vital benefits, including flood protection, water supply, hydropower, navigation, irrigation and recreation. While the estimated cost of rehabilitating our nation's dams is high, the collective cost of deferring maintenance on these structures is staggering.

The latest data from the National Inventory of Dams (NID), maintained by the US Army Corps of Engineers, shows that the number of deficient dams in the nation is increasing – up by 36% in the last five years.

Dam owners -- municipal, state and private – not state or federal regulators – are responsible for dam maintenance and repairs. Many dam owners, both public and private, are facing rehabilitation price-tags averaging in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, which few can afford.

While federal agencies own or regulate only about 4% of the 85,000 dams in the US, they too face formidable challenges as the nation's dams continue to age, downstream development increases and dam design and construction standards evolve. The US Army Corps of Engineers is spending roughly \$317 million to fix a dangerously leaking Wolf Creek Dam in Kentucky; the Corps is working with the US Bureau of Reclamation on a ten-year \$1.5 billion project to upgrade Folsom Dam in California; Center Hill Dam in Tennessee is undergoing rehabilitation estimated to cost \$263 million; and the list goes on.

ASDSO reports that state dam safety officials are preparing for a potential influx of needed funds, as state and federal lawmakers begin to focus on infrastructure. Many states are compiling lists of

“shovel-ready” dam rehab projects – those where construction could begin within two to 24 months. ASDSO is aware of 272 projects in 21 states that meet this definition. The funding need for these projects alone reaches almost \$382 million, which is the tip of the iceberg for dams in need of rehab.

Current ASDSO President Rob Martinez states, “Rehabilitating dams not only sustains their benefits, but also protects public safety. ASDSO applauds the American Society of Civil Engineers, and *Building America’s Future*, led by Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell, in bringing national attention to the aging infrastructure issue. In concert with these efforts, ASDSO asks the Obama Administration and Congress to create a fund for dam rehabilitation—administered through state dam safety programs—that could focus dollars over several years toward the most critical dam rehabilitation needs.”

ASDSO endorses legislation that would provide federal funds to be cost-shared at 65 percent federal to 35 percent state/local for non-federal publicly owned dams. The legislation would provide funds to states based on the number of high-hazard dams in each of the participating states.

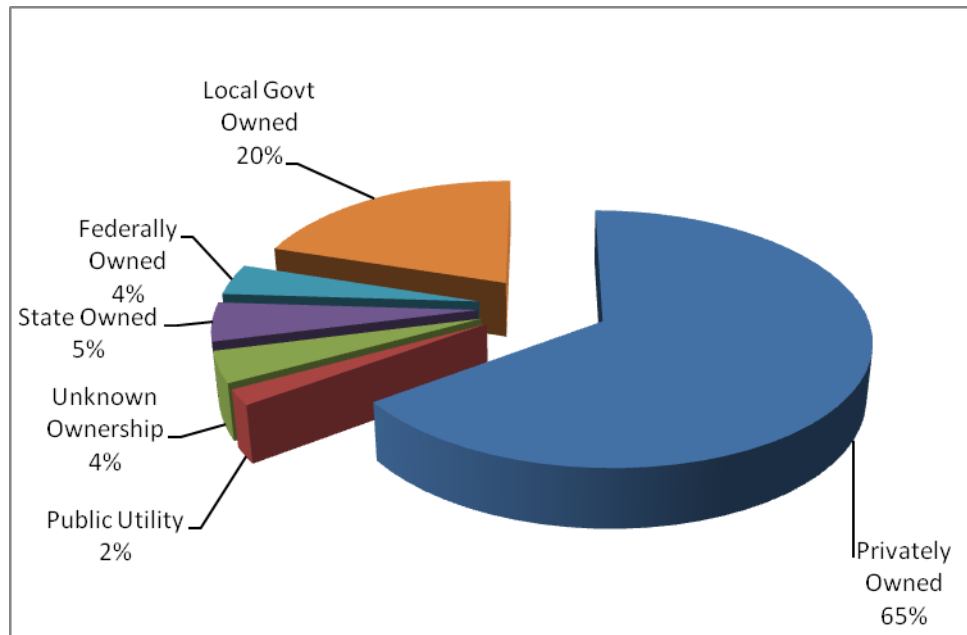


Figure 1: Breakdown of Dam Ownership

ⁱ Regulators determine a dam’s hazard potential classification based on the downstream consequences should the dam fail or have a serious incident; the classification has absolutely nothing to do with a dam’s condition or safety. **A high-hazard potential classification does NOT mean the dam is deficient.**

Dams that have a high-hazard rating are supposed to meet very stringent standards so that they can withstand all credible extreme events such as floods and earthquakes; yet states have determined many high-hazard-potential dams as deficient, proving that—in many instances—the stringent standards are not being met.

“Deficient” is defined as a dam that is not capable of performing safely under all required design pool and loading conditions. Note: Each state may have different definitions and standards.

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Since its formation in 1984, the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) has served as one of the premier professional organizations for individuals committed to ensuring the safety of dams in the U.S., including government officials, engineering consultants, contractors, manufacturers and suppliers, researchers, teachers, dam owners and operators and students.