

San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board

Water Quality Permit for Grazing Operations in the North San Francisco Bay Region



Overview

In July 2025, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board) adopted the Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Grazing Operations in the North San Francisco Bay Region (Napa River, Sonoma Creek, Petaluma River, and Tomales Bay watersheds, and all grazing operations in Point Reyes National Seashore; Order No. R2-2025-0021). This new Grazing Permit replaces existing water quality permits for grazing operations in the Tomales Bay, Napa River, and Sonoma Creek watersheds and expands the regulatory program to the Petaluma River watershed and to all grazing operations in Point Reyes National Seashore.

Even though this is a new permit, the requirements are mostly the same as before. These requirements have been in place since 2008 for Tomales Bay and since 2011 for the Sonoma Creek and Napa River watersheds.

The Grazing Permit applies to grazing operations that meet specific criteria (see below). Here is what landowners or operators need to do:

- 1) Enroll in the Grazing Permit;
- 2) Develop a Ranch Water Quality Plan (RWQP) to protect and improve water quality;
- 3) Implement the RWQP to achieve applicable performance standards for discharge; and,
- 4) Report progress annually.

Why does the Water Board require a water quality permit for grazing operations?

Grazing operations can contribute to water pollution in the North San Francisco Bay Region. Studies have shown that they are among several sources of sediment, bacteria (pathogens), and mercury pollution in surface waters. As a result, the Water Board has developed Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation plans to address these sources and improve water quality. For more information on TMDLs, click [here](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/) or visit <https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/>. Select 'Programs' from the menu at the top of the website, then select 'Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)' from the drop-down menu.

Why is the Grazing Permit being expanded to include my watershed?

The success of previous grazing permits in protecting and improving water quality has led to the program's expansion. The expansion of coverage is necessary to implement the 2019 Petaluma River Bacteria TMDL and to establish regulatory oversight of grazing operations throughout Point Reyes National Seashore consistent with the National Park Service's General Management Plan Amendment and Water Quality Strategy for Managing Ranching Operations.

How do I know if my grazing operation needs to be enrolled, and if so, when?

You are required to enroll in the Grazing Permit if your property meets the following eligibility criteria:

- 1) The property is part of a grazing operation covering 100 acres or more.
- 2) Livestock are kept on rangeland for a total of 45 days or more in any 12-month period.
- 3) The grazing operation is located within the Tomales Bay, Petaluma River, Sonoma Creek, or Napa River watersheds, or within Point Reyes National Seashore. See 'Attachment A – Area Map' in the 'Permit Documents' section of our website for a map of this area.
- 4) The property is not currently enrolled in the Tomales Bay or Sonoma Creek and Napa River grazing permits. If you are already enrolled in one of these two permits, you are automatically enrolled in the new permit and do not need to re-enroll.

- 5) The property is not currently part of the Water Board's Confined Animal Facilities Program. If your grazing operation is already enrolled as part of a Confined Animal Facility, then you do not need to enroll in the Grazing Permit.

Grazing operations that meet the above eligibility requirements must enroll by February 15, 2026.

How do I enroll in the Grazing Permit? Is there a permit fee?

You can enroll by filling out an enrollment form, called a Notice of Intent, and sending it to the Water Board. There is no fee, but the permit requirements must be followed.

The Notice of Intent form is available on our website (see below). Please return the completed form to the following address or email:

San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board
1515 Clay Street, Suite 1400
Oakland, CA 94612
ATTN: Grazing Program

Email: R2GrazingWaiver@Waterboards.ca.gov

What are the first steps I need to take after I'm enrolled?

Future milestones for new Grazing Permit enrollees include:

- 1) November 15, 2026 – Complete and submit the first annual report, called an Annual Certification, by November 15th. This report must be submitted each year following program enrollment.
- 2) February 15, 2027 – Complete and implement a Ranch Water Quality Plan. This plan will evaluate current operating practices, identify potential pollution sources and control measures to improve and protect water quality, and set a schedule for implementing actions. A workshop to help you prepare this plan will be scheduled in 2026.

Where do I get help?

You can complete the permit requirements yourself, but we recommend consulting with agricultural resource professionals. Contact information for support organizations, such as your local National Resource Conservation Service Field Office, Resource Conservation District, and University of California Community Extension, is available on the Grazing Program website under 'Resources' (see below).

How do I find out more information?

All Grazing Permit documents, including the Notice of Intent and Annual Certification forms, are available on our website under 'Permit Documents'. Simply click [here](#), or visit <https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/> and select 'Programs' from the menu at the top of the website, then select 'Agricultural Programs' from the drop down menu and go to the 'Grazing Program' website.

For announcements and updates on upcoming deadlines, workshops, and other news, subscribe to our email list through our GovDelivery service. To sign up, use the link on the Grazing Program website where it says 'Subscribe to Our Email Lists'.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact René Leclerc at (510) 622- 2410 or email at Rene.Leclerc@waterboards.ca.gov.