

Kevin Burns

Sunset Advisory Commission Hearing
Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board

April 27, 2022

My name is Kevin Burns
Wise County Commissioner Precinct 2
Texas Association of Watershed Sponsors board member
National Watershed Coalition past chair and Core Legislative Group Team member

Thank you, Chairman Schwertner, members of the Commission, Ms. Jones and staff for allowing this time for comments.

My comments are on behalf of all three entities and myself.

Wise County is a co-sponsor or co-owner of 108 flood control structures with shared maintenance responsibility for those structures.

Wise County taxpayers have shared the responsibility of building, maintaining, and enjoying the downstream benefits of those flood control structures and land treatment practices since the epic regional floods of 1957. That flood relieved a seven year drought in a multistate region, but in Wise County it washed out 84 bridges, devastating our mobility and adversely affecting our already strained local economy.

Most of the benefits these structures provide are to citizens far downstream from Wise County through flood control and water quality improvement in large population centers. Benefits of life safety and property damage control happens from the point of detention all the way to the Texas Coast.

Wise County appreciates the efforts of the TSSWCB establish guidelines and policies that quickly take advantage of federal funds available from the National Resource Conservation Service.

With the help of TSSWCB, the National Watershed Coalition has been successful in restoring funding in discretionary Federal Legislative spending and mandatory spending on watersheds that had been zeroed out of the Federal budget for more than a decade. The Core Legislative Group had made multiple trips over a number of years advocating in Washington D.C. prior to being invited to testify to an Agriculture Subcommittee hearing. That hearing has been a reference to justify the re-establishment of the Small Watershed Program in the current Farm Bill.

Five hundred million dollars of matching funds will be available over the next decade nationwide for planning, building, operation, maintenance and repair of our small watershed dams.

Although we have been successful in re-establishing funding, we have not been successful in establishing easy to follow guidelines or timelines from NRCS for obtaining those matching federal funds.

The TSSWCB staff must retain an amount of discretion in order to obtain NRCS funding, or the "slippage" goes to other states. There are over 11,000 flood control dams throughout the country that are aging just as 2040 located in Texas are.

Wise County appreciates the interaction, communication, advice, and funding it receives from the TSSWCB and wishes to continue enjoying those benefits. We owe much of our success in obtaining federal funds to the recordkeeping and expertise of TSSWCB staff.

I wish to personally thank each of you present and all the staff members that spend time to improve the services the State of Texas provides to its citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Burns", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kevin Burns
Wise County