

Septic System Loan and Inspection Programs Planning Committee Final Report

The objective of the Committee's recommendations is to reduce the pollutants that reach the Florida aquifer from onsite wastewater and disposal systems (OSTDS) in Leon and Wakulla counties, and to provide a means for management and financing of this reduction.

A. Reasons for Recommendations:

1. Leon and Wakulla counties depend upon the Florida aquifer for safe and abundant drinking water.
2. The amount of pollutants, particularly nitrogen, has been increasing in the aquifer. One of the important sources of the pollution is onsite wastewater and disposal systems (OSTDS).
3. The effluent of all OSTDS contributes to the pollution of the aquifer. However, aquifer vulnerability to OSTDS effluent varies throughout the region in direct relationship to the geology, hydrology and soil type of the OSTDS location. Therefore, OSTDS in the areas of greatest aquifer vulnerability are the greater source of pollution to the aquifer than OSTDS in areas of lesser vulnerability.
4. The most rapid and greatest reduction in aquifer pollution would occur by reducing pollutants, to the greatest extent possible, from OSTDS in the areas of greatest aquifer vulnerability.
5. The area of greatest vulnerability has been designated the Primary Springs Protection Zone (PSPZ). There are other areas of vulnerability within Leon County, which should be more clearly identified and designated.
6. Pollution reduction could be accomplished through a variety of means including reducing pollutant load in the effluent, improved biologic and chemical processing in the drainfield, and improved installation, operation and maintenance of the entire OSTDS.
7. A variety of OSTDS management and technology exists that can, with proper installation, operation and maintenance, reduce effluent load and improve drainfields. Improved installation, operation, and maintenance of all OSTDS, regardless of the technology used, would reduce their contribution to aquifer pollution. Management of existing OSTDS can be an effective way to reduce their impact on water quality.
8. The cost of compiling regulations upon regulations that would sufficiently and effectively reduce the pollutant load from OSTDS is substantial, which is not a cost that is currently fully borne by the public or private sectors. Therefore, it is necessary to establish fair funding mechanisms for compliance.
9. Implementation of regulations requiring replacement of OSTDS with nitrogen and other pollutant reducing systems would require substantial financial assistance to many of the owners of existing OSTDS in the PSPZ.

B. Recommendations:

1. All new development and re-development within the Primary Springs Protection Zone (PSPZ), where central sewer is not available, shall be allowed to develop provided that sewage disposal is accomplished through the use of a performance based treatment system (PBTS) which has been National Sanitation Foundation/American National Standards Institute (NSF/ANSI) 245 or an allowable equivalent, tested and certified demonstrating a reduction of the effluent Total Nitrogen concentration by a minimum of fifty percent (50%). A drip irrigation drain field is recommended in conjunction with the PBTS in these areas.
2. Repairs and modifications to an existing onsite sewage treatment and disposal system (OSTDS) within the PSPZ shall utilize a PBTS if and only when there is an established comprehensive funding mechanism in place to replace the existing failing or modified OSTDS with a PBTS. Otherwise, such repairs and modifications shall follow all current and existing state and local regulations.
3. Within 5 years of the effective date of the ordinance, as amended herein, other areas within Leon County with increased aquifer vulnerability shall be identified utilizing available data, including but not limited to the Leon Aquifer Vulnerability Assessment (LAVA), where the standards for wastewater treatment shall be established that are at least as effective in Total Nitrogen and other pollutant reduction as those required for the PSPZ.
4. With the passing of SB 550, which establishes a statewide existing OSTDS inspection program with an implementation start date of January 1, 2011, a countywide existing OSTDS inspection program is not needed or warranted at this time.

In order to effectively reduce aquifer and surface water pollution from OSTDS and to fairly distribute the cost of doing so throughout Leon County, the Committee recommends that a Responsible Maintenance Entity (RME) be established with the following principles.

C. Recommendations for a Responsible Maintenance Entity (RME), if established.

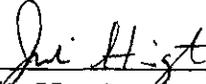
1. The RME should be an administrative organization that is responsible for oversight of the permitting, installation, operation, maintenance, repair, and compliance with performance standards for OSTDS and other decentralized wastewater treatment installations throughout Leon County.
2. The RME should collect a wastewater fee that would be used to provide for the administration of the RME and a source of revenue for subsidizing the replacement of OSTDS in order to reduce nitrogen load.
3. The wastewater fee should be paid by all users of OSTDS, regardless of the location relative to the Primary Springs Protection Zone (PSPZ).
4. The property owner would be the owner of all OSTDS components but the RME would be the administrative organization that is responsible for the oversight of permitting, installation, operation, maintenance, repair, and compliance with performance standards of OSTDS.

5. Any revenue collected through the RME should only be used for the purpose of, administration, permitting, installation, operation, maintenance, repair, and compliance of OSTDS.
6. Consider allowing a "no monthly fee" or "no copay for replacement" option that is income based. Recognize that this subsidy would need to be made up in revenue stream from other RME participants.
7. A financial structure of the RME should be established such that revenue from a single monthly fee and co-payment for repairs are sufficient to cover the costs of administration, permitting, installation, operation, maintenance, repair, and compliance. OSTDS owners do not want to be "nickel and dimed" for costs once they are paying a monthly fee.
8. Establish an organization structure and business plan for the RME and use of any State Revolving Funds (SRF) provided to implement it that is professional and not political in structure in order to allow it to accomplish the long-term intent of improving water quality.
9. Integrate the establishment of an administrative RME with the state required OSTDS inspection program.
10. Consider establishing the RME to include both Leon and Wakulla Counties.

We the undersigned members of the Septic System Loan and Inspection Programs Planning Committee concur with and approve the above recommendations which are hereby submitted to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration.



Peter Okonkwo, Chair



Julie Harrington, Co-Chair

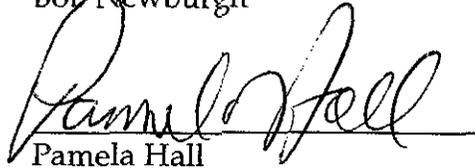
Ann Porter

John Fleming

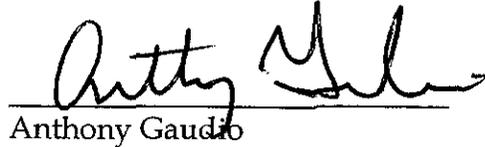


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