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. Area Plans are reviewed and updated by ODA and the local advisory committee every two years. The original Lower Deschutes Area Plan and Rules were approved by ODA in 2002.

THE AREA PLAN

The Area Plan guides local landowners and their conservation partners on how to prevent pollution. It includes information on agricultural water quality concerns and recommendations for addressing them. The Area Plan does not tell anyone how to farm, ranch, or otherwise use natural resources. Rather, it includes recommended practices that a landowner can choose from. The practices can help meet their business and conservation goals, while also preventing water pollution.

Agricultural water quality concerns in the Lower Deschutes area are primarily:
- Excessive upland erosion
- Degraded riparian areas due to poorly managed livestock access and cropping
- Excess livestock manure and sediment in rivers and streams

THE AREA RULES

The Agricultural Water Quality Program focuses on voluntary and cooperative efforts by landowners and others to protect water quality.

However, the Agricultural Water Quality Management Act also includes enforcement to ensure prevention and control of water pollution from agricultural sources.

Area Rules allow landowners flexibility in how they protect water quality. Area Rules describe conditions that landowners must achieve on agricultural lands,

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DO THE AREA PLAN AND AREA RULES APPLY TO ME?

The Area Plan and Area Rules apply to all agricultural lands. This includes lands in current agricultural use and those lying idle or on which management has been deferred. They also apply to agricultural activities within incorporated city boundaries, urban growth boundaries, and non-federal forest lands.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Landowners should evaluate their agricultural activities and try to determine if they might:

- Pollute streams, canals, or groundwater.
- Prevent growth of appropriate vegetation along streams.

Then change any problem practices to ensure compliance with the Area Rules and to protect water quality.

WHO CAN HELP?

Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Sherman County SWCD are the primary sources of landowner assistance to address water quality concerns. SWCDs are non-regulatory local organizations that can help or direct landowners to additional sources of help.