

State of Oregon  
Department of Environmental Quality

Memorandum

**Date:** Nov. 20, 2013

**To:** Environmental Quality Commission

**From:** Dick Pedersen, Director

**Subject:** Agenda item M, Informational item: Groundwater, the hidden resource

**Why this is important** Groundwater is a critical natural resource vital to Oregon's economy, environment and public health. Groundwater is vulnerable to contamination from many sources, which creates real health risks for a significant number of Oregonians.

DEQ and the commission are responsible for overseeing the protection of groundwater quality. Current programs that prevent, detect and remediate groundwater contamination from point sources and spills are effective. However - as with surface water - programs that prevent, detect and remediate groundwater contamination from nonpoint sources are less direct and far more challenging to implement successfully.

**Background** Groundwater makes up 99 percent of available freshwater sources. Current surface water supplies are almost completely allocated so future water needs must be met by groundwater. Groundwater is the sole or partial source of drinking water for 70 percent of Oregonians. Ninety percent of public water supplies draw drinking water from groundwater. More than 700,000 Oregonians in rural areas not served by public water supplies are almost completely dependent on groundwater resources.

Greg Pettit, DEQ's Laboratory and Environmental Assessment Division Administrator, has been working on groundwater issues much of his 36-year career at DEQ. He will present an overview of groundwater quality issues and protection activities in Oregon.

**EQC involvement** No action is requested. This item is presented as informational background to help EQC in prioritization of challenging environmental issues facing the state.

**Information Available online** <http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/groundwater/groundwater.htm>

Report prepared by: Greg Pettit