

LUBGWMA Advisory Committee (Hybrid)

April 7, 2026, 10 AM - 12 PM

MEETING PURPOSE: Reconvene LUBGWMA Advisory Committee for relevant progress updates related to the Nitrate Reduction Plan, review outcomes of the plan update public process, and review planned updates to be included in the updated Nitrate Reduction Plan.

ACTIONS and FOLLOW UP

ITEM FLAGGED	Follow Up? Engagement Opportunity? Who leads?
The next two Advisory Committee meetings are anticipated for August and November 2026.	Sponsor agencies and facilitator to contact Committee members for meeting scheduling and notification
Members are invited to attend the April 22 Drinking Water Roadmap Public Meeting	Event Flyer
OSU Best Management Practices (BMP) Survey Report will be available in late April 2026	Salini Sasidharan – consider providing the report to members and presenting findings at the next committee meeting
ODA will be developing an outreach plan and looking for ways to engage producers in review of ODA's water quality rules	Agencies include this in next committee agenda
DEQ's LUBGWMA quarterly water quality sampling data and synoptic sampling data is available online	Members can find the data in DEQ's public online water quality database EPA and DEQ are also in the early stages of collecting and analyzing nitrate and water isotope data and will continue to provide updates
The Groundwater Data Coordination Platform, the "LUB Hub," beta version will move into development	Share out at a future meeting
OWRD is working on a peer review of the 1995 conceptual model of the Lower Basin.	Lead hydrologist Andrew Wentworth will provide information on the outcomes at the next committee meeting
Update to Nitrate Reduction Plan	Agencies will publish and share with the committee the updated Nitrate Reduction Plan and response to comments when final

SUMMARY NOTES

Advisory Committee Attendees

Sylvia Ciborowski led introductions of the LUBGWMA Advisory Group members attending virtually and in-person.

Aaron Palmquist	Kevin Fenn
Chris Kowitz	Laura Fredrickson
Commissioner Dan Dorran	Laura Gleim
Courtney Crowell	Neil Ferguson
Dave Stockdale	Nick Sirovatka
Debbie Radie	Robert Waldher
Greg Harris	Ruijun (Ray) Qin
Isaak Stapleton	Salini Sasidharan
Jake Madison	Shiloh Simrell
Jana Compton	Tamra Mabbott
Justin Sterger	Tessa Willburn
Kaleb Lay	Trea Nance
Karen Lewotsky	Troy Baker

LUBGWMA Committee Member Updates

Committee members were invited to share relevant updates and anything they are hearing from constituents:

Kaleb Lay: Several community members have noted that as they are getting their wells retested, levels are still going up. This is a point of awareness for the committee: that things seem to be getting worse rather than better.

Tamra Mabbott: Morrow County manages a grant for bi-county investigation which looks at public water connection, and the third and final element was just signed.

The Clean Water Consortium with the Port of Morrow /county has raised money to look into some projects. The next meeting of the steering committee is on April 22, from 6-7:30 (Drinking Water Roadmap Public Meeting). This will be a public meeting at Umatilla City Hall where the contractor will provide an update, answer questions, and take input. The steering committee is a professional academic group that provides steering to the research team. There are flyers and press releases being distributed for the event.

Action: The facilitator will forward the invitation to LUBGWMA committee members: [Event Flyer: https://drinkingwaterroadmap.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=b199cc42ab80bfacd8c6c34f8&id=0244fc4706&e=927857b89e](https://drinkingwaterroadmap.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=b199cc42ab80bfacd8c6c34f8&id=0244fc4706&e=927857b89e)

Karen Lewotsky: The City of Boardman is putting together a groundwater source water protection program. It may be helpful to get an update on this from DEQ.

State Nitrate Reduction Plan Progress

The State Agencies provided updates on implementation of the Nitrate Reduction Plan.

Oregon Department of Agriculture
Isaak Stapleton and Nick Sirovatka

Nitrate Reduction Plan structure: Provided a reminder of the Nitrate Reduction Plan structure, which includes background information followed by an outline of the collaborative governance structure that includes agencies working together through an MOU and the committee as advisory in informing the agencies' work. The Plan lays out nitrate reduction strategies by source, i.e., the specific actions that the agencies propose to move forward. It also includes a monitoring, data, and analysis section followed by safe drinking water strategies that OHA contributes.

