

## Emergency Work and Permits

PA DEP recognizes in an emergency it may be necessary for individual landowners to clear streams of blockages and debris. Many items, such as up-rooted small trees, limbs, leaves, and debris that have formed a dam, diverted stream flow, or blocked an opening under a bridge can be removed without entering the stream.

**PA DEP and USACE should be consulted prior to the use of any mechanical equipment in a stream for a determination of permit requirements.**

- Public safety is of primary importance. When possible, landowners should seek assistance prior to removing debris.
- Machinery should not enter the stream unless access is otherwise impossible. If entering the stream is absolutely necessary, a permit must be obtained.
- Measures to control erosion and sediment should always be employed when working near streams.
- Landowners are reminded that live vegetation on the stream bank minimizes stream bank failures and reduces erosion. Live and undisturbed vegetation should not be removed.

## Dredging Does Not Prevent Future Flooding

Dredging is seldom the answer to preventing future floods. Dredging can have unexpected and unfavorable effects on upstream and downstream property owners. It is important to determine

whether the actual benefits can be achieved by other means. Channel improvement projects can achieve the same goals without these negative impacts.

Dredging frequently results in the following:

- increased flooding downstream
- upstream bank erosion
- increased gravel bar formations
- stream bank erosion
- destruction of stream habitat

Dredging is also impractical in most cases, considering the amount of dredging required to achieve adequate flood prevention. For example, to lower potential flood levels by 6 inches on a 900-foot-wide flood plain, you would need to dredge an existing 30-foot-wide channel an additional 15 feet deep, and maintain it at that depth.

**If you have questions or need more information, please contact the Pennsylvania Dept of Environmental Protection: [www.dep.state.pa.us](http://www.dep.state.pa.us)**

### Other Contact Information:

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency:  
[www.pema.state.pa.us](http://www.pema.state.pa.us)

Federal Emergency Management Agency:  
[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

United States Army Corps of Engineers:  
[www.usace.army.mil](http://www.usace.army.mil)

U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service:  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)

Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts:  
[www.PACD.org](http://www.PACD.org)

*Information for Local Governments, Non-Profit Organizations, and Individuals Affected by Flooding*



## Emergency Stream Stabilization

*Assistance is available from both Commonwealth and Federal government agencies in developing and implementing plans to restore stream channels.*

*If you are considering a stream restoration or improvement project, please contact one of the listed agencies for assistance and information.*

## **Stream Restoration After Flooding**

Stream blockages, eroded stream banks, and accumulated debris can present significant problems in the aftermath of a flood. The removal of debris and blockages from streams and any work to stabilize stream banks must be carefully planned.

Any disturbance to the streambed or bank requires a permit, whether the work is temporary or permanent. Applications for permits to work in waterways or wetlands within the Commonwealth should be directed to the Pennsylvania Dept of Environmental Protection (PA DEP). Depending on the scope of the project, a permit may also be required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). PA DEP will forward the application to the USACE if additional permits are required.

All landowners are encouraged to contact the USACE, PA DEP or the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for information and guidance relating to emergency stream stabilization. The following government agencies may be able to provide technical and/or financial assistance:

### **Pennsylvania Dept of Environmental Protection (PA DEP)**

PA DEP's emergency response mission is to protect public health and safety and restore the natural environment. PA DEP may provide technical assistance to applicants in planning projects that meet both of these goals.

### **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)**

The USACE is responsible for issuing permits for discharges of dredged or fill material into streams, including the bulldozing or leveling of streambeds or stream banks. The USACE may also provide limited cost shared assistance to local governments with minor projects to improve and clear stream channels and provide stream bank protection to endangered roadways, bridges and public facilities, and with small flood control projects.

### **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

Following a natural disaster, the NRCS may provide funding assistance for emergency measures to relieve imminent hazards to life and improved property. The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) may fund work for removing debris from stream channels, restoring vegetation and stabilizing banks. The measures undertaken must be environmentally and economically sound and must benefit more than one property owner.

Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance but must be sponsored by a public agency of state, county, city or township government. NRCS may bear up to 75 percent of the cost of emergency measures. The remaining 25 percent must come from the local sponsor and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services. EWP funds cannot be used to pay for incurred expenses.

### **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**

In limited circumstances following a major disaster, FEMA may be able to reimburse local governments and non-profit organizations for costs related to removing stream blockages. To be eligible for such reimbursement, the applicant must have assumed responsibility for clearing the stream. Additionally, the blockage created by the disaster must pose an immediate threat to improved property. FEMA reimbursement is limited to the costs of work required to remove the blockage causing the immediate threat.

Projects to alter a natural stream bank are generally ineligible for FEMA assistance. However, limited reimbursement may be available if the stream bank was manufactured or constructed, and has been maintained.

FEMA may reimburse applicants 75 percent of the total eligible costs of the work performed. FEMA does not reimburse applicants for the costs of dredging operations.

If a blocked stream on private property is threatening individual homeowners' property, homeowners are encouraged to contact PA DEP and/or their local government.

### **County Conservation Districts**

The County Conservation Districts can provide technical assistance for erosion and sediment control planning. In addition, some Districts have the ability to acknowledge permits on behalf of PA DEP for certain small projects, including projects to clean channels, protect banks, and repair or replace bridges and culverts.