



STATE OF MICHIGAN
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
LANSING

JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

JOHN D. CHERRY, JR.
LT. GOVERNOR

August 20, 2004

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I read with interest Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell's letter of June 1, 2004, to you regarding the safety of this country's dams. His letter points out that 115 years after the catastrophic dam failure that led to the Johnstown flood of 1889, many citizens of our country still face danger from aging, dysfunctional, and hazardous dams. He asks that your administration, the other Governors, and Congress join him in a renewed commitment to prevent a recurrence of the events of that terrible day. I join Governor Rendell and ask you to propose to Congress a program to address the issue of our nation's crumbling dams.

The American Society of Civil Engineers reviewed infrastructure needs in the United States and, in its 2003 report card, gave dams a "D." The report states, "The number of unsafe dams has risen by 23 percent, to number nearly 2,600. There have been 21 dam failures in the past two years."¹ The Association of State Dam Safety Officials estimates the national cost of dam repair, replacement, or removal of nonfederally owned dams to be \$36.2 billion.² Repair of a dam can easily cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and for larger, more complex dams, millions of dollars. In some cases, dam removal may be the most environmentally beneficial and most economical option.

Michigan currently has at least 20 dams that we know have serious deficiencies. Of these, 11 are rated high or significant hazard potential, which means that their failure would likely result in loss of life, significant property damage, or serious environmental damage in the area downstream of the dams.

¹ American Society of Civil Engineers, *Report Card for America's Infrastructure, 2003 Progress Report, An Update to the 2001 Report* (2003); <<http://www.asce.org/reportcard/>>

² Association of State Dam Safety Officials, *The Cost of Rehabilitating our Nation's Dams, A Methodology, Estimate & Proposed Funding Mechanisms* (December 2002), p. 3

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Six dams in particular are the Redridge Dam in Houghton County, the Hamilton Dam in Genesee County, the Lyons Dam in Ionia County, and the Otsego, Plainwell, and Trowbridge Dams in Allegan County, all owned by units of government.

The nation's dams have been overlooked at significant cost to property owners, public safety, and the environment. The rapid deterioration of these dams demands our attention and our national investment, just as our highways, water supply and wastewater disposal systems, airports, and other important infrastructure have been supported with federal funding.

For quite some time we have heard from dam owners, particularly owners of small dams, many of which are small municipalities, who want to do the right thing but are unable to because of the expense. Now is the time for us to join together to help them and their neighbors who live with the constant threat of inundation by floodwaters due to dam failure. Meaningful federal assistance is imperative if we are to protect our citizens, address our infrastructure needs, and foster economic growth and environmental protection.

Sincerely,



Jennifer M. Granholm
Governor

JMG/pd

c: Michigan Congressional Delegation
Great Lakes State Governors
Mr. Steven E. Chester, Director, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
Ms. Rebecca Humphries, Director, Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Ms. Gloria Jeff, Director, Michigan Department of Transportation