Water Quality Groundwater Rules: The permanent rules were filed on March 13, 2026. The process included eight Rulemaking Advisory Committee meetings and two public meetings with good turnout and many comments. The public comment period closed on December 22, 2025.

Water Quality Compliance Investigation updates: In 2025, the Water Quality Program conducted site visits focused on irrigated pivot circles or livestock with flooded irrigated pastures. ODA has collaborated with Morrow County SWCD to provide technical assistance to those producers and follow-up visits are scheduled for June of this year. This is all a result of the 2024 Strategic Implementation Area (SIA) process.

Strategic Implementation Area (SIA): The agency is working to identify a second SIA, which will help identify potential concerns within a second area and different group of operations located within the LUBGWMA.

BMPs/Livestock Inventory: The Morrow County SWCD spent the last year doing a drive-by evaluation of farming and ranching operations within the LUBGWMA, identifying type of irrigation, whether livestock is incorporated into the farming operations, and the types of crops being produced generally. The agency plans to use this inventory information to develop a platform for best management practices (BMPs) by operation. The goal is that producers will be able to access the tool and find resources for how they can better manage their specific operation type.

OSU Best Management Practices (BMP) Survey: ODA is also nearing the end of a project that Salini Sasidharan has been working on regarding a BMPs survey for the LUBGWMA. The survey ended on January 31st and Salini's team will develop a report by the end of April. Salini added that the survey response rate was lower than anticipated but the research team still hopes to draw out some conclusions and information that can help in the future if we want to pursue a second survey or a follow-up study.

Action: Salini offered to present the findings at the next LUBGWMA meeting.

CAFOs and General NPDES permit renewal: Ten facilities received inspections in 2025 and nine of those were found in compliance with their permit.

The National Pollution Discharge Permit is being renewed. The draft permit was filed on November 13, 2025, a public hearing was held on December 16, and the public comment period closed on January 21, 2026. ODA is working to respond to comments and make any final

changes to the permit. Once the final version of the permit is complete, ODA will begin the public notice process for registering existing operations to the new general permit.

Committee comment/request: A member asked how many operations are impacted by the new groundwater quality rules. ODA noted that the agency sent out roughly 500 postcards to identified landowners/operations during the notice for public comment.

Committee comment/request: A member asked if site visits are focused on people that have permits under the current SIA. ODA noted that permits are only required for livestock operations that meet the definition of a CAFO or are subject to DEQ wastewater permitting and that the SIA is a focused compliance tool that evaluates individual tax lots in a specific area for impacts to water quality and compliance with state water quality regulations. Site visits are conducted when a complaint is submitted or there was an identified risk to groundwater from the SIA evaluation process. ODA asked the LUBGWMA committee if they have recommendations of events or venues for where ODA can connect with landowners or operations to get the word out about the new groundwater quality rules.

Committee comment/request: A member asked how many complaints the agencies received about groundwater concerns. ODA noted that around six complaints were received in the last year in the LUBGWMA. These were not complaints from neighbors but rather partner agencies referrals. ODA also clarified that the agency wants to talk to not just those that are getting complaints, but any producers.

Committee comment/request: A member asked if there is an opportunity to showcase things that farms are doing well, to put out examples of best practices as well as provide recognition of those doing good work. ODA said yes, and that they would invite the opportunity to have an informal coffee meeting at some farms to both showcase what the farm is doing and talk about the water quality rules and responsibilities of agricultural producers.

Committee comment/request: In response to questions, ODA clarified what the colors on the LUBGWMA permit map in the presentation mean. A member noted that it is important to not just look at the higher level but also dive into the details and better explain the graphic.

Committee comment/request: A member noted that it is important to focus on impacts not just of large agricultural operations and irrigated lands, but also of independent and small farms. It is important to explain that the Agricultural Water Quality Program is about anyone who's doing any sort of irrigation—large-scale irrigated agriculture, medium scale, or small hobby farms. Another member added that there is not evidence that small hobby farms are a significant contributor to water quality issues and cautioned against singling them out.

