



# FACT SHEET

No. 10

## Rangeland Watershed Program

U.C. Cooperative Extension and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

### Voluntary Compliance

#### What is Voluntary Compliance?

This is when property owners or managers voluntarily choose to implement management practices which comply with clean water regulations without being forced to do so by regulation.

#### Who Supports Voluntary Compliance?

The California Cattlemen's Association, Range Management Advisory Committee to the State Board of Forestry, State Water Resources Control Board, and other industry groups support a voluntary, non-regulatory, locally developed program of management practice implementation.

#### Is Voluntary Compliance a Viable Alternative to Regulation?

It is up to the livestock industry and private rangeland owners to show that voluntary and cooperative approaches to clean water regulations can be successful. By the year 2000 the livestock industry needs to show measurable progress implementing the voluntary approach described in the California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan.

#### How do Environmental Groups and Federal Regulators Feel About Voluntary Compliance?

In public comments received on the Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendments some environmental groups indicated that they expect voluntary approaches to fail. The livestock

industry must work together to show that voluntary compliance can work.

#### Who can Help Implement Voluntary Compliance?

Property owners or managers can take advantage of the expertise and incentives offered by a variety of existing state and federal programs geared to promote private actions which could have water quality benefits. Assistance agencies include:

- C USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- C Resource Conservation Districts (RCD)
- C University of California Cooperative Extension Service (UCCE)

#### How can Voluntary Compliance be Implemented?

Voluntary compliance may be accomplished individually or in groups.

- C **Individuals** may identify water quality problems on their own ranch and correct them with no intervention from regulatory agencies, just as many have with NRCS conservation planning. Documentation of these actions in a **ranch plan** is an ideal means of demonstrating voluntary compliance. Ranchers can write their own plans following the outline in the CRWQMP, and local ranch water quality workshops

can be arranged through your local NRCS or farm advisor's office.

C Coordinated planning and implementation by **groups** can be initiated by any public or private group. Coordinated planning is intended to be a "grassroots" citizen led process where diverse views and interests have an opportunity to describe water quality problems, technically and economically feasible solutions (management practices), and monitoring procedures to control nonpoint source pollution.

- Resource Conservation Districts actively support voluntary compliance by initiating cooperative watershed planning.
- Regional Water Quality Control Boards and other agencies and organizations may encourage group implementation by providing demonstration project funding.

### **What are the Benefits of Voluntary Compliance?**

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- C Landowners or managers can avoid regulation of their activities by managing their land to meet water quality standards.
- C Voluntary implementation of management practices to reduce nonpoint pollution is a positive opportunity for the livestock industry to show environmental stewardship of the land.
- C **Individual landowners/managers:** A ranch plan will be invaluable in the event that your watershed becomes a focus of public or agency attention in the future. It may also bring economic and other environmental benefits to the ranch operations.
- C **Cooperative planning:** While cooperative planning can be a threatening process to many, it is a voluntary process

that brings many different interests together to solve mutual problems without enforced regulation.

### **What Happens Without Voluntary Compliance?**

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**Option 1:** Voluntary Compliance is the first of three options for achieving compliance with clean water regulations. 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.

### **Where are the Biggest Problems?**

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California has 20 million acres of privately owned rangelands. Water quality concerns are

focused on drinking water supplies as well as habitats of trout, salmon, and steelhead. Consequently, the North Coast, northeastern California, and the Sierra Nevada have and will receive increasing attention. These areas are likely to be the first to be regulated if voluntary compliance fails.

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