

5.0 Agency Assistance and Permit Reference

This section describes the permits generally necessary for watershed restoration and enhancement work. These permits are required of agriculture and vineyard owners as well as individual landowners conducting work or sponsoring agencies such as SSCRCD. Local assistance is available to landowners in terms of financial support for qualifying projects and technical advice in ranch planning.

Cost Share Programs

The NRCS administers the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The 1996 Farm Bill replaced the Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP) cost-share program with the EQIP program. Many agencies are involved in determining eligibility and project development. Landowners are encouraged to contact the USDA Farm Service Agency for application and eligibility requirements as a first step in applying for EQIP funds.

SSCRCD convenes a local work group consisting of staff from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, the Farm Service Agency County Committee, Farm Bureau, UC Cooperative Extension, Regional Water Quality Control Board, California Department of Fish and Game, California Department of Forestry, and others as appropriate. This local workgroup gives final approval for local individual projects that then must go to the state level for approval. The federal government's share of the cost is typically 70% with the landowner bearing 30%; this proportion is sometimes negotiable. The contract term is typically 5 to 10 years with a stipulation that a minimum term for structural work is during a one-year period and management practices would be completed during four years (or vice versa). The EQIP program requires a Conservation Plan be prepared that focuses on natural resource concerns.

Conservation, Ranch, Farm Planning

What is a Conservation Plan? A conservation plan is a voluntary effort involving the processes of setting goals, inventorying ranch resources, assessing water quality concerns and evaluating existing management practices. Once the plan is completed, implementing a monitoring program will help achieve set goals and evaluate the effectiveness of the management practices.

The purpose of a conservation plan is to develop a plan that will provide the landowner with a comprehensive integrated understanding of the past, present, and future management decisions and developments of their property. It follows a step by step process to meet the producer's goals and to assess the impact those goals may have on the natural resources in that watershed.

The role of a conservation plan in addressing water quality is becoming increasingly important as regulators look for landowners to demonstrate voluntary compliance with water quality laws. Writing a conservation plan will not exempt ranchers from water quality regulations, but both the CDFG and the RWQCB encourage cooperative conservation planning and recognize that conservation plans demonstrate an effort toward voluntary compliance. The RWQCB has stated that when accidental water quality violations occur, operators who are following conservation plans consistent with

the appropriate Animal Waste Management Guidelines of the Sonoma Marin Animal Waste Committee (AWC) will receive additional consideration when the level of enforcement is determined.

Elements of a Conservation Plan. A conservation plan can be written many different ways. For range livestock operations, a plan can be fairly simple, but for dairies or confined animal facilities a conservation plan should be quite technical. All plans should involve the following components; introduction, facilities inventory, livestock and ranch operations, natural resources inventory, ranch condition assessment, planned management practices, and a monitoring program.

The introduction should identify the ranch location and ownership. It would also include the purpose of the plan and the operator's goals. Typically, ranch plan goals include production goals, quality of life goals, and landscape goals, though other categories can be added. Water quality goals would be included in landscape goals.

Facilities inventory should list and evaluate the condition of buildings, roads, corrals, feedlots and fences. This will help to identify capital improvements that may be needed. The pastures should be inventoried for size, forage type, and production. The inventory should also include improvements such as water developments, livestock crossings and erosion control structures.

The livestock and ranch operations section should describe current management practices that involve animal (both livestock and wildlife) and forage management. This section can include a calendar of ranch operations, grazing schemes, a pasture use calendar, and the calculated stocking rate and yearly forage demand.

The natural resources inventory describes the natural resources of the ranch. It should include the existing natural resources: vegetation, wildlife, soils, and the watershed and creeks.

A ranch condition assessment evaluates the condition of resources and facilities that have been inventoried. Conditions or problems that could prevent fulfillment of stated goals should be listed and described. Examples include overgrazed areas, gullies and other erosion sites, lack of streambank vegetation, brush encroachment, inadequate stock water, and weed and poisonous plant infestations. This section should also address nutrient sources (animal waste), quantities, and disposal methods.

