



Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board

Water Quality Management Plan Program

Program Overview

The Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) Program is a voluntary certification program created by the Texas Legislature that provides farmers, ranchers, and other landowners a way to demonstrate appropriate and effective management toward the protection of water quality from agricultural and silvicultural (forestry-related) nonpoint sources. Nonpoint source pollution, or runoff, occurs when rainfall comes in contact with potential pollutants on the ground and flows into waters of the state. Agricultural and silvicultural nonpoint source pollution abatement is not regulated by permit and is the responsibility of the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB). Possessing a certified WQMP provides certainty, for both the State and the landowner, that the agricultural and/or silvicultural activities conducted on the land are done so in a manner that is protective of state water quality standards.

Nonpoint Source Pollution Abatement in Texas

The Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) established the Section 319 - Nonpoint Source Management Program, recognizing that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should work more closely with states, territories and tribes to focus on technical assistance, financial assistance, education, training, technology transfer, demonstration projects and monitoring to ensure nonpoint sources do not lead to water quality degradation. Texas' Nonpoint Source Management Program is jointly administered by the TSSWCB and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), with the approval of the Governor and the EPA. The WQMP Program is Texas' primary, statutorily enacted, technical and financial assistance mechanism for implementing the overall nonpoint source program for agriculture and silviculture.

Water Quality Management Plans

WQMPs are voluntary, site-specific conservation plans, developed cooperatively between a landowner and a local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) with an emphasis on water quality. The plan includes appropriate land treatment practices, production practices, management measures, technologies or combinations thereof to achieve a level of pollution prevention or abatement determined by the TSSWCB, in consultation with local soil and water conservation districts, to be consistent with state water quality standards. There are 216 individual SWCDs, administratively associated with the TSSWCB. Each SWCD is responsible for identifying local natural resource concerns and directing landowners toward technical and financial assistance programs. TSSWCB assists SWCDs with identification and mitigation strategies and establishes the conservation planning threshold that must be met in order for the State to certify a WQMP under Section 201.026(g), Agriculture Code, consistent with Section 26.1311, Water Code.

11,096 Active WQMPs Statewide

- 4,825,557 Total Acres
- 1,467,826.15 Acres of Cropland
- 785,056.5 Acres of Pasture/Hayland
- 2,283,402 Acres of Rangeland
- 82,777.86 Acres Irrigated Land

1,564 Animal Feeding Operations

- 4 Auction Barns
- 38 Beef Cattle Operations
- 1,230 Poultry Operations
- 2 Sheep or Goat Operations
- 8 Pork Operations
- 6 Horse Operations
- 276 Dairy Operations

Applicability

Any farming, ranching, forestry, or other rural land-owner can request planning assistance toward the development of a WQMP, so long as the operation is not considered a point source under federal and state water quality law. Unless an operation is defined as a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO), therefore a point source by definition, it is eligible for a WQMP. Smaller animal feeding operations (AFOs) that do not meet the animal numbers are considered nonpoint source and are eligible. Definitions for AFO and CAFO can be found in the TCEQ CAFO Rules at Title 30, Chapter 321, Subchapter B.



1,230 Active Poultry WQMPs

- 1,192 Chicken Operations
- 33 Turkey Operations
- 5 Pasture Chicken Operations

Statewide Species Headcount

- 6,640,244 Breeders
- 146,728,426 Broilers
- 825,721 Layers
- 3,474,025 Pullets
- 2,325,240 Turkeys

Poultry Operations

An exception to the voluntary aspect of the WQMP Program applies to poultry operations. Section 26.302, Water Code, requires all persons who own or operate a poultry facility to implement and maintain a WQMP certified by TSSWCB. This exception also applies to poultry operations defined as CAFOs that do not use a liquid waste handling system. The law applies to any person who owns or operates a poultry facility for commercial purposes and requires that the WQMP include adequate means to handle and dispose of poultry carcasses, poultry litter, and other poultry waste regardless of whether the person owns the poultry. Poultry CAFOs that use a liquid waste handling system are required to obtain a permit or other authorization from the TCEQ.

