CASE STUDIES

IN recent years western riparian areas have been the focus of unprecedented public and political attention. Several factors working together contributed to this encouraging development.

The environmental, economic and social costs of deteriorated riparian areas are more widely understood. The 1987 nonpoint source amendments to the Clean Water Act provided requirements and authorized resources for states to deal with the problem. Perhaps most important to heightened awareness is the work of a growing number of public and private land managers who have conclusively demonstrated improved grazing management can dramatically improve the productivity of riparian areas and adjacent uplands.

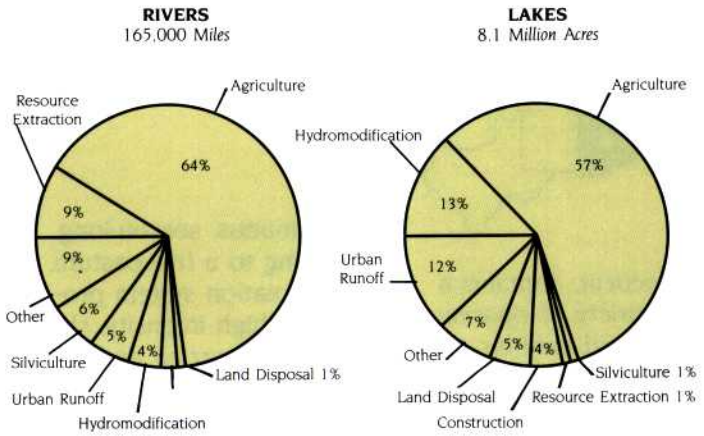
The following case studies are representative of broad areas of land in the western United States, and of diverse environmental, political and economic conditions. They broadly illustrate the problems and the promise of improved management of riparian areas and adjacent uplands.

"THE objective of this Act is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the Nation's waters."

Clean Water Act

THE Clean Water Act of 1977 established a national objective "... to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nations waters."

compliance through nonregulatory programs of technical and financial assistance, education, training, technology transfer, demonstration watershed projects, and monitoring.



Relative amount of state assessed waters impacted by various categories of nonpoint source pollution. Source: Environmental Protection Agency.

The act initially focused on reducing or preventing degradation of water quality by easily identifiable discharges — "point sources" — of pollutants. The act was amended by the Water Quality Act of 1987; section 319 addresses "nonpoint" sources of water pollution.

Nonpoint source pollution is broadly defined as being any human-caused degradation of surface or groundwater quality. This includes all sources not regulated as point sources, such as runoff from construction sites, urban areas, forest lands and agricultural lands — including lands used for livestock grazing.

States are required to identify nonpoint sources of pollution and to develop procedures and practices — Best Management Practices — to achieve state and national water quality objectives.

The current approach to controlling most nonpoint sources of pollution is to seek voluntary

"WE have been persuaded to take a path somewhat different from that taken for point sources. States are given flexibility to identify priorities. And based on commitments made in this legislative cycle, it is the expectation of Congress that this program will result in significant improvement in water quality and nationwide reduction in pollutant loadings from nonpoint sources. We will, of course, revisit this question in the next legislative cycle on the Clean Water Act. We will not find this program adequate if real improvement in water quality has not occurred. We are not so much interested in elements of a State program as we are concerned with meeting the goals and objectives of the Clean Water Act."

— Senator Durenberger, Senate debate on nonpoint source pollution amendments to Clean Water Act.