A Planned Management Practices section should describe ways to address nonpoint source pollution from animal waste and sediment sources. It can include a discussion of the technical and economic feasibility of solving problems listed in the assessment section. A timetable for implementing selected practices can be included along with an assessment of long- and short-term impact of these practices. This section is the most critical in determining how to reach and maintain water quality goals.

A monitoring program should identify parameters to be monitored, locations and frequency of monitoring. Monitoring may be in the form of notes on observations of overall ranch operations, photographs, or actual measurements including residual dry

matter (RDM), water testing, ranch condition and trend sampling. The purpose of monitoring is to determine if progress is made toward the goals established by the ranch operator. Monitoring provides information for timely management decisions and it documents the impacts of those decisions.

Essential plan components should include:

- an assessment of potential and existing water quality problems
- a description of and schedule for addressing these problems
- a nutrient budget (for dairies and confined animal facilities)
- a manure disposal plan (for dairies and confined animal facilities)
- a monitoring plan for ongoing work/testing.

Where to go for Assistance. Conservation planning assistance is available through the University of California Cooperative Extension and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. NRCS provides free help through this voluntary participation program which is available to all land users through the Resource Conservation Districts. Resource Conservation Districts are local units of government (special districts under the State) which are guided by a governing board made up of local farmers, ranchers, other land users, and community leaders. Help from your local NRCS Soil Conservationist may be requested through the Southern Sonoma County Resource Conservation District.

Although most NRCS assistance is provided to farmers and ranchers on cropland, pasture, rangeland, and forest land, you can also get assistance with solving conservation problems on nonagricultural land uses, such as controlling erosion on construction sites or on public lands.

Conservation plans should be working documents that are revised as needed. Ranch plans and supporting data should be kept on-site at the ranch where it is available for easy reference and updating. Should a water quality problem occur, the conservation plan can be presented to regulatory agencies at that time.

Local Permits

The Sonoma County Public Works Division requires grading permits for streambank stabilization and similar projects.

Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department
(707) 527-1900
2550 Ventura Ave.
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Regional Permits

The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) requires a permit for levee maintenance or work within 100 feet of the bay waters.

S.F Bay Conservation and Development Commission
(415) 557-8778
30 Van Ness Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94102

State Permits

The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) requires Streambed Alteration Agreements for work that occurs in defined waterways. Under Streambed Alteration Agreements, repair projects must generally be completed by October 1st of each year.

California Department of Fish and Game
(707) 944-5525
Region 9
P.O. Box 47
Yountville, CA 94599

State Permits - (Cont.)

The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) issues water quality certifications (401 certification) for all projects requiring permits from the ACOE (see below). This is to ensure that ACOE permits (including non-reporting Nationwide Permits) meet California's water quality standards. The application consists of a letter, description of the project, potential water quality impacts, proposed revegetation, and sketches.

Regional Water Quality Control Board

(510) 622-2300

1515 Clay Street, Suite 1400

Oakland, CA 94612

Federal Permits

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) issues permits for work done in waters under their jurisdiction. As defined by ACOE, in non-tidal areas this extends up to the ordinary high water line or the upper limit of wetlands. For tidal waters, this extends up to the line of high tide (for dredge or fill), or up to the mean high water line. The ACOE and BCDC have issued a special Section 404 (of the Clean Water Act) blanket permit for levee maintenance in the Sonoma Creek and Petaluma Watershed drainages. The permit is administered by SSCRCD. The permit has been reissued since 1980, although not without review and input by several regulatory agencies. The SSCRCD anticipates that the current permit, which is good for five years, will be renewed for another five years.

SSCRCD is now working on an ACOE Section 10 permit renewal that would allow landowners to clean existing drainage ditches in the Petaluma River area.

