

**The Role of the Georgia  
Soil and Water Conservation Committee  
in P. L. 92-500, Section 208,  
Nonpoint Source Agricultural Pollution Control**

F. Graham Liles, Jr

Georgia State Soil and Water Conservation Committee

The State Committee role in nonpoint source pollution from agriculture began with the passage by Congress in 1972 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, or Public Law 92-500. It was the most far-reaching legislation ever enacted in protecting and maintaining the quality of the Nation's water.

The original goal of this act was to make waters of the United States fishable and swimmable by July 15, 1983 with no discharge of pollutants by 1985. The Environmental Protection Agency is the Federal agency responsible for carrying out this law.

The law was divided into several sections. One of the most important was Section 208 which called for area and statewide water quality management planning which would deal with point and nonpoint sources of pollution. In Georgia, the Governor designated the Environmental Protection Division as the state agency to develop the overall 208 plan for the state.

For the nonpoint portion of the 208 plan, EPD decided to use the task force approach. Seven task forces were selected with one being the Agriculture/Irrigation Nonpoint Source Technical Task Force.

This Task Force charged by the Executive Director of the State Soil and Water Conservation Committee inventoried all agricultural activities in the state and ranked individual counties for their pollution potential. The Task Force did not find any specific pollution problems related to agriculture but pointed out areas where problems would most likely occur.

To explain a bit, nonpoint source pollutants are those carried by runoff from many areas and which cannot be pinpointed. Some examples are: soil eroded from a plowed field, pesticides and fertilizer leached from cropland, and runoff from construction sites. Major sources contributing nonpoint pollutants are: construction, silviculture, mining, urban runoff, agriculture and salt water intrusion.

The State Water Quality Management Plan which was developed favors a nonregulatory approach for controlling agriculturally-related nonpoint source pollution. In accordance with this plan, the State Committee was designated as the administering agency, working through soil and water conservation districts, to carry out the agricultural portion of the state plan.

The State Committee then initiated a 208 program based on the voluntary approach to meeting national goals. In this role, the Committee has secured a staff person who is expert in nonpoint pollution control. His job is to develop and present to districts and the public various types of information displays explaining 208 requirements and the methods through which they can be met. He also helps develop and implement long range programs for districts and coordinates activities between the State Committee and other agencies.

The Committee also assisted the 40 soil and water conservation districts in developing 208 plans in agriculture. The ultimate goal of the Committee is that all the agricultural land in Georgia is managed under a current conservation plan.

In 1981, the Committee entered into a contract with the EPD that would provide funding for certain activities. The main thrust of this program was to fund informational and educational activities relating to nonpoint efforts.

I would like to say that this money has been used widely and wisely. We have now had leadership roles in planning, publicizing and conducting 50 demonstrations or demonstration projects which have been visited by an estimated 15,000 youth, adults, landowners, nonlandowners, farmers, etc.

Furthermore, we pledge to continue our efforts in nonpoint pollution control because, basically, the practices which control pollution almost always control erosion or sediment runoff. And that's what this agency is here for.

Conservation tillage, for instance, includes a number of methods such as no-till, minimum tillage, chisel planting and more. Aside from being great conservation practices, they are doing a great job of controlling nonpoint source pollution.

Today the requirements and goals of Section 208 are not getting too much publicity. We must not, however, assume that the requirements of the law are invalid or forgotten. Accordingly, the Committee will continue to educate and inform all who need to know the benefits and needs in nonpoint source pollution control. It is very important to keep demonstrating that farmers and landowners in Georgia can control nonpoint pollutants through a voluntary program. The alternative is a federally-mandated regulatory program emphasizing cross-compliance with other programs of federal assistance to agriculture. None of us wants more federal regulation in farming.

We applaud efforts such as this which, though not directed specifically to Section 208 goals, will contribute greatly to those goals through increased understanding and appreciation among the participants.