

HB 2168 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Action Date: 02/03/25

Action: Do pass and be referred to Ways and Means by prior reference

Vote: 9-0-0-0

Yeas: 9 - Boice, Hartman, Helm, Levy B, Marsh, McDonald, McLain, Owens, Scharf

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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Meeting Dates: 1/22, 2/3

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure requires the Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service to establish a program to provide assistance to households that rely on wells for drinking water or on septic systems for wastewater treatment and appropriates \$2.5 million from the General Fund for implementation. The measure also appropriates from the General Fund \$5 million to the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) for deposit into the Water Well Abandonment, Repair, and Replacement Fund and \$5 million to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for Oregon’s low-interest loan programs for residential or small business on-site septic systems.

Detailed Summary

- Requires the OSU Extension Service to establish a program to provide assistance, including outreach, research, education, advice on available resources, and monitoring of wells and septic systems, to households that rely on wells for drinking water or on septic systems for wastewater treatment. Requires the program to focus on areas that are declared areas of ground water concern and appropriates \$2.5 million General Fund moneys for implementation.
- Appropriates \$5 million General Fund moneys to OWRD for deposit into the Water Well Abandonment, Repair, and Replacement Fund.
- Appropriates \$5 million General Fund moneys to DEQ for purposes related to Oregon’s low-interest loan programs for repair, replacement, upgrade, or evaluation of residential or small business on-site septic systems.
- Declares an emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Federal funding of the Well Abandonment, Replacement, and Repair Fund (WARRF)
- Information dissemination and outreach for the WARFF program
- Groundwater levels in Deschutes County
- Lifespan of a septic system and causes of septic system failure
- Comparison of state funding versus private funding for septic system projects
- Timeline of septic system failure and subsequent repair processes

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

In areas not connected to a public water system, people often rely on private wells and septic systems for their drinking water and wastewater needs. According to the Oregon Health Authority, estimates for Oregonians reliant on domestic wells range between 17 to 23 percent of the state’s population. The Well Abandonment, Replacement, and Repair Fund is administered by the Oregon Water Resources Department and provides grants

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to reimburse homeowners for the expenses to repair, or replace and abandon, a qualifying well. The program was last funded during the 2024 legislative session when OWRD received \$1 million from the General Fund. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) provides a number of financial resources for homeowners who need financial assistance for septic system repairs or replacement. In 2021, DEQ's Onsite Septic Financial Aid Program received \$15 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds.