

Comment on the Grazing Waiver

Tomales Bay Grazing Waiver Toolkit

Prepared by Resource Renewal Institute, Turtle Island Restoration Network, and the Environmental Action Committee for community use – please customize to your needs.

Comment on the Grazing Waiver

The public Comment Period for the Tomales Bay Grazing Waiver is now open! The Water Board is accepting comments on their proposed expansion of the program to Point Reyes National Seashore. We invite all community members to participate who value clean water, thriving ecosystems, and sustainable land management.

Stay Informed

- The complete draft of the Grazing Waiver Program is available on waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/public_notices (under "Agriculture").
- One week before the hearing, responses to public comments and any proposed changes will be posted on waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/board_info/agenda.html

Talking Points and Example Comments

- "I support the updated Grazing Waiver program as proposed. Thank you for incorporating the additional areas in the Point Reyes National Seashore. Expanding the scope ensures more consistent protection of our region's watersheds."
- "My family likes to kayak and swim at Point Reyes National Seashore / Tomales Bay. Maintaining clean, safe waterbodies to recreate in is important to me. Please adopt the proposed Grazing Waiver program to safeguard these special places for swimmers, kayakers, and future generations to enjoy."
- "Point Reyes National Seashore is home to many ecologically significant areas that require protection. We appreciate that the updated Grazing Waiver supports these vital ecosystems, ensuring responsible land management."

- “I support the updated Grazing Waiver as it aligns with the California Coastal Commission’s Conditional Concurrence for the General Management Plan for Point Reyes National Seashore, and the Water Quality Strategy outlined therein. This waiver ensures consistency across agency decisions, reinforcing protections for coastal waters through effective monitoring and best management practices. A coordinated approach among regulatory agencies is essential to safeguarding water quality in this ecologically significant region.”
- "This waiver helps safeguard water quality by requiring best management practices to control sediment, nutrients, and pathogens from grazing operations."
- "This waiver aligns with California’s commitment to clean water while recognizing the importance of sustainable grazing for our local economies."

How to Get Involved

- **Submit Written Comments by March 24, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.**
 - Email: Rene.Leclerc@waterboards.ca.gov
 - Mail: San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board. Attn: René Leclerc 1515 Clay Street, Suite 1400 Oakland, CA 94612
- **Attend the Public Hearing on July 9, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.**
 - In-Person: Elihu M. Harris Building, First Floor Auditorium, 1515 Clay St, Oakland.
 - Remote: Please check waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/board_info/remote_meeting/index.html

What Kind of Comments Are Useful?

- Share your personal connection to affected watersheds
- Be specific—reference sections of the proposed waiver.
- Support your points with data or real-world examples.
- Suggest alternatives or improvements.
- Keep it constructive and professional.

Background

The Grazing Waiver is a regulatory program designed to balance water quality protection and sustainable ranching in the North San Francisco Bay region.

Implemented by the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board (“Water Board”), this grazing waiver streamlines permitting for agricultural operations and establishes annual monitoring, reporting, and assessment standards. By requiring best management practices (BMPs) to minimize erosion, reduce runoff, and protect local waterways, the waiver helps safeguard the health of Tomales Bay, Sonoma Creek, and the Napa River. The proposed Grazing Waiver update would also expand the existing program to the Petaluma River watershed and Point Reyes National Seashore.

This program plays a vital role in preserving the region’s food production while ensuring that healthy watersheds and thriving working lands can coexist for generations to come.

Grazing Waiver FAQ

1. Who is the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board?

The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Board (“the Water Board”), is the public agency responsible for protecting water quality and beneficial uses of water for the use and enjoyment of people in the Bay Area.”

Under the California Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, the Water Board regulates all waters within its region, including those that drain into coastal streams, wetlands, estuaries, and directly into the Pacific Ocean to ensure that they are suitable for various purposes such as drinking, recreation, and supporting aquatic life.

The Board achieves its mission by setting and enforcing water quality standards, issuing permits for activities that may impact water bodies, and monitoring the condition of the Bay and its tributaries. Through these actions, the Regional

Water Board plays a critical role in maintaining the health and sustainability of the San Francisco Bay ecosystem, which is vital for the well-being of local communities, thriving economies, and the diverse wildlife that call this region home.

2. What is a grazing waiver?

A Grazing Waiver is a set of rules that establishes how livestock operations, like cattle ranches, ensure ongoing grazing operations reduce pollution to nearby rivers, streams, and wetlands. Instead of requiring a lengthy permit for each individual livestock operation, the waiver sets basic environmental protections that all grazing operations must follow to reduce water pollution from manure, soil erosion, and runoff. The Water Board's goal is to safeguard water quality while making it simpler for grazing operations to meet monitoring requirements and achieve management outcomes.

This applies to any landowner or operator with a grazing operation covering 100 or more acres OR is identified by the Water Board as a potential water quality risk.

3. Where does the grazing waiver apply?

The current waiver specifically applies to North San Francisco Bay Region grazing lands, including the Napa River, Sonoma Creek, and Tomales Bay. The proposed update to the Grazing Waiver program would also incorporate grazing operations in the Petaluma River watershed and Point Reyes National Seashore.