Development and Certification

State law requires that the landowner voluntarily request the planning assistance and agree to the terms and provisions of a WQMP. The local SWCD is responsible for determining if the lands within the scope of the requested planning assistance meet the TSSWCB's rules for an acceptable operating unit. Rules for the WQMP Program are adopted by the TSSWCB and are located at Title 31, Chapter 523, Texas Administrative Code. The TSSWCB has adopted the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Office Technical Guide's water quality criteria for a resource management system (RMS) as the technical basis for a WQMP. The NRCS, or an NRCS-approved third-party, verifies that the technical requirements are met. The TSSWCB issues certification that a WQMP satisfies the rules and criteria and complies with state water quality standards established by the TCEQ.

Essential Conservation Practices

- Conservation crop rotation/residue management
- Prescribed grazing/livestock water
- Wildlife management
- Forest management
- Nutrient management/waste utilization
- Pest management
- Animal waste management systems
- Irrigation water management
- Erosion control measures



Nonpoint Source Priorities and Financial Incentives for Participation

Because the WQMP Program is voluntary, participation is incentivized with financial assistance toward the implementation of certain conservation practices. When private landowners utilize properly installed conservation practices on an individual basis, the public at large benefits from the improved water quality. TSSWCB approves a list of approved practices that are eligible for cost-sharing assistance not to exceed 75% of the total cost. The exact cost-share rate is determined by the appropriate local SWCD, but there is a maximum one-time per operating unit limit of \$15,000 established by the TSSWCB. Applications for cost-share may be submitted to the local SWCD once the WQMP has been certified. Because funding is limited, TSSWCB ranks applications based on water quality parameters linked to agriculture and silviculture identified in the Texas Integrated Report of Surface Water Quality approved by the TCEQ. Performance certifications are conducted by TSSWCB to ensure practices are installed according to required specifications.

Status Reviews and Complaint Investigations

To maintain the integrity of the WQMP Program, TSSWCB conducts on-site status reviews to verify that a WQMP is being implemented in accordance with its implementation schedule. Status reviews, when performed on poultry operations defined as CAFOs by TCEQ, may be considered an inspection by TCEQ and reported to EPA. TSSWCB also performs investigations and resolves water quality complaints filed with TSSWCB or referred to TSSWCB by the TCEQ. State law requires TSSWCB to refer noncompliance with state water quality laws or corrective action plans within a WQMP to the TCEQ for possible enforcement actions in certain cases.

Fiscal Year 2020 Planning Requests

- 161 WQMPs Certified/Re-Certified
- 71 SWCDs Represented
- 82,965 Total Acres Added
- 14,008 Acres of Cropland Added
- 9,689 Acres Pasture/Hayland Added
- 57,044.54 Acres Rangeland Added
- 7,286 Acres Irrigated Land Added

Components of WQMP

- District cooperative agreement
- Request for planning assistance
- Soil map with appropriate interpretations
- Conservation plan map
- Plan of operations
- Implementation schedule
- Inventory and/or planning worksheets
- Certification sheet

Measuring Success

Because the overall success of nonpoint source abatement programs is generally measured in terms of load reductions, TSSWCB partnered with the USDA-Agricultural Research Service to customize a version of the Soil and Water Assessment Tool (computer model) to assess relative reductions in predicted loads of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment resulting from full implementation of a WQMP. The Texas Best Management Practice Evaluation Tool (T-BET), is applied to each certified WQMP to predict the impact of the WQMP Program on the environment. During Fiscal Year 2020, TSSWCB certified WQMPs that would result in 87,303 lbs. of nitrogen, 639,111 lbs. of phosphorus, and 8,763 tons of sediment from reaching the nearest surface waters if fully implemented in one year.

How to Contact Local SWCD or TSSWCB Regional Office

To identify the specific SWCD or TSSWCB Regional Office service area within which an operating unit is located, the TSSWCB website includes the resources below:

SWCD Locator: <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/swcds/locatormap>

Regional Office Locator: <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/contact-us/regional-office-service-areas>

Fiscal Year 2020 Status Reviews

- 332 Status Reviews Performed
- 80 Poultry CAFO Inspections
- 58 Deficiencies Identified
- 25 Resolved by Remedy
- 33 Still Pending
(at close of fiscal year)

Fiscal Year 2020 Complaint Investigations

- 11 Complaints Received
- 11 Investigations
- 7 Complaints Considered Valid
- 5 Complaints Received from TCEQ
- 4 Complaints Referred to TCEQ



*Updated January 2020