



## Statewide Grazing Regulatory Action Project Outreach Document

### **i. Introduction**

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) is proposing a statewide action to enhance environmental benefits from grazing, protect beneficial uses of surface and groundwater, and address water quality impacts related to livestock grazing in California. This Grazing Regulatory Action Project (GRAP) aims to facilitate efficiency and statewide consistency in developing and implementing requirements to meet these goals, while at the same time accounting for regional differences in hydrology, topography, climate, land use, and microeconomics. A cornerstone of the GRAP will be thoughtful consideration of the costs of compliance to the regulated grazing community.

In California, there are more than 40 million acres of rangeland (approximately 38 percent of the state's surface area), with about half of this acreage in public and half in private ownership. Well-managed livestock grazing operations provide benefits to the environment, the economy, and California consumers. In some instances, however, grazing operations contribute to impairment of water quality and impact beneficial uses. Approximately 120 water quality impairments (including fecal bacteria, temperature, sediments or nutrients) identified on the 2010 Clean Water Act (CWA) List of Impaired Waters for California are on lands with active grazing operations. Under existing law, Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) are required for all waters and pollutants on the CWA list, including waters impacted by grazing operations.

Developing a TMDL for each impaired water body is not a practical solution. To date, the Water Boards have chosen to regulate livestock grazing through Water Board orders, grazing waivers, Water Quality Control Plan (Basin Plan) prohibitions, TMDLs and enforcement actions. These approaches have varied in their application and effectiveness, and have resulted in inconsistencies statewide. GRAP is one of several collaborative efforts established by the Water Boards directing staff to work with interested stakeholders on ways to more efficiently and consistently address impaired waters.

In addition to meeting the requirements of the CWA, the Water Boards must meet the requirements of the California Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, which obligates the Water Boards to address all discharges of waste that could affect the quality of the waters of the State, including all nonpoint sources of pollution. This means that not only must the Water Boards address water bodies impaired by grazing activities, but that they must also protect the numerous high-quality streams within public lands, including federally managed wilderness areas, from water quality degradation caused by livestock grazing. Grazing in California is a nonpoint source of water pollution that is not currently regulated statewide. Examples of nonpoint source pollution that may be associated with grazing include discharges of sediment

from the erosion of stream banks, discharges of bacteria from livestock feces that get into the surface water, and increased temperature of streams caused from trampling of riparian habitat.

## **II. Grazing and the Environment**

Grazing is an important economic commodity in California, resulting in over \$3 billion in food and fiber annually. Over 85 percent of California's drinking water supply is generated and/or stored within watersheds that include rangelands. Environmental benefits from grazing on rangelands can include vegetation management, fire management; invasive species control and carbon sequestration. In California, many of the private rangelands are under intense pressure for conversion to residential, commercial, or other agricultural land uses.

Improperly managed livestock grazing degrades riparian habitat by trampling soils, reducing shade-producing cover, degrading the structure of streamside vegetation, and destabilizing stream banks. This can result in shallow, wide streams and increased water temperatures. Grazing in riparian zones also causes substantial amounts of stream bank and stream bed erosion causing sediment increases, resulting in the loss of spawning beds and overall habitat degradation for riparian wildlife species. Pollution, including by fecal coliform bacteria from animal waste, can reach high levels and impact beneficial uses of the water, including uses for recreation, domestic and municipal supply.

Our challenge is to support well-managed grazing while still protecting water quality and its beneficial uses.

## **III. Public Outreach**

The participation of interested stakeholders in the development of a statewide grazing regulatory strategy is crucial to its success. Thus, the Water Boards will actively engage stakeholder groups by soliciting early public comments during focused outreach listening sessions in 2014 and early 2015. The listening sessions will be held in Sacramento and in other more remote locations throughout the state. These listening sessions will be the first of many opportunities for stakeholder participation.

The purpose of the first series of outreach meetings is to discuss the statewide issue of water quality impairments associated with grazing, solicit input on what types of management practices have been effective, and hear concerns and suggestions or other feedback on the approach for this project.

The initial outreach sessions will invite input from five key stakeholder sectors: Ranching and related Industries; Government and Local Agencies; Tribes; Environmental and Environmental Justice Organizations; and Academia. In the sessions, stakeholders will be invited to share their thoughts on several questions including:

1. How should we define grazing (e.g., herd size, range size, duration/intensity, water source, type of animal, open range, irrigated pasture)?
2. What would a successful regulatory program look like to you? In your experience, what types of management practices have been effective in protecting or improving water quality? How can we incentivize use of effective management practices?

3. In your experience, what types of monitoring have been effective in assessing water quality?
4. What are the unusual or extreme circumstances that GRAP should consider as part of its regulatory program (e.g., weather, market conditions, wildfire, livestock diseases)?
5. How can we best collaborate with all stakeholders regarding grazing and water quality?
6. Who else should we be talking with? Are there other key stakeholders with whom we should coordinate?

Water Board staff will compile all input from these initial outreach sessions and consider it in the development of the GRAP proposal during 2015. As the proposal is developed, there will be additional opportunities for stakeholder input.

#### **IV. State and Regional Water Board Contacts for the GRAP**

For questions about the process of developing the GRAP, please contact:

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For questions related to stakeholder meeting schedule or locations, please contact:

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#### **V. Proposed Schedule for GRAP Development**

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Estimated Date</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused Outreach Listening Sessions</li> </ul>	2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of Initial Proposal</li> <li>• CEQA Scoping and Broader Outreach</li> <li>• Public Comment on Proposal</li> </ul>	2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final Drafts of Proposal and Environmental Document</li> <li>• Consideration of Adoption by the Water Boards</li> <li>• Begin Implementation</li> </ul>	2016