

Agricultural Water Quality Rules

Having clean water is vital to sustain your livestock, and water your lawn, garden and crops. To insure that agricultural activities don't impair water quality, Oregon has a statutory agricultural water quality program, administered by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA).

Many of our actions can pollute local waterways. Elevated water temperature is considered a pollutant according to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ). Water temperatures can increase dramatically when the tree or shrub shade canopy is removed along waterways, threatening the fish in the system. Bacteria and nutrients from improperly managed manure, septic systems or unrestricted livestock access to streams, as well as chemicals from pesticides, fertilizers and herbicides, can easily make their way into the stream or into groundwater.

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Oregon's agricultural water quality management laws require landowners to prevent these kinds of water pollution by using good agricultural management practices. Under the direction of a local advisory committee, ODA developed an agricultural water quality management plan and administrative rules for our area. Copies of the plan and rules are available online at www.oregon.gov/ODA/NRD/water_agplans.shtml or from the Hood River SWCD office.

The plan addresses water quality concerns and provides recommended management practices to prevent and control pollution. The area rules have requirements for streamside vegetation and waste management. These two rules were established because many stream reaches in our watershed have water temperatures and nutrient levels that exceed state standards.

Streamside Vegetation – Establish, Maintain, Protect

Adequate riparian (streamside) vegetation is a vital part of good water quality. Vegetation controls water pollution by providing cooling shade, minimizing streambank erosion and filtering sediments and nutrients from overland flows. It also slows water flowing



Covered manure storage facilities like this one protect nearby waterways from contamination while providing landowners with valuable compost for pastures.

across the land so that it has an opportunity to soak into the soil rather than running off into the stream.

In the Hood River Valley, agricultural activities must allow the establishment, growth and maintenance of sufficient streamside vegetation to provide these functions. This requirement also applies to agricultural lands lying vacant or unused for an agricultural purpose. Planting with appropriate native vegetation, including deep rooted shrubs, trees, sedges and grasses, controlling invasive plants and fencing livestock away from the riparian area are all excellent ways to maintain streamside vegetation.

Waste Management

Nobody wants to swim in, or irrigate with, a stream contaminated by livestock manure. Fencing cows, horses or other animals out of the streamside area is a smart thing to do for yourself and for your neighbors downstream. Piled manure and animal bedding can leach nutrients and bacteria into groundwater or nearby streams if not covered and located away from waterways (wet or dry). Soil, grass clippings and other organic materials can also pollute water if allowed to wash into streams.

The SWCD staff and local ODA water quality specialist are available to provide advice and technical assistance on managing streamside vegetation and agricultural waste. In some instances, financial assistance may be available. See the “Raising Animals in Hood River County” chapter for more ideas.

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