Department of Environmental Quality

Laura Gleim

Wastewater permits: All facilities are on track to meet the compliance schedule. The Port of Morrow ended its winter application of wastewater. They also are progressing on design of their secondary treatment system, which will allow them to have a more consistent output of nitrogen. This will allow farmers to plan better. Additionally, DEQ issued an updated permit renewal to Lamb Weston in November 2025. Requirements within that permit are similar to those in other permits that DEQ has issued, including enhanced monitoring, storage lagoon, and a phase-out of winter irrigation land application. The deadline for that is November 2027. Lastly, DEQ approved Olam West Coast's plans for a storage lagoon which has a construction deadline of

November. The expectation is that Lamb Weston will end winter irrigation this November. It is encouraging to see the progress that these facilities are making.

Quarterly and Larger-Scale Synoptic Sampling: DEQ continued to do its regular four quarterly nitrate samplings in LUBGWMA last year. This includes about 30 wells that the agency has sampled four times per year for the last 30 years.

In addition, last spring DEQ did a larger-scale synoptic sampling of 74 wells as part of its statewide groundwater quality monitoring program. This is the fifth time that DEQ has done a larger-scale sampling event in LUBGWMA since 1992. This provides a larger snapshot of what is happening over time. Synoptic sampling includes not just nitrate, but also pesticides, pharmaceuticals, personal care products, and other analytes that can be indicators of the sources of contamination.

DEQ has very limited resources to monitor groundwater and can only conduct synoptic sampling in one area per year under its statewide groundwater monitoring program. The LUBGWMA was the one area that DEQ sampled last year.

Committee comment/request: A member asked what people can do to help lobby the legislature to get more monitoring funding for the agencies and asked when synoptic sampling would happen again in the LUBGWMA. DEQ noted that the agency historically returns to a basin every eight or ten years.

Committee comment/request: A member asked whether all of this monitoring data is available. DEQ noted that all data from the quarterly sampling and synoptic sampling is available in DEQ's public online database: <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/pages/wqdata.aspx>

DEQ added that the agency is partnering with the EPA Corvallis lab to do isotope analysis on both water and nitrate to help identify the age and potential sources of nitrate. The agency hopes to have results to share out at some point.

Jana Compton, EPA added that the EPA has analyzed all of the synoptic and quarterly samples collected so far for nitrate, dual nitrate isotopies, and dual water isotopes. The data is not yet publicly available but will be after EPA and DEQ have completed the analysis and interpretation. Members requested a report of the analysis.

Action: EPA and DEQ noted that they would meet together to consider developing a report and at a minimum can share the data.

Trends analysis report: DEQ published an update and trends analysis report in January. The report, which is based on sampling of the 30 wells in LUBGWMA, shows that overall, there continues to be increasing trends with nitrate, with some decreases in individual wells. While the network-wide trend is still increasing, it's going up at a slower rate than it has historically, which shows that we're making progress. This is also just one data point, and the next step is to look at all data—from the 30 wells plus synoptic event data, data from permitted sites, etc., to see what can be learned.

Committee comment/request: A member asked if the 30 sampled wells are always the same, and what happens if they cannot be accessed during the sampling period. DEQ noted that it has been the same 30 wells since sampling began in 1979, with minor changes.

Septic funding: DEQ is providing funding to assist with wastewater infrastructure. DEQ's non-profit lender partner signed three low-interest loans with people in Morrow and Umatilla County to repair and replace septic systems. This program did not receive additional legislative allocations this last session, so that program will be sunseting this spring.

Wastewater infrastructure funding: The Clean Water State Revolving Fund provides funding for public infrastructure and public wastewater infrastructure expansions. Local entities can apply for funding through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund to run their own program for septic repair and replacement. If counties are interested in this, it is something that could be discussed. There are ten active, completed, or pending public projects through the CWSRF including expansion of infrastructure in Stanfield, Umatilla, Irrigon, Echo, Hermiston, the Port of Morrow, and the Westland and Hermiston Irrigation Districts.

Storymap: The storymap was launched last year, which is a huge accomplishment. Members are encouraged to click through and view this educational resource: <https://lubgwma.org/about/>

Oregon Water Resources Department
Chris Kowitz

Inspection of wells in LUBGWMA: OWRD reported progress on commitments in the Lower Umatilla Basin Plan. The agency exceeded its target for tracking new, abandoned, and altered wells, achieving 96% completion against a 90% goal.

Lower Umatilla Basin Conceptual Model: The updated 1995 conceptual model of the Lower Basin has been completed and submitted for peer review.

Collecting quarterly groundwater level data in the LUBGWMA: About 45 wells are included in a quarterly synoptic monitoring program for groundwater level measurements. The agency is trying to develop a comprehensive well assessment program but has faced challenges with limited landowner participation and site access issues. Despite limitations, data collection was partially successful, and additional participation opportunities may be available in future years.

Backflow Prevention Device Program: OWRD launched a comprehensive backflow prevention device program. Approximately 750 inspections were completed across 650 sites. Of inspected sites, approximately 170 has chemigation and therefore subject to the rules. OWRD thanked the two individuals that went out to all of the sites.

Committee comment/request: A member asked if there was a reduction in active load because of the increased use of surface water, and whether the agencies put valves on inactive wells. The agency replied that backflow devices are only required if the site is actively chemigating. If a site is chemigating without a backflow device, then it is out of compliance, and the agency would require disconnection of the chemigation system until the backflow device is installed.

Committee comment/request: A member asked if the agencies know how many wells exist in the LUBGWMA. The agencies replied that they only looked at permitted wells, not exempt wells. The agencies do not have good data points for wells installed in the past. A member chatted that OHA has identified 3,291 domestic wells. This is considered the best available estimate but is acknowledged to be incomplete due to legacy data limitations.

Committee comment/request: A member asked if there are any requirements to notify the agencies when someone wants to update or install a new well. The agencies replied that when someone wants to put a new well in, they are required by law to file a start card which notifies the agencies of the intent to drill a new well or alter an existing well.

Committee comment/request: A member raised concerns about unlined irrigation canals and potential groundwater impacts. The agencies clarified that water quality impacts fall under DEQ programs, while pesticide-related issues fall under pesticide regulatory programs

Nitrate Reduction Plan Update

Laura Gleim, DEQ, provided an update on the Nitrate Reduction Plan Update public process. This was followed by presentation of planned updates to the Nitrate Reduction Plan for each of the three agencies.

Update Purpose and Public Engagement

The update of the Nitrate Reduction Plan is limited in scope and is not intended to be a full redesign. It incorporates implementation progress, newly added strategies that the agencies have been working on, and public/committee feedback. A key newly added strategy is the backflow program.

Public engagement on the plan update included an online form, both in English and Spanish, that asked three questions: What additional strategies should be considered? Are you aware of additional resources or expertise that could assist with this implementation? Do you have additional feedback for the agencies?

16 online submissions and 2 formal comment letters from nonprofit organizations were received. Comments were grouped into three categories: existing agency actions, future or emerging actions, and general concerns and comments.

Structural and Cross-Agency Planned Updates

Several updates are proposed to the plan that are general in nature or cut across all agency actions. These include: codification of the shared leadership structure as a result of the finalized MOU between agencies, clarification of community representation and role of the committee and agencies, and formatting revisions. The updated plan will also include an appendix with all public comments and agency responses.

ODA Planned Updates

Strategic Implementation Area (SIA): Planning continues for Strategic Implementation Area (SIA) Phase 2 with remote evaluation scheduled for late September/early October. Coordination with Soil and Water Conservation Districts is underway to identify priority implementation areas. The hope is to identify the second SIA priority area in the next couple of months, start setting up for remote evaluation, and then invite people to an open house to talk about the findings of the SIA and how ODA can work with producers and agricultural operators to improve their operations.

Best Management Practices (BMP) Resource Hub: ODA will be developing the Best Management Practices (BMP) resource hub, which was described earlier in the meeting.

Agricultural Water Quality Groundwater Rules Implementation: The new rules are finalized, and the agencies will now be moving into implementation. Agencies will begin interacting with the producers, gather data, and help identify opportunities for producers to improve their operations, as part of the adaptive management component of the rules.

The intent is to begin conducting on-farm audits of operations with 1,000+ acres beginning in 2027. This will be followed by on-farm audits of operations with 500–999 acres the following year. Additionally, the rules require that producers maintain their data and documentation for 10 years (up from 5 years).

Staff clarified that, if an audit shows that a producer does not meet nitrate requirements, then they must develop an adaptive management plan to reduce nitrate levels.

Committee comment/request: A member asked and staff clarified that the landowner as defined in the rules is required to collect data and keep records. The data and records are kept by the landowner and audited by the agency.

