

SB 747 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

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Meeting Dates: 2/4

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure requires the Department of Agriculture (ODA) to establish a reporting system for fertilizer application to irrigated agricultural land. Requires owners of at least 200 acres of irrigated land to submit annual reports to ODA and authorizes ODA to use the data to prevent overapplication. Authorizes the Department of Environmental Quality to access annual report information and requires ODA to report annually on fertilizer application and related prevention and education efforts.

Fiscal impact: May have fiscal impact, but no statement yet issued.

Revenue impact: May have revenue impact, but no statement yet issued.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Oregon law defines fertilizer as any substance or combination of substances primarily designed to “provide plant food, stimulate plant growth, or induce chemical, microbial, or physical changes in the soil, containing at least five percent total nitrogen (N), available phosphate (P2O5), or soluble potash (K2O).” The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) Fertilizer Program is responsible for inspecting and registering fertilizer, agricultural minerals, lime, and amendments distributed in Oregon, ensuring these products are registered before distribution. The ODA also funds research through grants for field-level projects that explore the interactions of fertilizers and amendments with ground or surface water.

Nitrate contamination of drinking water, caused by agricultural fertilizer, manure, septic systems, and wastewater infiltrating groundwater, has been identified in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area. The Oregon Nitrate Reduction Plan, involving collaboration between the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), ODA, and the Water Resources Department (OWRD) the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), local governments, businesses, and residents, seeks to address this issue. High levels of nitrate in drinking water can potentially cause short and long term health problems. Nitrate contamination can persist in groundwater for decades, accumulating as nitrogen continues to be applied annually to the land.