

SB 1154 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

Action Date: 04/08/25

Action: Without recommendation as to passage, but with amendments and requesting referral to Rules. (Printed A-Eng.)

Vote: 4-1-0-0

Yeas: 4 - Golden, Nash, Prozanski, Taylor

Nays: 1 - Girod

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: Revenue impact issued

Prepared By: Alexa Piscanio, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 4/8

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure modifies processes for managing ground water quality contamination concerns, including the declaration of ground water quality concern areas and ground water quality management areas and related responsibilities. It requires coordination among state agencies and local entities to address these areas, including monitoring, action planning, and remediation strategies. It authorizes the Governor to appoint agencies to develop an agency assessment, prepare an action plan, implement regulations, and take necessary actions to address ground water quality, while allowing for increased monitoring, reporting, and coordination to protect public health and water resources.

Detailed Summary:

Definitions:

Replaces the term “an area of ground water concern,” with “ground water quality concern area.” Replaces the term “ground water management area,” with “ground water quality management area.” Defines “contaminant of concern.”

Ground Water Quality Concern Areas (GWQCA)

1. Directs the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to recommend that the Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) declare a GWQCA under specified conditions, adding elements that the department must find before recommending a declaration.
2. Directs Governor to establish an interagency team and designate a lead agency.
3. Directs that interagency team include DEQ and the Water Resources Department (WRD) and may include the Department of Agriculture (ODA), the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), and the Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI).
4. Directs agencies to develop an agency assessment and outreach plan addressing specific objectives and report each quarter to the lead agencies' respective board or commission.
5. Requires the appointment of a ground water management committee by lead agency in consultation with the interagency team after completion of draft agency assessment and outreach plan.
 - a. Adds one homeowner or tenant who relies on a domestic well for drinking water to committee membership.
 - b. Requires that the committee shall develop and promote a local voluntary implementation plan for the GWQCA upon completion of the final agency assessment.
6. After a groundwater quality concern area is declared and the agency assessment and outreach plan is developed, specific actions must be taken by DEQ, ODA, and OHA, in coordination with the interagency team under specific circumstances.

SB 1154 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

- If the identified contaminant of concern directly contributes to ground water quality deterioration and is associated with permitted or onsite activity, **DEQ** must
 - review active permits allowing discharge of contaminants of concern in ground water quality concern areas to identify the need for enhanced monitoring. Requires DEQ to prioritize permit modifications and new permit requests to address contaminants of concern.
 - coordinate with counties to compile information on alternative sewage systems and subsurface sewage systems, including their age and location.
 - encourage voluntary inspections of alternative sewage disposal systems, nonwater-carried sewage disposal facilities and subsurface sewage disposal systems.
 - prioritize funding for repairing or replacing on-site septic systems in the affected area.
- If the declaration is relevant to agricultural activity, the **ODA** must
 - review ground water quality management plans to identify voluntary practices, documentation or actions needed for source control, and stewardship agreements.
 - review active permits to identify opportunities for permit modifications or revisions.
- Requires **OHA** to
 - prepare a preliminary assessment identifying risks to domestic well users and public water systems from contamination.
 - evaluate possible response strategies and estimate public health response costs.
 - prepare and distribute accessible and language appropriate outreach and education materials identifying public health risks to the local public health authority for distribution to community members.

Authorizes **WRD**, in coordination with DEQ, to consider which new uses of water may increase the presence of a contaminant of concern, as well as ground water quality when deciding to approve a new ground water right within an area after a declaration is issued.

Requires final agency assessment and outreach plan be submitted to Governor and Joint Committee on Ways and Means (JWM), with biennial progress reports due by December 15 of each even numbered year.

Ground Water Quality Management Areas (GWQMA):