Watershed restoration projects often come under ACOE nationwide Permit 27. Depending on the specific details of the repair, the ACOE may require advance notification of the work. There is no filing fee, but response can take up to one year.

The ACOE requires a permit for ripping ground in wetland areas.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

415) 977-8439

San Francisco District

33 Market St.

San Francisco, CA 94105

6.0 Glossary

Adopt-A-Watershed - An integrated K-12 science curriculum which uses a local watershed as a focal point for bringing theory into application. Students participate in hands on activities, making science directly applicable and relevant to their lives by allowing students to undertake field studies, restoration projects, and community action projects in which they apply these concepts.

Advisory Committee (AC) - A committee consisting of local landowners, residents, local interest groups and representatives from Local, State, Federal agencies whose role is to provide input and/or support toward watershed planning efforts.

Anadromous fish - Fish that live some or all of their adult lives in saltwater but migrate to freshwater to spawn.

Aquifer - A geologic layer of permeable rock, sand, or gravel that is water bearing and is often times a source for well water.

Baseline data - A selected set of data that forms a known starting point that will enable determining of system status and help determine trends as the system changes.

Bedrock - The solid rock underlying the soils of the earth's surface.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) - Accepted conservation practices used by land stewards that are designed to be the most effective and practicable way in addressing local watershed concerns.

Biodiversity - Biological diversity; variety of life forms in a given area.

Cover crop - A close-growing crop used primarily for the purpose of protecting or improving soil between periods of regular crop production or between trees and vines in orchards or vineyards.

Effluent - To flow out; an outflow of waste, as from a sewer; an outflow from a river out of a lake.

Endangered species - Wild species with so few individual survivors that the species could soon become extinct in all or most of its natural range.

Endemic - prevalent in or restricted to a particular locality.

Exotic species - A species of plant or animal that belongs by nature or origin to another part of the world.

Geographic Information System (GIS) - Technology that links traditional map information with computer database information about particular locations by allowing users to enter, manage, analyze, and output information.

Groundwater recharge - The process involved in the absorption and addition of water to the zone of saturation.

Habitat - An area in which an organism or population of organisms survive.

Land stewardship - A land ethic of cultural value set that promotes existing land use practices that protect the resources for succeeding generations.

Native species - Species that normally live and thrive in a particular ecosystem.

Natural resources - The soil, water, air, plants, animals, and geologic processes created by the earth's natural processes.

Nonpoint source pollution - Pollution that enters water from dispersed and uncontrolled sources, such as surface runoff, rather than through pipes. Nonpoint source (e.g., forest practices, agricultural practices, on-site sewage disposal, automobiles, and recreational boats) may contribute pathogens, suspended solids, and toxins. While individual sources may seem insignificant, the cumulative effects of nonpoint source pollution can be significant.

Point source pollution - A single identifiable source that discharges pollutants into the environment. Examples are the smokestack of a power plant or an industrial plant.

Rill erosion - An erosion process in which numerous small channels of only several centimeters in depth are formed; occurs mainly on recently cultivated soils.

Riparian - Pertaining to a river or stream.

Runoff - Rain water and melting ice that flows on the earth's surface into nearby streams, lakes, wetlands, and reservoirs.

Salmonid - Any species of a genus of Pacific Ocean fishes from the salmon or trout family that can breed in rivers and stream tributaries to the North Pacific.

Sheet erosion - The removal of a fairly uniform layer of soil from the land surface by surface runoff.

Spawn - To produce as spawn; deposit eggs or roe.

Stakeholder - an entity (individual/agency/group) who has an interest or responsibility or livelihood in the activities within the watershed and its health.

Water Rights - Specific policies governing rights to water.

Watershed - An entire drainage area that delivers water, sediment, and dissolved substances via streams and rivers.

Wetland - Land that: 1) has a predominance of hydric soils, 2) is inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support a prevalence of hydrophytic vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions, 3) does support a prevalence of such vegetation under normal circumstances.

7.0 References

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