

Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater Management Area Declared

Groundwater Management Area

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has issued a Declaration creating the Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater Management Area. (GWMA)

On May 10, 2004, following a public comment period on the final Southern Willamette Valley groundwater report and proposal for declaring a Groundwater Management Area, DEQ director Stephanie Hallock signed the official Declaration, creating the Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater Management Area. By declaring a Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) for portions of the Southern Willamette Valley, DEQ, Department of Agriculture, Water Resource Department, Department of Human Services and other state agencies are required to focus efforts on the development of an *Action Plan* to restore the groundwater quality.



Shallow groundwater is the drinking water source for most of those living in the Southern Willamette Valley

Background

The Southern Willamette Valley is one of Oregon's fastest growing regions and depends heavily on groundwater for both private and public drinking water, irrigation water, and other uses. In fact, groundwater provides almost all of the drinking water in the study area. High levels of nitrate contamination in drinking water can pose a health risk.

The GWMA is the result of many years of studies and analyses of the shallow groundwater

in the lowlands of the Southern Willamette Valley. Studies beginning in the 1990s show that shallow groundwater contains nitrate above levels that are a concern.



Several workshops and meetings were held throughout the Southern Willamette Valley

Public Involvement

Since 2000, DEQ has been involved in confirming the extent of the problem, and has worked with local governments, agencies, agricultural interests and environmental groups to provide information about the issue, even as the sampling was completed by DEQ to confirm the appropriate groundwater management area. Oregon State University Extension Service (OSU) and Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) have collaborated with DEQ, bringing data analysis, mapping and a greater awareness of the groundwater issues through education to local jurisdictions and rural communities of the Southern Willamette Valley.

A final Summary Report was developed with input from stakeholders representing a variety of interests. The report was open for comments by individuals, agencies, and other entities during the recent public comment period. DEQ has reviewed all of the comments in detail and has prepared a document that summarizes our responses.

Oregon law requires that DEQ declare a groundwater management area when there is confirmation of nitrate contamination in the groundwater above 7.0 milligrams per liter



State of Oregon
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Environmental
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Western Region Southern Willamette Valley GWMA

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(mg/L) and the suspected sources of nitrate are not facilities with permits, such as landfills or incinerators.

Nitrate contamination is a concern because children less than six months old who consume water with high levels of nitrate are at risk for *blue baby syndrome*, or Methemoglobinemia, a condition where the nitrate can ultimately interfere with the oxygen-carrying capacity of the child's blood.

The nitrate public water supply standard for nitrate is 10 mg/L nitrate as nitrogen, to protect children from this risk. There are no standards for private wells. Other potential health risks are linked to nitrate in drinking water at even lower levels than the 10 mg/L, however these risks are still being evaluated.

What's Next

The May 10, 2004 Declaration begins a 60-day period for public consideration. After this time period, DEQ, Oregon Department of Agriculture and other state agencies will initiate the next round of groundwater protection implementation by establishing a citizen's Groundwater Area Management Committee. This Committee will strategize with the state agencies preparing the Action Plan, and will review and comment on all potential options. It is expected that the initial protection strategies outlined in the Action Plan will be voluntary. This Committee will approve the final Action Plan prior to its use by state agencies.

It will take everyone's efforts to continue the process that is underway in the Southern Willamette Valley and achieve water quality standards that protect important groundwater uses such as drinking water and irrigation. Your continued assistance and interest in the next steps of implementation are welcomed, as we move towards improving groundwater quality within the Southern Willamette Valley GWMA.

Watch for free training available to rural residents of the Southern Willamette Valley on how to care for your private water systems to protect your family's health, your homestead investment and your community's groundwater. OSU Extension, with assistance from DEQ and LCOG, will be offering these trainings, and participants will receive a free screening of their well water for nitrate. Information about future *Rural Living Basics* can be obtained by checking the "Events" page on OSU Extension's Southern Willamette Groundwater website:

<http://groundwater.oregonstate.edu/willamette/> .

If you would like more information

A copy of the January 2004 Southern Willamette Valley Summary Report and the Response to Public Comments can be viewed at

<http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/groundwa/UpperWillBasin.htm> or at the DEQ's Eugene Office at 1102 Lincoln Street, Suite 210.

DEQ will be looking for interested citizens to participate in the Groundwater Management Committee and several technical subcommittees. If you have an interest in being part of this Groundwater Management Team, please contact Audrey Eldridge, Gail Glick Andrews at (gail.glick.andrews@orst.edu; 541-737-6294) or Denise Kalakay at (dkalakay@Lane.COG.OR.US; 541-682-7415)

If you have questions regarding the GWMA, contact:

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