



WHAT HOMEOWNERS & REALTORS NEED TO KNOW

Meeting the Septic System Permitting Requirements Under the Springs and Aquifer Protection Act

Why are the permitting requirements for septic systems changing?

In 2016, the Florida Legislature identified 30 "Outstanding Florida Springs" that require additional protections to ensure their conservation and restoration for future generations. These protections will be outlined in restoration plans, known as Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs), focused on reducing nitrogen pollution that is impacting the water quality of these springs.

In some areas, the water leaving septic tanks has been identified as a major contributor to nitrogen pollution. Where this occurs, the law requires the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to include a septic system remediation plan within that spring's BMAP. The law requires specific actions regarding both existing and new septic systems located near impacted springs within areas known as Priority Focus Areas.

Why are these changes to septic system permitting important?

Nitrogen pollution is impacting the water quality of many of Florida's Outstanding Springs. Water from conventional septic systems is high in nitrogen, and that water leaves the septic system drainfield, reaches the aquifer and emerges in springs. While conventional septic systems are good at removing many pollutants from wastewater, they are not designed to remove nitrogen. To restore spring water quality, contributing septic systems need to be either removed or upgraded to include enhanced nitrogen-reducing technology.

Why are septic systems being addressed only in certain areas?

Septic systems pose the highest threat to water quality in areas where they are located near springs with highly permeable (sandy) soil. These vulnerable areas are identified as Priority Focus Areas in the remediation plans.

How can I find out if I am affected by new system permitting requirements?

Requirements for new septic system permits apply to lots less than one acre within a Priority Focus Area. A searchable map of these areas can be found by visiting FloridaDEP.gov/PFAMap.

How will homeowners be affected if they have an existing septic system?

For existing systems within the Priority Focus Areas, nothing will immediately change. However, in the future, failing systems may need to be enhanced with nitrogen-removing technology or the home or business may need to connect to central sewer. These requirements will be put in place after certain programs, such as homeowner grant programs to assist with offsetting the cost of replacement systems, are established and the Florida Department of Health has completed rulemaking for septic systems. These requirements will be phased in no later than five years after the adoption of the restoration plans.

How and where will permitting for new septic systems change?

Requirements for installation of new homes or businesses needing new septic systems on lots less than one acre within the Priority Focus Areas will change. These new systems will be required to include enhanced treatment of nitrogen. The installation of nitrogen reducing systems will not be required if a central sewer connection project is planned by the local government and the project has been included in the remediation plan. These changes will apply to all new system permits issued on or after adoption of the BMAP (no later than July 1, 2018).

When will new permitting requirements for new homes with new systems go into effect?

The permitting requirements for new septic systems on lots less than one acre within the Priority Focus Areas will change when the restoration plan for that area is adopted, which is anticipated by July 1, 2018.

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What is considered a “new” septic system?

New system installations are defined by current Department of Health (DOH) rules. In general, new is defined as an installation of a system where a system has never been installed. For a more information on which septic systems are considered new, please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.

How can I find out if central sewer is planned for a specific area and included as project in the remediation plan?

Residents can find out if central sewer is planned for their community by contacting the public works or utility department of their local city or county government.

What funding assistance is available to help me meet these requirements?

DEP is working with the water management districts, DOH and local governments to develop grant programs to provide funding assistance directly to local homeowners for replacement of existing systems. DEP will administer the grant program to help homeowners cover the difference in costs for upgrading their existing septic system to enhanced nitrogen treatment systems that reduce impacts to springs.

In areas that are connecting to central sewer, DEP and the water management districts will continue to provide funding to the local governments and utilities to offset a portion of connection costs for homeowners.



MEETING THE SEPTIC SYSTEM PERMITTING REQUIREMENTS

Springs and Aquifer Protection Act

In 2016, the Florida Legislature identified 30 “Outstanding Florida Springs” that require additional protections to ensure their conservation and restoration for future generations. These protections will be outlined in restoration plans, known as Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs). These plans are focused on reducing nitrogen pollution that is impacting the water quality of these springs.

Nutrients, specifically nitrogen and phosphorous, are naturally present in the water and necessary for the healthy growth of plant and animal life. However, too much nitrogen or phosphorous can harm water quality. Excess nutrients can come from insufficient treatment at wastewater treatment facilities, stormwater runoff, densely clustered septic systems and fertilizer use.

The legislation requires each BMAP to identify the sources of nitrogen pollution within the springshed, and include projects and strategies that will achieve the reductions needed to improve water quality in the region.

Changes to Septic System Permitting

In some areas, the water leaving septic tanks has been identified as a major contributor to nitrogen pollution. Where this occurs, the law requires the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to include a septic system remediation plan within that spring’s BMAP.

State law requires specific actions regarding both existing and new septic systems located near impacted springs within areas known as Priority Focus Areas. These are targeted vulnerable areas where pollution sources pose the highest risk due to proximity to a spring and permeable (sandy) soil conditions. The following changes to septic permitting will take place within these Priority Focus Areas:

- For new homes or businesses with new septic systems on lots less than one acres: Installation of new septic systems is prohibited unless the system includes enhanced treatment of nitrogen as described in the septic system remediation plan. This applies to all new system permits on lots less than one acre within the Priority Focus Area of an adopted BMAP. The installation or replacement of an enhanced system in these areas will not be required if central sewer connection is planned by the local government and identified as a BMAP-listed project.
- For existing septic systems: Nothing will immediately change. However, in the future, failing systems may need to be enhanced with nitrogen-removing technology or to connect to central sewer. These requirements will be put in place after certain programs, such as homeowner grant programs to assist with offsetting the cost of replacement systems, are established. These requirements will be phased in no later than five years after the adoption of the restoration plans.

DEP is coordinating with the Florida Department of Health (DOH), local governments, wastewater utilities and septic system contractors on the development of the remediation plans. These plans will determine how much nitrogen pollution from septic systems must be reduced to protect the springs. Projects can include septic tank enhancements to treat nitrogen pollution or wastewater system upgrades and service connections to municipal systems. In cases where specific projects have not yet been identified or proposed, DEP will continue to work with stakeholders to identify and implement the spring-specific projects and strategies to achieve the necessary reductions of nitrogen pollution.

Thanks to the continued commitment of Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature in securing a dedicated funding source for springs restoration and protection, DEP is able to assist local governments and homeowners with grant funding to implement these projects that will reduce nutrients and produce real benefits for our spring systems.

You can find out if your home lies within an adopted BMAP’s Priority Focus Area by visiting [FloridaDEP.gov/PFAMap](https://www.floridadep.gov/PFAMap), and contact DEP for information on available funding for homeowners. In areas that are connecting to central sewer, DEP and the water management districts will continue to provide funding to the local utilities to offset a portion of homeowner connection costs.

