WASHINGTON, Feb. 18--Senator Strom Thurmond's office today learned that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has given tentative approval to the Bush River Watershed Project for Newberry and Laurens Counties.

Thurmond said subordinate officials of the department have approved the project, subject to final approval by the department policy committee.

The project, which will include some of South Carolina's richest farm land, will affect approximately 80,000 acres of land. It is one of 200 projects under consideration by the department. Watershed projects are authorized under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, Public Law 566 of the 83rd Congress.

In announcing tentative approval by the department, Thurmond pointed out the city of Newberry, plus textile plants at Joanna, Newberry, and Prosperity are dependent upon the watershed for their water supply. He said the project would aid in soil conservation and at the same time provide a water supply to guard against future water shortages.

He said further: "Our farmers deserve every consideration in view of the extreme drought conditions that have plagued them during the past two years. I am sure this watershed project will immeasurably benefit the Newberry-Laurens area. In addition to providing a water supply for the surrounding communities, it should also stimulate irrigation experiments and establish a water supply to guard against future droughts."

The project has been advocated by C.T. Smith of Kinards, and the National Affairs and Legislative Committee of Newberry Chamber of