

Water Quality Policy

Who made it?

The RSBOJC Water Quality Policy was developed with support and input from local landowners, SVID and RID staff and Directors, as well as representatives from local, state and federal environmental agencies. The policy was adopted by the RSBOJC Board.

Will it work?

With cooperation from landowners, RSBOJC Water Quality Policy has enabled us to meet DOE requirements. The key is to be pro-active. If landowners and irrigation districts cannot make improvements, state and federal agencies may implement stricter methods of enforcement.

How will it affect the landowner?

Landowners are being asked to enter a partnership with the RSBOJC. The goal is to have each landowner minimize return flows and clean up the irrigation water leaving the farm. In addition to cleaner water, better management has improved on-farm efficiencies and water conservation. It's a win-win situation for the landowners, the districts, and the environment.

How do I get involved?

You can become a member of the RSBOJC Work Group. The group meets regularly at the SVID conference room in Sunnyside. Call 837-6980 for specific times and dates.

What is turbidity?



Turbidity is a measure of water clarity. Scientists measure it in Nephelometric Turbidity Units, or NTUs.

Here are the yearly Water Quality Targets:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Turbidity</u>
1999	2000 NTU
2000	1000 NTU
2001	500 NTU
2002	400 NTU
2003	400 NTU
2004	400 NTU

2004 On-Farm Targets

The Water Quality Policy addresses the worst areas first by setting numerical targets for three or less water quality samples.

Throughout the upcoming irrigation season, RSBOJC water quality specialists and personnel will collect NTU readings. The target for 2004 is 400 NTU. If a concentration of total suspended solids higher than 400 NTU is reached in three or fewer samples, immediate corrective action must be taken.

If your supply is reduced because of a violation, you must meet 200 NTU before your supply is fully restored. In the event a landowner has violations for three consecutive years on the same parcel, the water delivery will remain at reduced flow of 0.25 cfs per 40 acres (2.8 gpm/acre) until the end of the irrigation season. An appeal process is available to request the restriction be removed or modified at the discretion of the Board.



2004 WATER QUALITY POLICY

"We like to pride ourselves on being the true environmentalists. If we are going to talk the talk, we'd better walk it."

Background

In 1996, the Roza Irrigation District and the Sunnyside Division formed a Board of Joint Control (RSBOJC) in response to the 1992-94 drought. Together, the two organizations are working to improve water supply, water quality, and management.

Why the push for better water quality?

There are two primary driving forces behind the push for improving water quality: the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Clean Water Act (CWA).

The ESA impacts irrigation districts because it protects bull trout and steelhead. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife are the federal agencies responsible for designating endangered species and ensuring recovery. They can take broad steps to protect the fish, regulating any activity that affects water quality—including irrigation.

Under the CWA, the Department of Ecology (DOE) has established Total Maximum Daily Loading (TMDL) goals for all water bodies not meeting water quality standards. To better protect aquatic life and river health, the DOE requires that all points of discharge to the Yakima River comply with a turbidity target of 25 NTU by the end of 2002.

Policy details

- The RSBOJC will monitor water discharged from irrigated property or entering project waterways throughout the irrigation season.
- Each time the RSBOJC collects a water quality sample, the landowner will receive notice of the results.
- The RSBOJC will take up to three water quality samples from the same area no more than once a week. If the total of three or fewer samples exceeds the yearly turbidity target, the landowner will be asked to take action to improve water quality. If the first sample collected from an individual landowner violates the turbidity target, it will trigger corrective action.
- If a landowner violates the current water quality target, they will be required to complete and submit both a Short-term and a Long-term Water Quality Plan.
- If the Short-term Plan is not submitted, approved, and implemented, the RSBOJC will reduce water delivery services for that irrigation season. Water will not be turned on the following irrigation season until the individual grower submits the Long-term Plan.
- In the event a landowner has violations for three consecutive years on the same parcel, the water delivery will remain at reduced flow of 0.25 cfs per 40 acres (2.8 gpm/acre) until the end of the irrigation season. An appeal process is available to request the restriction be removed or modified at the discretion of the Board.

Results

Since 1997, when the RSBOJC Water Quality Program was implemented, the quality of RSBOJC irrigation return flows has increased dramatically.

At the close of the 2003 irrigation season, three of the four major irrigation drains under RSBOJC jurisdiction met the 90th percentile turbidity target set by the Washington Department of Ecology.

A decrease in total suspended solids (TSS) correlates to the improved turbidity. TSS is a measure of the actual tonnage of sediments being carried off farms and fields through water erosion. *From 1997-2003, TSS has been reduced 85% in Granger Drain and 80% in Sulphur Creek Wasteway.* See the graphs below for more information.

