



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON**

February 3, 2016

To: Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Senator Chris Edwards, Chair
Senator Alan Olsen, Vice Chair

Email: senr.exhibits@state.or.us

Re: SB 1563 - Onsite Septic Loan Program: **SUPPORT**

The League of Women Voters is a grassroots nonpartisan, political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League spent three years studying water quantity and quality and updated its positions on Water Policy. *“The League opposes degradation of all of Oregon’s surface and ground water.” “The League supports policies and legislation that integrate water quality into resource management and include but are not limited to standards for:2. Placement and inspection of septic tanks and alternative individual treatment systems,7. Permitting and enforcement procedures with agency funding adequate to ensure timely compliance,.....”*

We have also completed a study of Coastal and Nearshore Oregon (available on OLIS under HB 3172, 2013 Regular Session Meeting Materials) where the issue before you was discussed. 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 the issue of septic system pollution. Our researchers note that the Coastal Zone Management Act requires a septic system inspection program and that the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to complete a rule adoption. The League participated in that rulemaking, but it is not enough.

When this issue was presented before an interim legislative hearing in 2012, Rep. Deborah Boone shared a very telling story: When she purchased her home (located in the Coastal Zone), she discovered that the septic pipe went directly into the nearby river. Of course, she corrected that problem. But hers is just one of many stories well known about old installations and failing septic systems, both in the Coastal Zone and elsewhere in Oregon. **This is a public health issue.**

DEQ is 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. In 2013 there were an estimated 200,000 to 350,000 individual home domestic wells that supply drinking water to Oregonians. I assume that number has increased. 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, testimony has been offered in previous hearings on this important issue from the residents of Tenmile Lake and Lakeside. Information about Dunes City is included in our above-mentioned League report. 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 a 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.”

We understand that people like living near rivers and streams and along lakes. The possibility of contamination of those waters and of nearby wells is great. Septics are, granted, only one source. But they are a source you could help fix with the adoption of this loan program.

As you might be able to tell from this testimony, the League has been working on the issue of failing septics for quite a while. We want our low income families who rely on septic systems to stay in their homes while having a resource to help them have working septics. We want small businesses to have a resource to help with this issue. **Most of all, we ask that the Legislature help with this public health issue and support SB 1563.**

Sincerely,



Norman Turrill
President

Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator