Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area Frequently Asked Questions

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## In español:

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# What is a Groundwater Management Area (GWMA)?

Purpose of a GWMA – guide the development of site specific groundwater management programs, in order to protect groundwater quality, to assure groundwater quantity, and/or to provide for efficient management of water resources for meeting future needs while recognizing existing water rights. In the Lower Yakima Valley the focus is water quality.

Statutory Authority RCW 90.44.400, WAC 173-100.

# What is the purpose/focus of the Lower Yakima Valley GWMA (LYV-GWMA)?

The LYV-GWMA was established to address nitrate levels in groundwater that exceed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) safe drinking water guidance of 10mg/L. Studies conducted during the planning process indicate 12-20% of individual domestic wells within the GWMA boundary have elevated nitrate levels.

# Who led the planning and development process?

* Yakima County is the Lead Agency, supported and guided by a Citizen-based 39 member GWMA Advisory Committee representing 21 diverse interests – state and federal agencies, Yakama Nation, agriculture, local government, health district, local citizens, and environmental groups.
* Seven Work Groups explored voluntary and regulatory solutions; Education & Outreach, Livestock/Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO), Irrigated Agriculture, Residential/Commercial/Industrial/Municipal (RCIM), Regulatory Framework, Data Collection, and Funding.

# Why is it important, how long has it been going on and what is the remaining timeline?

Elevated nitrates in groundwater can be fatal to sensitive populations such as infants, pregnant women, elderly, and individuals with certain blood disorders. The planning process officially began in June of 2012.

Going forward:

* A non-programmatic State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) conducted by Yakima County,
* The final draft plan is out for public review and comment,
* Public Hearing March 12,2019, held at the Sunnyside Community Center, 1521 South 1st Street, Sunnyside, WA 98944, 5:30 PM
* Ecology and affected local government will review comments and create findings,
* Ecology and affected local governments will review the Program for concurrence,
* Final approval by the LYV-GWMA Advisory Committee is anticipated upon concurrence,
* Process anticipated to be finalized before June 30, 2019.

# What are Ecology and other state agency roles in the GWMA?

* State Legislature: Provided funding for program development.
* Ecology:
* Participates and provides leadership as an Advisory Committee member.
* Serves as a subject matter expert in areas of expertise.
* Appoints a lead agency and advisory committee members to develop the groundwater program.
* Conducts public comment and hearing process.
* Reviews Groundwater Management Program for consistency with intent of the legislation.
* Implementation of recommendations upon Program approval.
* Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Agriculture (WSDA):
* Participates and provides leadership as an Advisory Committee member.
* Serve as subject matter expert in their areas of expertise.
* Implements recommendations upon Program approval.
* WSDA developed a Nitrogen Availability Assessment.

# What related data is collected?

* Concern over nitrates in groundwater within the area began as early as 1988, over several decades EPA, Ecology, US Geological Survey (USGS), DOH and others conducted water quality studies.
* An extensive literature review, conducted by the Data Analysis Work Group and the Advisory Committee members resulted in relevant data incorporation into the final planning document.
* Water quality data collected by USGS from 159 existing domestic wells in 2017 established baseline conditions. Approximately 30 additional purpose built wells will be added to the sampling network.
* Extensive Education and public outreach efforts have been conducted throughout the LYV-GWMA and surrounding communities.