

Forestry Water Quality Plans: Agriculture Water Quality Act Implications for Woodland Owners

by Amanda Abnee Gumbert

Do you plan to harvest timber, plant trees, or do other forestry activities on 10 or more acres? Do you farm 10 or more acres? If so, you are required by Kentucky state law to implement an agriculture water quality plan.

The Agriculture Water Quality Act was passed by the Kentucky state legislature in 1994. It states that landowners with 10 or more acres in agricultural or silvicultural (forestry) production must develop a water quality plan. This plan documents best management practices being followed to protect water resources. Best management practices related to forestry include: properly installing logging roads and stream crossings; maintaining streamside management zones; and reclaiming and revegetating erodible areas such as skid trails, logging roads, and log decks. Best management practices for your property could also include planned grazing systems for livestock, filter or buffer strips around crop fields, animal waste storage structures, and nutrient management plans. Livestock should have limited access to streams. In addition, the plan should include information about proper handling of herbicides and pesticides and proper maintenance of septic systems.

To develop a water quality plan, a landowner must first identify activities planned or ongoing on the property that have the potential to pollute the water. Then the landowner can use planning tools (discussed below) available through the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service or the Kentucky Division of Conservation to answer questions about his or her operation. By answering these questions, the landowner can identify the appropriate best management practices needed. Then, the landowner documents that these practices are being used and properly maintained. In many cases, proper practices are already being implemented. Creating an agriculture water quality plan provides landowners with a document that says they are doing the right things to protect water quality on their farm.

An agriculture water quality plan is not a voluntary document, and it must be completed and on file at the local Conservation District office if the landowner is planning to apply for state cost share programs. As farming or forestry operations change or ownership of the property changes, landowners should update their plan to reflect these changes.

By implementing an agriculture water quality plan, landowners will be helping to protect both surface and groundwater from agricultural and silvicultural contaminants. Keeping the water resources of the Commonwealth clean protects human and animal health and reduces the cost of treating drinking water.

Planning tools, including online interactive questionnaires, CDs, and publications are available to help landowners develop and implement their agriculture water quality plan. An online tool is available at www.ca.uky.edu/enri by clicking on "Develop Your Ag Water Quality Plan." Various fact sheets and publications are available at www.ca.uky.edu/enri/PUBS/index.htm. A publication titled "Forest Water Quality Plan" (FOR-96) by the University of Kentucky Department of Forestry is available at www.ukforestry.org and was developed specifically for woodland owners to assist them in developing an agriculture water quality plan for their woodlands. You also can visit your local Cooperative Extension office (www.ca.uky.edu/county/) or your local Conservation District office (www.conservation.ky.gov/condistricts/). Personnel at either of these locations can help develop agriculture water quality plans and answer landowners' questions.

About the Author:

Amanda Abnee Gumbert is an Extension Water Quality Liaison at the University of Kentucky's College of Agriculture. She works in the areas of watershed protection, water quality, stream restoration, solid waste reduction/management, and is also a Kentucky Certified Environmental Educator.

University of Kentucky, N-122C Ag., Lexington, KY 40546; E-mail: amanda.gumbert@uky.edu; Phone: 859.257.6094; Fax: 859.257.3655.

