

OWYHEE RIVER AGRICULTURAL WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREA PLAN AND RULES

Oregon's legislature passed the Agricultural Water Quality Management Act in 1993. It requires the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to prevent and control water pollution from agricultural activities.

As a result, ODA worked with local advisory committees to develop Water Quality Management Area Plans and Rules throughout the state. ODA approved the Owyhee River Area Plan and Rules in 2003.

What is the Plan?

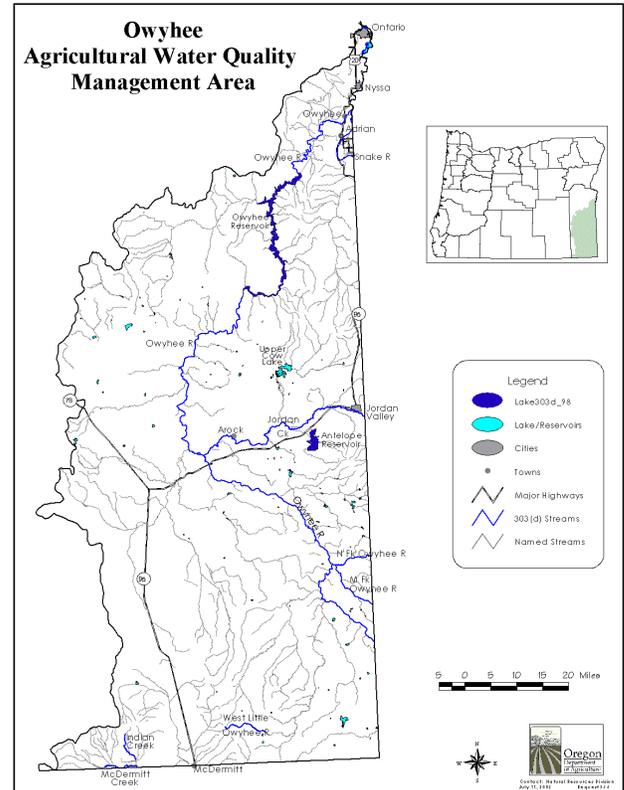
The Owyhee River Area Plan guides landowners on how to prevent pollution. Its goal is to "enhance or maintain water quality through the promotion of agricultural activities that are technically and economically feasible."

Agricultural water quality concerns in the Owyhee River area are primarily:

- Irrigation-induced erosion.
- Degraded riparian areas due to poorly managed livestock access.
- Excess livestock manure in rivers and canals.

The Area Plan does not tell anyone how to farm, ranch, or otherwise use their natural resources. Rather, it includes recommended practices that a landowner can choose from. The practices can help them meet their business and conservation goals, while also preventing

water pollution.



What are the Regulations?

The Agricultural Water Quality Management Program focuses on voluntary and cooperative efforts by landowners and others to protect water quality. However, the Agricultural Water Quality Management Act also provides for enforcement to ensure prevention and control of water pollution from agricultural sources when land managers fail to correct problems.

Agricultural water quality regulations (Area Rules) allow landowners flexibility in how they protect water quality. Area Rules describe characteristics that landowners must achieve on agricultural lands, rather than practices they must implement.

The local advisory committee helped ODA develop Area Rules specifically for the Owyhee River. These rules address water quality objectives identified in the Area Plan.

The Area Rules require agricultural landowners in the Owyhee River area to:

- *Maintain sufficient vegetation along stream banks for bank stability and stream shading.*
- *Ensure that irrigation return flows do not contribute excessive sediment to receiving water unless the sediment doesn't cause the receiving water to exceed water quality standards.*
- *Not exceed water quality standards.*
- *Not pollute ground or surface water by discharging waste into waters of the state or placing any wastes in a location where they are likely to enter waters of the state.*

Waters of the state can include ponds, groundwater, canals, ditches, and rivers.

Do the Plan and Regulations apply to me?

The Area Plan and Rules apply to all lands, regardless of size, in current agricultural use and those lying idle or on which management has been deferred. It also applies to agricultural operations within incorporated city boundaries and urban growth boundaries.

What do I need to do?

You should evaluate your agricultural activities and try to determine whether they might 1) pollute streams, canals, and groundwater, and 2) prevent growth of appropriate vegetation along streams. Then you need to change any problem practices to ensure compliance with the Area Rules.

Who can help me?

The Area Plan describes water quality concerns, includes recommended practices, and lists sources of help.

The Malheur County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is the primary source of landowner assistance to address water quality concerns. SWCDs are non-regulatory and can direct you to additional sources of help.

More information?

Malheur County SWCD
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Oregon Department of Agriculture
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<http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/programs/NaturalResources/Pages/AgWaterQuality.aspx>

