



Oregon

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TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means: Subcommittee on Natural Resources

FROM: Richard Whitman, Director, Department of Environmental Quality

RE: Follow-up to questions during March 9 hearing

Co-chair Frederick, Co-chair Witt and subcommittee members:

Below is information related to questions raised during the Mar. 9 Department of Environmental Quality budget hearing. Please let me know if you would like additional information.

Where do the civil penalties referred to in Section 14 of House Bill 2269 go?

Civil penalties for violations of Chapter 468A and related rules and permits are deposited into the General Fund pursuant to ORS 468.135(2) and 468.140.

What contributed to the groundwater quality improvements in the Northern Malheur County Groundwater Management Area?

Multiple factors contributed to the improving water quality trend in the GWMA. The following is an excerpt from a 2003 DEQ [report](#) titled "Evaluation of Northern Malheur County Groundwater Management Area Success."

"Major changes in agricultural practices have occurred since groundwater contamination was identified in the Malheur River area in the late 1980s. The method of nitrogen application in this area has been changed. Reduced nitrogen loading has been accomplished by changes in the timing and the application of nitrogen as well as the rate of application. Plant tissue and soil sampling have also played a major role in modifying practices for the application of nitrogen by enabling the producers to apply only the amount of nutrient needed and only when that nutrient is needed. Changes in irrigation management practices have also occurred that increase the protection of groundwater quality."

To what extent are aging onsite septic systems contributing to the elevated nitrogen concentrations in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Areas?

DEQ may designate a Groundwater Management Area when there is an area-wide elevation in groundwater contamination resulting, at least in part, from nonpoint sources. All three of Oregon's

GWMA's were designated based on elevated nitrogen concentrations in groundwater. In the Lower Umatilla Basin GWMA, as shown in the pie chart below, septic systems are a minor source of nitrogen. We do not have comparable charts for the Northern Malheur County GWMA or Southern Willamette Valley GWMA, but those areas are similarly predominated by irrigated agricultural land uses.

