

Progress and Impact Mid-Biennium Report: Domestic Well Safety/LUBGWMA (2025-2027)

The Oregon Legislature invested \$5.2 million in General Fund support during the 2025-27 biennium for the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Areas (LUBGWMA) Domestic Wells Public Health Project.

Program background and summary

High nitrate levels in drinking water can cause health problems. Formula-fed babies and pregnant people are the populations at greatest risk. Potential health risks include blue baby syndrome, miscarriage and certain birth defects. In 1990, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Oregon Department of Agriculture designated the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWMA) due to high groundwater nitrate levels. The LUBGWMA includes Hermiston, Boardman, Irrigon, Stanfield, Echo and nearby areas in northern Morrow and northwestern Umatilla counties.

In 2020, environmental organizations asked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under the Safe Drinking Water Act, to protect LUBGWMA

residents from nitrate in their domestic well drinking water. EPA expects the state and the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), the lead agency for drinking water, to reduce nitrate exposure. In 2023, Governor Kotek directed OHA to meet the immediate safe drinking water needs of the community. OHA has since worked to support access to safe drinking water for domestic well users in the LUBGWMA.

OHA's LUBGWMA Domestic Wells Public Health Project uses 10 milligrams nitrate per liter of water (10 mg/L) as the health action level. OHA works with state and local agencies to provide safe drinking water through testing, treatment, water delivery, and outreach and education.

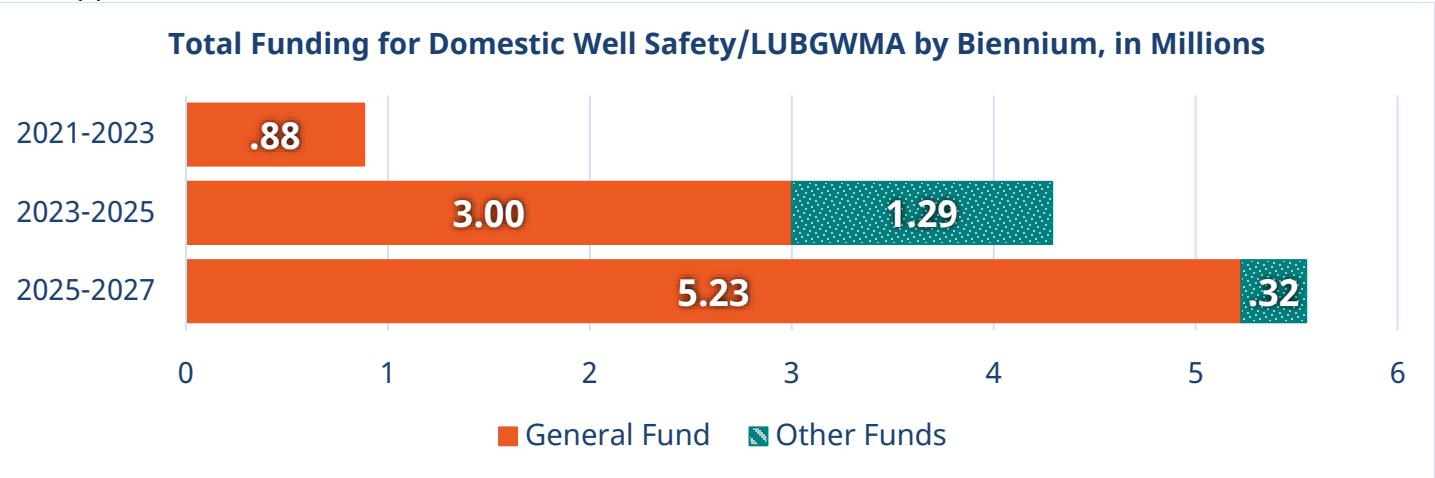
Trends and outcomes summary

The 2025-27 biennium is the third biennium in which Oregon has allocated state funds to OHA to address high levels of nitrate in the LUBGWMA. Since initiating work in this area, OHA has identified about 3,300 households that rely on domestic wells. As of June 2026, 2168 households have been tested (approximately 500 declined testing). OHA continues to reach out to those who have declined testing in partnership with county health departments and local organizations. About a third of wells test high for nitrate.

There is now broad awareness among community members and leaders about health risks and safe water resources, with 681 households accessing delivered water or treatment systems. OHA's partnership with other state agencies led to the adoption of the Oregon Nitrate Reduction Plan for the LUBGWMA, establishing a unified, state-led framework with clearly defined agency roles for DEQ, ODA and the Oregon Water Resources Department. The agencies report annually on progress and update the plan with new strategies. The plan is available at www.lubgwma.org.

Program funding

Total funding for domestic well safety in LUBGWMA since the 2021-2023 biennium. 2021-2023 funding was approved in 2022.



Objectives, outputs and outcomes

The table below represents select measures that show progress of the Domestic Well Safety/LUBGWMA program in the first 12 months of the biennium. Metrics highlighted in **green** indicate performance that has met or exceeded the established benchmark, target, or expected outcome during the reporting period.

Objective 1:	Objective 2:	Objective 3:
Outreach and engagement. Output: OHA mapped areas in the LUBGWMA with untested households to carry out strategic door-to-door canvassing in collaboration with local public health authorities and community-based organization partners. Outcome: Engaged untested and unresponsive households by providing direct access to information, answering questions, collecting water samples and connecting people with program resources.	Testing and retesting. Output: Test at least 30% of wells that remain untested by June 2027. June 2026 update: 130/228 (57%) wells tested Output: Retest 75% of eligible households at least once per quarter. June 2026 update: 404/541 (75%) at-risk households received at least one retest. Outcome: More initial well tests help people make informed health decisions and connect with services. Outcome: Households that complete quarterly retesting gain insight into fluctuations in nitrate levels enabling them to take action to ensure drinking water remains safe.	Treatment installations. Output: June 2026 update: All eligible households were contacted and offered a treatment system. To date, 326 have been installed. Outcome: Households that install a treatment system can safely continue using their domestic well water for drinking and cooking, reducing reliance on water delivery services.

Considerations

Participation in initial and retesting has declined. This may be due to sampling fatigue or distrust in government. Current outreach focuses on hard-to-reach groups.

OHA water testing shows nitrate levels are highest during the summer months. For this reason, the OHA Domestic Well Safety Program is carrying out

a summer campaign encouraging households to retest their well water from July to September.

Learn more at:

- [OHA’s LUBGWMA project website](#)
- [Oregon Nitrate Reduction Plan for the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area](#)

Other formats and languages

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer free of charge. Contact the Financial Investments and Outcomes Office at ashley.gonzalez@oha.oregon.gov or 503-269-1492 (voice/text). We accept all relay calls.

Public Health Division
Domestic Wells Safety
800 NE Oregon St
Portland, Oregon, 97232
541-952-9254
[Domestic Wells Safety Program Website](#)

