



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF OREGON**

March 28, 2013

To: House Consumer Protection and Government Efficiency  
Representative Paul Holvey, Chair  
Members of the Committee

Re: Onsite Septic HB 3172: **SUPPORT**

The League of Women Voters is a grassroots nonpartisan, political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We have provided written testimony dated March 21 on this bill, explaining not only our positions, but providing factual information on the seriousness of this issue. On March 26<sup>th</sup> we asked that our Coastal and Nearshore Report be added to the record. That document not only shows the boundaries of the Coastal Zone and the Coastal Non Point Pollution Zone, but has a section on nonpoint pollution, including this issue of septic system pollution.

The League is dismayed at the acquiescence of DEQ to this voluntary proposal and their willingness to allow Oregon's waters to be contaminated. They are responsible for administering the Clean Water Act. We know that most Oregonians get their drinking water from groundwater. According to DEQ, 70% of Oregonians, including over 90% of rural residents, rely on groundwater as their primary or secondary drinking water source. There are an estimated 200,000 to 350,000 individual home domestic wells that supply drinking water to Oregonians. Many of those same Oregonians also rely on septic systems. Testimony provided by a septic system provider in 2011 stated that approximately 30% of all single family homes have on-site septic systems.

Although I do not have statistics on septic failures, you received testimony from the residents of Tenmile Lake and Lakeside. We provided information about Dunes City. You heard that the McKenzie River is the sole drinking water source for Eugene and surrounding communities. The Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB) provided testimony in 2011: "Upstream of EWEB's intake, over 4,000 septic systems exist, discharging an estimated 900,000 gallons of wastewater to the environment on a daily basis." During a temporary program in 2008-09, "A total of 439 septic systems were inspected...of which 108 required pump-outs due to out of balance scum/sludge layers that reduced treatment efficiency of household wastewater and 55 systems needed significant repairs or replacement." In the La Pine area DEQ is continuing work with residents to address groundwater contaminant concern: "The entire area shares environmental characteristics (shallow, unconfined groundwater, highly porous soil) that increases the risk of contaminated groundwater and drinking water." Among the recommendations under discussion include 5 year inspections and mandatory pumping on a regular basis.

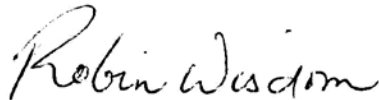
We are equally dismayed that the Realtors do not seem to feel responsible to the buyers of real property. This is a public health issue. We understand that people like living near rivers, streams and along lakes. The possibility of contamination of those waters and of nearby wells is great. A recent study of the nation's waters noted how polluted they are. Septics are, granted, only one source. But they are a source you can help fix with this bill.

As to the issues raised by Mr. Chandler, we supported a rulemaking exercise on this issue so that various situations could be addressed such as age of system, how often an inspection should occur, etc. We recognize that there are differences in older systems vs. newer systems. But we also know that rural residents can accidentally drive over even new systems and damage the drain lines.

We continue to be concerned about costs to low income homeowners as stated in our earlier letter. We understand that there is a fund at DEQ that was originally created to help with a similar issue that might, under your direction, be made available to help these homeowners. But this is a public health issue that must be addressed and not just given a wink and a nod.

Thank you for considering our testimony.

Sincerely,



Robin Wisdom  
President



Peggy Lynch  
Natural Resources Coordinator