Committee comment/request: Members had concern about trying to conduct the farm audits of 1000+ acre operations in 2027. It is estimated there are about 52 operations of this size, and not enough staff to conduct that many audits in one year.

DEQ Planned Updates

Updated Map of Nitrate Data: The agency will update the map using synoptic sampling results and other data from the same time period, including from permitted sites.

Trends Analysis of Long-Term Well Network: The trend analysis for the long-term network is complete. Now, DEQ will work on an analysis of the permitted site data and seek to understand potential impacts of the permitted facility as well as what's happening up gradient that may not be on a permit. The trend analysis can be found here:

<https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/Documents/lubgwmaNetTrendAS.pdf>

Groundwater Data Coordination Platform: EPA has made progress on this platform, and it will be transferred to OSU. The intent is to then create a beta version that people can access and use. **Action:** This will be shared out at future meetings.

Plan to identify data gaps for nitrate leaching: The agencies are working with EPA on an updated analysis of nitrate applied to land and are also working across state agencies to understand data gaps that would need to be addressed in order to do an updated leaching analysis. The “pie chart” uses old data, and it is necessary to do this data gaps analysis as a first step to update the pie chart. There are a lot of sensitivities around the pie chart, and the intent is not to point blame at specific industries or sectors. It is meant to show where we can make changes in land use that could translate to improvements for groundwater, and to acknowledge that there are many sources of nitrates that can seek to make progress for improvement.

Committee comment/request: A member asked if the updated pie chart will focus on historic sources of pollution or current contributors. DEQ noted that the intent is to understand data from snapshots time.

Committee comment/request: Members and agencies noted the pie chart is just one piece of information and does not tell the whole story. A member also noted that there are more

agricultural producers today than there were in the past, and that should be considered as a factor in why there are more nitrates.

Committee comment/request: Members clarified the primary contacts at OSU and EPA for the data gaps analysis and pie chart update: Carlos Bonilla is the main OSU contact, and the Compliance Division at EPA

OWRD Planned Updates

Backflow Program: Staff will continue to do on-site inspections and will expand to looking at sites outside of the LUBGWMA. Landowners are encouraged to continue to work collaboratively with OWRD staff that go on-site.

Funding for Monitoring Wells: Thanks to Senator Merkley's office, OWRD received approximately \$2.5 million in CIP federal funding. \$2 million is dedicated to new observation wells. OWRD is working with EPA to get access to the funding and set up a grant agreement. The agency will be working to decide where to put those wells based on data gaps, to use the dollars as effectively as possible. Funds are expected to become available in late summer.

Publish Update of the Conceptual Model: The agency is working on a peer review of the 1995 conceptual model of the Lower Basin.

Action: At the next meeting, lead hydrologist Andrew Wentworth will provide information on the outcomes.

Using Geophysics Tools to Understand Aquifers: Agencies are continuing to try to fill as many data gaps as possible, in coordination with operators and the community. Will explore opportunities to utilize geophysics tools to better understand aquifer properties.

The agencies are focused on understanding what data needs to be collected, and what processes are needed, to identify areas that could benefit from different strategies. The agencies are also looking for ideas and lessons learned from neighboring states like Idaho and California. Courtney Crowell with the Governor's Office is also part of that effort to understand which questions need answers, and how to get data to get the answers, to ensure the best decision-making. The state is seeking to understand what is needed for optimal recharge.

Committee comment/request: A member suggested reaching out to TNC or Environmental Defense Fund, both of whom have been working on similar data collection.

Action: Karen Lewotsky can provide contact information and introductions.

Committee comment/request: A member noted that if monitoring wells are put in place on behalf of one agency, there should be coordination with other agencies that need the data or access to the monitoring well.

Committee comment/request: A member commended OWRD for the backflow program, which is a good approach done very efficiently and with limited resources.

Committee comment/request: A member asked for clarification on how the agencies are selecting locations for monitoring wells. OWRD noted that the agencies are taking a coordinated effort and trying to identify locations where there are data gaps, or where little information is known.

Wrap Up

The next two meetings will likely be held in August and November 2026. Further details will be provided by state sponsoring agencies and the facilitator.

Members are encouraged to reach out to the facilitator and agencies if they have specific topics they want covered in the next meeting.

Today's meeting summary and presentation will be posted to DEQ's web page designated to LUBGWMA efforts.