



To: Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
From: Commissioner Phil Chang

April 8, 2025

Chair Golden and Members of the Committee,

Thanks for the opportunity to testify about SB 1154. I'm Deschutes County Commissioner Phil Chang.

18,000 southern Deschutes County residents depend on La Pine sub-basin groundwater as their primary drinking water source. Toxic levels of nitrate contamination will reach the well intakes for thousands of these residents in the next 10-20 years unless we can address the impacts of thousands of inadequate septic systems in the sub-basin very soon.

Over the past 25 years we have:

- convened regional problem solving committees;
- monitored, studied, and modeled local groundwater;
- streamlined permitting for Advanced Treatment Technology septic systems;
- offered substantial cost share incentives; and
- explored extending sewer service to households served by septic.

Despite all these efforts we have made little progress in stopping the slow moving nitrate contamination train coming down the tracks to crush us. Of the 6000 septic systems that were loading nitrates into shallow groundwater in 2009 in the sub-basin, we have only upgraded 300, or about 5%. We need more tools, more state agency support, and more investment in implementing solutions if we hope to make meaningful progress.

At this point we all understand that by the time DEQ designates a Groundwater Management Area, water quality is so degraded that recovery will be a very long, expensive, demanding and uncertain process. The new Groundwater Area of Concern designation proposed by SB 1154 sounds like a step in the right direction – offering new tools, agency leadership, pro-active accountability, and a clear process leading to investment and implementation.

Deschutes County is particularly interested in opportunities to extend water and wastewater district services beyond Urban Growth Boundaries and Urban Unincorporated Communities. Facilitating this in strategic, geographically limited areas could honor our state land use planning system while stewarding groundwater resources.

Thank you for working to make the Groundwater Quality Protection Act work better.

Phil Chang
Deschutes County Commissioner