

Groundwater Protection Project

Background:

Extensive field research and study has shown that the groundwater underlying south Deschutes County is threatened by continued use of traditional onsite wastewater treatment systems (standard, pressure distribution and sand filter systems). The groundwater in the area is the primary drinking water source for the residents. In addition, the La Pine National Demonstration Project showed that new types of onsite systems can protect the groundwater. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) provided further groundwater models that showed without action nitrates in groundwater will continue to increase with concentrations exceeding 10 mg/L over large areas of the shallow aquifer.

In June 2008, the Deschutes County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approved an interim ordinance (2008-019) requiring all new permits, major alterations and major repairs in South Deschutes County to install protective nitrogen-reducing onsite wastewater systems. Several months later, the Deschutes County BOCC approved a local ordinance adopting broader language that required all property owners in South Deschutes County to install nitrogen-reducing onsite wastewater treatment systems. This ordinance included upgrading or retrofitting existing onsite systems to nitrogen-reducing onsite systems within 14 years of adoption. Citizens petitioned and placed a referendum on the ballot to repeal the ordinance, and the vote to repeal the ordinance was successful, and the Ordinance was nullified in spring, 2009. The interim ordinance (2008-019) was ultimately repealed by the BOCC early 2011.

Following the repeal of the local ordinance in 2009, Deschutes County asked the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to take the lead in investigating groundwater protection alternatives. The DEQ formed a South Deschutes/Northern Klamath Groundwater Protection Project Steering Committee to make recommendations about the best way to protect water resources in the area. The committee has met monthly since September 2010, and once accepted by DEQ, local partners and the community, Deschutes County looks forward to helping to implement recommendations.

Groundwater Protection Project Goals:

Recognizing that existing development and future growth can negatively affect groundwater resources in the La Pine sub-basin, Deschutes County has focused on the following goals:

1. Prevent a moratorium on development;
2. Protect the primary, and currently high quality, source of drinking water for the residents in south Deschutes County;
3. Minimize the financial and environmental impacts to residents in the La Pine sub-basin of the upper Deschutes River Watershed.
4. Support DEQ's efforts and work with local citizens on implementing long-term solutions that protect our water resources for future use.