



COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas for the Record

Environment Subcommittee Hearing – From Gray to Green: Advancing the Science of
Nature-Based Infrastructure

March 2, 2022

Thank you for holding today's hearing, Chairwoman Sherrill.

Natural infrastructure, while not a frequent topic of discussion, is nevertheless important to our communities. Traditionally, we think of infrastructure as the roads, bridges, and power grids that keep our country functioning. They're the physical framework of our society. While most of that infrastructure is manmade, we also have naturally occurring landscape features which can help lessen the impacts of weather events such as flooding or droughts.

That's right – nature IS infrastructure.

When Oklahomans consider practical examples of natural infrastructure, they don't need to look far. Oklahoma is home to more than 2,100 earthen dams, which are managed by local communities with assistance provided by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. These dams are so common, in fact, that 90% of Oklahomans live within 20 miles of a dam. These dams are very effective at limiting the potentially devastating impacts of flooding, which could wipe out a season's worth of crops in the blink of an eye.

But like a lot of our nation's infrastructure, these dams are showing their age. Nationwide, more than 5,000 of these dams are nearing or have exceeded the end of their functional lives and are in need of repair. It is because of this great need that I authored the Small Watershed Rehabilitation program more than two decades ago. Through this program NRCS has extended the service life of hundreds of these important structures across the state of Oklahoma.

This work is even more urgent now because as our climate changes, we are seeing more frequent and more costly extreme weather events each year. In addition to improving near- and longer-term weather forecasting to understand when and where

these events will occur, this Committee must carefully consider how we adapt to these occurrences to minimize damage to life and property.

It is appropriate that USDA has a leading role in the maintenance and repair of these dams. After all, America's farmers and ranchers have always led the way in managing land use to reduce environmental impacts from agriculture production while also protecting against extreme weather events. Small steps taken by these producers, such as planting buffer strips along water streams, are an effective means of reducing the impact of flooding and nutrient runoff.

Our panel of witnesses represents a number of agencies across the federal government who utilize natural infrastructure to mitigate the effects of extreme weather events. I am pleased we will hear from Dr. Sherry Hunt, who is based at USDA's Agricultural Research Service lab in Stillwater, Oklahoma, about her important research in this area. Her work examines ways we can use natural methods to extend the lives of the dams which are so important to these rural communities.

I thank our witnesses for sharing their expertise with us and I look forward to a productive discussion. Thank you and I yield back.