1. Directs DEQ to recommend that EQC declare a GWQMA under specified conditions.
2. Directs Governor to establish an interagency team and designate a lead agency.
3. Directs that interagency team include DEQ and WRD and may include ODA, OHA, and DOGAMI.
4. Changes timeline for preparation of draft action plan.
5. Requires action plan to include informing well owners of ground water contamination.
6. Specifies that the action plan must identify, not recommend, mandatory actions, and includes those actions identified in specified sections of the measure and adds actions included in agency assessment and outreach plan developed under GWQCA declaration.
7. Removes existing law giving ODA responsibility for developing certain plans to address farming practices.
8. If groundwater pumping is identified as a cause of, or contributing to, water quality degradation in the area, authorizes WRD to classify or reclassify an aquifer or designate an aquifer as a critical ground water area.
9. Provides agencies 90 days to complete the final action plan after close of public comment period.
10. Authorizes EQC to repeal a designation upon recommendation and findings by DEQ.
11. Authorizes ODA to take the following actions as necessary to address a relevant contaminant of concern, including
 - a. adopt rules to restrict manner and use of application of contaminant of concern; develop and implement management plans for source control; requirements for testing, transport mechanism, measuring efficacy of mitigation practices, recordkeeping; and individual exemptions.
 - b. review active permits issued by DEQ within area to identify opportunities for modifications or revisions during renewal or issuance to address sources of contaminants of concern. Establishes review elements.
 - c. make available stewardship agreement opportunities.
12. Requires OHA to submit health remediation and response plan to Governor and JWMs.

SB 1154 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

13. Authorizes DEQ to enter onto private property at reasonable times to inspect sewage disposal systems only with prior notice and arrangement with the resident of the property.
14. Establishes cap of 5,000 gallons per day on WRD approval of application to appropriate ground water in a declared area for community public water wells. Requires impact of proposed well on hydraulically connected surface water to be similar to or less than cumulative impact of abandoned domestic wells.

Changes to Agency Authorities

1. Authorizes DEQ to modify, instead of require renewal, of water quality permits under ORS 468B.050 if it is determined necessary to address urgent groundwater contamination issue.
2. Authorizes Water Resources Commission (WRC) to order the withdrawal an underground reservoir in a ground water quality concern or management area to protect public health.
3. Finds that the use of community or public wells located in declared ground water management areas ensure the preservation of the public welfare, safety, and health under specified conditions.
4. Adds conditions to WRD authority to issue a permit to appropriate ground water for community or public wells for an amount of water equivalent to amount provided by abandoned domestic wells; sets cap and condition regarding impact on hydraulically connected surface water.
5. Directs WRD to presume that groundwater application will ensure preservation of the public welfare, safety, and health under specific conditions in lieu of conditions established in ORS 537.621 (a). Makes conforming amendment to required findings of fact.
6. Directs WRD to assess water wells and require compliance with backflow prevention rules.
7. Revises WRC authority to require a water right owner using an underground reservoir to install a measuring device and submit an annual report in ground water quality concern or management area.

Specifies that an area subject to declaration as a ground water quality critical or management area as of the day immediately preceding the effective date of Act is deemed a declared area on that effective date.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Private property rights related to Department of Environmental Quality sewage inspections
- Oregon State University aquifer study
- New agency authorities and multiagency efforts
- Recharging permits and House Bill 2988 (2025)
- Including local government in stakeholder conversations

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

The amendment replaces the measure.

Detailed Summary:

- Renames “ground water management area” to “ground water quality management area”
- Transfers authority to declare a ground water quality concern or management area from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to the Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) with recommendation from DEQ.
- Modifies agency responsibilities and actions in response to the declaration of a ground water quality concern or management area.
- Adds provisions related to well users.
- Removes operative dates.

BACKGROUND:

Current law directs ground water concern areas to be declared by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) if they confirm the presence of ground water contaminants suspected to originate from nonpoint source activities. The declaration must confirm substances within ground water, as well as ground water aquifers that may be affected. (ORS 468B.175: Declaration of an area of ground water concern.) After a ground water concern area is declared, DEQ, in collaboration with other state agencies, must

- appoint a ground water management committee within 90 days for the affected area.

SB 1154 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

- focus on research and public education regarding the ground water concern.
- ensure necessary monitoring of the area.
- support the management committee in developing a local action plan to address the concerns.
- if the committee doesn't create the plan, the Department will develop it themselves.

Current law directs ground water management areas to be declared by DEQ if, based on information from monitoring activities, the agency confirms that ground water contains contaminants from suspected nonpoint source activities, specifically, if nitrate levels exceed 70 percent of established limits, or if other contaminants exceed 50 percent of their established limits. The declaration must specify the substances detected and the affected ground water aquifers. Before declaring the area, DEQ must confirm the results with a second laboratory. (ORS 468B.180: Declaration of ground water management area.) Furthermore, DEQ, in consultation with appropriate state agencies, must appoint a ground water management committee to develop and promote a local action plan for the affected area. After a ground water management area is declared, the ground water management committee must

- evaluate portions of the local action plan that reduced contaminant levels.
- advise state agencies on local aspects of the action plan.
- analyze the local action plan to understand why it failed to improve or prevent further deterioration of ground water in the management area.