

Testimony to the House Committee on Water On House Bill 4070

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council strongly supports HB 4070.

OEC supports the program because of the assistance it provides low-income and rural households. We also support it because it provides protection for Oregon's water resources.

Fixing failing septic systems protects domestic wells. According to the EPA, "Septic systems provide wastewater treatment for many homeowners who also often get their drinking water from private wells. If a septic system is not working properly or is located too close to a drinking water well, contaminants from the wastewater can end up in drinking water."

Fixing failing septic systems also protects surface water resources, which are often a source of drinking water for municipalities, irrigation water for agriculture, and an essential resource for wildlife and fish. Phosphorus and nitrogen from failing septic systems can stimulate production of plant and microbial biomass in lakes and streams, which leading to eutrophication and the depletion of dissolved oxygen in the water.

In addition to the impacts on aquatic life, excess nutrients can also degrade aesthetics of recreational waters, and increase the incidence of harmful algal blooms, which may endanger human health through the production of toxins that can contaminate recreational and drinking water resources.

Fixing failing septic systems also protects groundwater resources. Even if a failing septic system does not contaminate a nearby domestic well, the contamination can move through soils and rocky layers to contaminate an aquifer. Across Oregon DEQ has designated Groundwater Management Areas (Southern Willamette Valley, Lower Umatilla Basin, Northern Malheur County) where monitoring has shown such contamination. While failing septic systems aren't the only source of groundwater contaminants, they are known to contribute to the problem. Rehabilitating and remediating an aquifer is a challenging task, better to avoid the contamination altogether.

Replacing failing septic systems can be expensive, and is often beyond the reach of rural landowners. Providing access to Clean Water State Revolving Fund monies through Community Development Financial Institutions allows landowners to finance needed system upgrades/replacements. Sometimes, however, replacing failing septic systems isn't the answer. In that case, assisting homeowners in connecting to a municipal system is a better option, and this program can provide that assistance as well.

OEC supports HB 4070, and we will also be encouraging the Joint Committee on Ways and Means to include the necessary \$2Million dollars in DEQ's budget to support this program.