



FACT SHEET

No. 1

Rangeland Watershed Program

U.C. Cooperative Extension and U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service

California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan

The California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan (CRWQMP) was approved by the State Water Resources Control Board in July 1995. This plan, developed cooperatively by industry, conservation organizations, and state and federal agencies, describes a program of voluntary compliance with the Clean Water Act, Coastal Zone Management Act, and Porter-Cologne Act.

Development of the CRWQMP

In late 1989, California's Range Management Advisory Committee (RMAC) to the State Board of Forestry, made up of livestock industry and public members, identified water quality as a priority issue. This resulted in two mutually reinforcing activities that have increased awareness of clean water issues among private rangeland owners:

- development of a statewide rangeland water quality management plan and,
- jointly delivered education and technical assistance by University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

In 1990, leaders in the livestock industry began working with RMAC and the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to develop a rangeland water quality management plan. A technical committee was formed by NRCS, UCCE, the California Department of Forestry's Forest and Rangeland Assessment Program, and the SWRCB. This technical committee under

leadership by UCCE and NRCS outlined the plan and began to compile technical information on ranch and watershed planning, management practices, and monitoring for inclusion in the plan.

In 1993, AGvocate, a private consulting firm, was hired to coordinate a concentrated two-year effort to complete the plan. AGvocate compiled information on agency roles and responsibilities, policy and coordination mechanisms, sources of funding, and technical assistance. The firm worked with an advisory committee that included industry, agency, and environmental interests to help review and develop the California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan (CRWQMP). In 1994, 18 input meetings were held with industry and agencies to seek input on the plan.

In 1994, the plan was accepted by industry organizations. In early 1995, RMAC approved the plan, and in July 1995, the State Water Resources Control Board approved the plan.

Implementing Voluntary Compliance

With approval of the California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan, the SWRCB, the livestock industry, and rangeland owners and managers must now implement this plan and prove that voluntary compliance is a viable alternative to regulatory prevention of nonpoint source pollution. The CRWQMP provides for three approaches to voluntary compliance: Letter of Intent, Nonpoint Source Management Plan, and a Recognized Nonpoint Source Management Plan.

Letter of Intent: Where water quality issues are minimal and/or a management strategy is in place, a letter of intent may be written and filed either at home or with the local Resource Conservation District office. This letter should include brief paragraphs on the evaluation of water quality status, management approach being implemented, and the monitoring program for continuing evaluation. It will be a document to use if and when water quality issues arise. In some cases, landowners/resource managers may wish to file this letter with the local office of their Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Nonpoint Source Management Plan: Where a written plan is desired, it does not have to be lengthy or complicated but should include the following elements.

1. inventory of resources (soils, animals, climate, water sources, etc.),
2. problem assessment (site conditions, potential or current NPS problems),
3. statement of goals (measurable outcomes or products)
4. existing and/or alternative management practices (technical/economic feasibility, desired outcome, timetable for implementation, etc., and
5. monitoring (progress toward goals, effectiveness of management decisions).

This management strategy should be ongoing, with evaluation and revisions as needed.

Recognized Nonpoint Source Management Plan: Many landowners have a desire for some form of institutional recognition of their planning and implementation efforts, as well as legal support against potential nuisance complaints. There are currently two methods available that would provide for a Nonpoint Source Management Plan to be recognized as utilizing acceptable standards and practices that affected agencies will recognize and support.

- A. The landowner/resource manager voluntarily chooses to work with NRCS to complete a conservation plan, with specific attention paid to water quality, and then agrees to implementation as a cooperator with their local Resource Conservation

District. Concurrent with this conservation plan, the landowner/resource manager may also choose to request a supplemental agreement (under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act) that could determine a net environmental benefit, obtained through implementation of a RWQMP, and allow for some incidental take.

- B. The landowner/resource manager voluntarily chooses to approach their local Regional Water Quality Control Board staff and request review of the individual RWQMP developed for their operation. Approval under this option could provide agency support for a RWQMP that included capital investments staggered over multiple years, and potentially qualify the landowner/resource manager for quicker permitting and waiving of fees for necessary stream bed alterations (under section 1603, California Fish & Game) and some relief from concerns with endangered species (under section 2081, California Fish & Game) potentially moving onto improved habitat.

Regulatory Options

Option 1: Voluntary compliance is the first of three options for achieving water quality goals. If voluntary compliance is unsuccessful the Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCB) have the authority to invoke the more stringent options.

Option 2: Regulatory-Based Encouragement of Management Practices: This option will set water quality standards or goals (management measures) but will not prescribe specific practices. Regional Boards may encourage management practices by waiving adoption of Waste Discharge Requirements on condition that dischargers comply with management practices.

While management practices may be left up to the landowner, a ranch water quality plan may be required by the RWQCB. Regional Boards may also enter into agreements with agencies that have management responsibilities for publicly owned or controlled lands. Once management practices have been formally approved by the State or Regional Board, they will become the primary mechanism for meeting water quality standards.

Option 3: Effluent Limitations: Regional Boards will adapt and enforce Waste Discharge Requirements on proposed or existing nonpoint sources of pollution. Regional Boards are precluded from specifying the manner of compliance with waste discharge limitations. However, limitations may be established at a level that, in practice, would require implementation of appropriate BMPs.

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