

Understanding and Getting Assistance to Comply with the Grazing Waiver Regulations in the Napa River and Sonoma Creek Watersheds, January 2012

University of California
Agriculture and Natural Resources



The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) has adopted new regulations for grazing lands greater than 100 acres within the Napa River and Sonoma Creek watersheds. These regulations are part of a larger program to reduce the amount of sediments, pathogens and nutrients in the Napa River and in Sonoma Creek that impair water quality and limit beneficial uses. Livestock grazing was identified as one of many sources of these contaminants, which obligates the Regional Board to implement a water quality compliance program for grazing activities. The Regional Board initiated such a compliance program on September 14, 2011 by adopting a conditional waiver of waste discharge for grazing facilities in the Napa River and Sonoma Creek watersheds. In order to comply with the conditional waiver, livestock operators or landowners of grazing lands are required to submit a Notice of Intent (NOI) form, prepare and implement a ranch water quality plan, and submit annual certification forms.

Main Elements of the Conditional Waiver Program

Notice of Intent (NOI): The NOI is a form that informs the Regional Board that a grazing operation intends to comply with the waiver program. In this form, operators / landowners are required to provide contact information, parcel number(s), and livestock information to the Regional Board. Current grazing operations were to submit the NOI to the Regional Board by **November 15, 2011**. However, if the form was not submitted, the Regional Board will continue to accept NOI submissions. New grazing operations must submit an NOI to the Regional Board when grazing activities begin.

Ranch Water Quality Plan (RWQP): The RWQP is a collection of information that describes the ranch, provides an inventory of natural and constructed resources, describes grazing management practices, identifies ranch water quality objectives, describes a plan to meet those objectives, and serves as a file or catalog of assessment and monitoring information. The RWQP is not submitted to the Regional Board, but must be completed by **November 15, 2012** and must be made available for review by Regional Board staff upon request.

RWQP Implementation, Compliance Monitoring, and Reporting: In order to verify that management practices are being implemented and the RWQP is being followed, specific types of monitoring must be completed and recorded at various times throughout the year. Monitoring grazing activities and impacts is nothing unusual for grazing operators, but recording such observations in a written form, or as pictures, may be a new practice. An annual summary of the monitoring observations and actions taken to reduce water quality impairments must be submitted on **November 15, 2012 and every year thereafter**.

Where to Seek Assistance

Several local organizations are committed to supporting and assisting livestock operators and landowners comply with the conditional waiver. The University of California Cooperative Extension secured a grant that will provide direct assistance in completing individual RWQPs in the Napa River watershed. The Grant funds will also support workshops on ranch water quality planning, management practices to minimize water quality impairments, and compliance monitoring and reporting. The workshops, beginning in early-2012, are open to operators and landowners from both Napa River and Sonoma Creek watersheds. Funds for RWQP development assistance in the Sonoma Creek watershed are being sought.

Contact Information

If you are interested in receiving assistance in developing a RWQP or want to attend ranch water quality workshops, please contact Morgan Doran at (707) 784-1326 or mpdoran@ucdavis.edu.

If you would like additional information about the Regional Board's conditional waiver program and an NOI form visit www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/water_issues/programs/TMDLs/grazing/index.shtml .

¹University of California Cooperative Extension, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Napa County Resource Conservation District, Napa County Farm Bureau