4. Why is Point Reyes National Seashore being added now?

While portions of Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS) and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) were covered by the prior Grazing Waiver, The Water Board has decided to expand this program to include all ongoing grazing operations within PRNS. This decision aligns with recent water quality monitoring and protection policies adopted by the California Coastal Commission

and the National Park Service.

Over the last two decades, various government agencies and nonprofit organizations have documented sediment, pathogen, and nutrient pollution from grazing operations with PRNS that can degrade coastal ecosystem health.

Runoff from some grazing operations within the national park drains directly into designated marine protected areas and "Areas of Special Biological Significance," which are recognized as among California's most biodiverse and vulnerable coastal ecosystems. These special designation areas serve as fundamental building blocks for resilient coastal ecosystems and economies in California. Due to their exceptional status, they require stringent protection against all potential pollution sources.

While a dozen beef and dairy ranch operations plan to wind down operations and transition out of the national park in the coming year, targeted grazing may continue to be utilized to achieve conservation and restoration priorities for PRNS. Measures in the proposed grazing waiver program are essential to ensure that conservation grazing practices align with the stringent protection required for these exceptional coastal ecosystems.

5. Why is it important, and how does it protect water quality?

The grazing waiver program is crucial because it helps ranching operations comply with environmental laws such as the Clean Water Act while protecting local watersheds. The program establishes annual monitoring, reporting, and assessment of land conditions, including residual dry matter measurements that prevent soil erosion and runoff. Best management practices required by the waiver reduce nutrient and pathogen pollution from entering waterways.

Without this streamlined waiver, individual ranchers might be required to obtain costly and complex individual permits, making compliance more difficult. This

approach sets clear, consistent standards across all regional grazing operations, ensuring watershed protections while sustaining local food production systems.

6. How can landowners and ranchers comply?

Ranchers and landowners can comply with the grazing waiver by adopting best management practices (BMPs) that help reduce pollution and protect waterways.

Examples include:

- Keeping livestock out of sensitive riparian areas.
- Implementing erosion control measures on roads and pastures.
- Managing manure and runoff to prevent contamination.
- Maintaining sufficient vegetation cover to reduce sediment flow.
- Conducting regular inspections and submitting required reports.

Social Media Outreach

Please use this social media toolkit to share the importance of the Grazing Waiver. Modify as needed.

Accounts to Tag

- @rri_org
- @turtleislandrestorationnetwork
- @eacwestmarin
- @pointreyesnps

Hashtags

#GrazingWaiver #SustainableRanching #HealthyWatersheds #RegenerativeAg
#WaterQuality #PublicComment #TomalesBay #CleanWaterAct #RanchingResponsibly
#BayAreaFarms

Post 1: Public Comment Period

Graphics: [Download Graphics Here](#)



Caption:

The public Comment Period for the Tomales Bay Grazing Waiver is now open.

Once every five years, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board reviews and updates the Conditional Waiver Program for Grazing Operations in the Tomales Bay Watershed (Grazing Waiver Program), which regulates waste discharge from grazing operations to protect Tomales Bay water quality. Now is the time to weigh in on the proposed updates!

What's Happening? The Water Board is renewing and expanding the Grazing Waiver Program, which covers 88,000 acres of grazing lands in the Tomales Bay, Sonoma Creek, and Napa River watersheds. The new proposal expands coverage to include grazing operations in Point Reyes National Seashore. Compliance requirements will largely remain the same.

How to Get Involved

Submit Written Comments by March 24, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.

 Email: Rene.Leclerc@waterboards.ca.gov

 Mail: San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board. Attn: René Leclerc
1515 Clay Street, Suite 1400 Oakland, CA 94612

Attend the Public Hearing on May 14, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

 In-Person: Elihu M. Harris Building, First Floor Auditorium, 1515 Clay St, Oakland.

 Remote: Please check

waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/board_info/remote_meeting/index.html

What Kind of Comments Are Useful?

- ☀ Be specific—reference sections of the proposed waiver.
- ☀ Support your points with data or real-world examples.
- ☀ Suggest alternatives or improvements.
- ☀ Keep it constructive and professional.

Stay Informed

- The complete draft of the Grazing Waiver Program is available on waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/public_notices (under "Agriculture").
- One week before the hearing, responses to public comments and any proposed changes will be posted on waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/board_info/agenda.html

This is a once-in-five-year chance to provide input on how grazing practices impact water quality in the Tomales Bay region. Make your voice heard!

Post 2: What's a Grazing Waiver & Why Does It Matter in Point Reyes?

Graphics: [Download Graphics Here](#)



Caption:

A grazing waiver allows ranchers in Point Reyes National Seashore to continue their work while protecting local water quality. It sets clear guidelines to reduce runoff, prevent erosion, and safeguard streams from pollutants like sediment and bacteria—helping keep our lands healthy and our waters clean.

✓ Supports Sustainable Ranching – Provides a framework for responsible land management that helps ranchers maintain their livelihoods.

✓ Protects Waterways – Reduces runoff, erosion, and pollutants like bacteria and sediment that can harm Tomales Bay and beyond.

✓ Balances Agriculture & Conservation – Creates clear guidelines to keep ranching and local ecosystems thriving.

💬 Get Involved! The public can submit comments on the grazing waiver before March 24, 2025. This is your chance to learn more, share your thoughts, and help shape the region's future of ranching and water protection!

🔗 Visit waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay for details