

**amsa** Clean  
Water...



Clean Water...  
We've Got the Point. . .

Now Let's Get to the **Nonpoint...**

# Nonpoint Source Pollution.



LIVESTOCK

**WATER POLLUTION from “nonpoint sources” – polluted runoff from crops, livestock, roads, timber harvests, abandoned mines and air pollution – is holding the country back from realizing its full clean water potential – high quality drinking water, teeming fisheries and wildlife habitat and expanded recreational opportunities.**

**But according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), after nearly 30 years of the Clean Water Act, 40 percent of U.S. waters remain polluted – largely by nonpoint source pollution.**

**The situation won’t improve unless we “get to the non-point” with more**

**scientific data, more targeted funding, tougher laws and nonpoint source enforcement. For the environment and the economy, we must act decisively and comprehensively to stem the flow of nonpoint source pollution.**

## **WE’VE GOT THE POINT...**

Discharges that impact water quality fall into two categories: point and nonpoint. For almost 30 years, federal law has been focused primarily on point source pollution. Industrial and municipal “point sources” are easily identified and highly regulated facilities that are required to treat wastewater before discharge into receiving waters. Point sources are strictly controlled by the Clean Water Act, which forbids any discharge to U.S. waters unless regulated by a permit. Discharges without permits are punishable by fines or imprisonment, and wastewater quality is continually monitored and reported to state and federal regulators who ensure that water quality is protected. A combination of tough laws and regulations along with federal, state and local dollars has resulted in tremendous water quality progress. **In other words, we’ve got the point.**

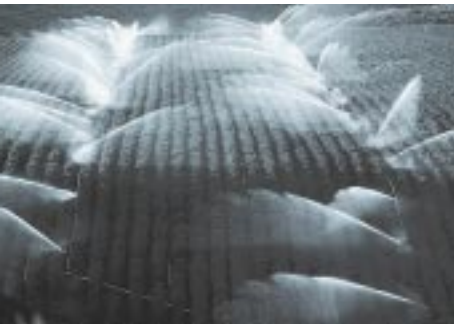
## **NOW LET’S GET TO THE NONPOINT**

By contrast, nonpoint source pollution – and the systems to control it – vary widely. A mixed bag of state and federal regulations, incentive-based, voluntary programs and funding mechanisms seek to address nonpoint source pollution. But we need to verify that efforts to control nonpoint source pollution are reaping genuine water quality benefits.



MINING

CROPS



As runoff from rainwater, irrigation or melting snow makes its way



AIR POLLUTION

to the nearest stream, river, lake or estuary, it picks up pollutants. For the most part, these pollutants consist of sediments and nutrients, but the runoff can also carry pesticides, bacteria and viruses, salts, oil, grease, toxic chemicals and heavy metals. How we use the land determines what runs into the water. Sources of nonpoint pollution include car and truck exhaust, coal-fired power plants, roads and highways, timber harvests, abandoned mines and – the number-one source of water pollution – crops and livestock. According to EPA, agriculture is responsible for degrading 60 percent of the country’s impaired river miles and half of the impaired lake acreage. Nonpoint source pollution closes beaches, contaminates and kills fish, destroys wildlife habitat and pollutes drinking water. Yet there are limited federal controls. **It may not be easy, but we must get to the nonpoint.**

These sources aren’t going anywhere, but there are basic on-the-ground measures that can stem the flow of pollution. A wide range of “best management practices” (BMPs) offers landowners ample opportunity to protect water quality. For instance, “buffer strips” of vegetation along waterways capture nutrients and sediments, and wetlands slow runoff, control flooding, provide habitat and capture some toxic pollutants. These and many other BMPs are encouraged and funded with state and federal dollars. But with little accountability built into the process, there’s not much assurance that taxpayers’ money is buying actual water quality improvement.

## CLEAN WATER EQUITY, CLEAN WATER PRIORITIES

Getting to the nonpoint becomes all the more critical as local governments continue to lay out huge amounts of cash to meet tough Clean Water Act requirements. The Act requires cities, towns and counties to reduce wet weather flows and to bring impaired waters into compliance with state and federal water quality standards. But many communities across the country have no response when their citizens ask, “Why spend all this money when the bulk of the problem lies elsewhere?”

Put in perspective, urban flows are a small part of the country’s overall water quality problems. And although local governments will spend billions of dollars to meet the Act’s requirements, they are powerless to address the most pervasive problem in most watersheds: nonpoint sources that seriously pollute waters. With gaps in the law, gaps in our economic and scientific data, lack of funding and no consistent, comprehensive mechanisms for monitoring and regulating those responsible for nonpoint source pollution, many communities may be held hostage by someone else’s pollution.



TIMBER HARVEST



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*The Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies (AMSA) represents the nation's publicly owned wastewater treatment agencies. Its members serve the majority of the sewered population in the United States and collectively treat and reclaim over 18 billion gallons of wastewater each day. AMSA's members are true environmental practitioners dedicated to protecting and improving the quality of the nation's waters.*