

Long Tom Watershed Council

By PAUL REED

The dominant feature of western Oregon winters is rainfall. Each time it rains, pollutants wash out of the air and off of the land. They generally flow with the runoff into nearby streams and rivers, or soak into the groundwater aquifers. The problem intensifies in towns and cities where buildings, pavements and stormdrains divert water away from the earth's natural filters, such as vegetation and wetlands.

The Long Tom River is one of the most polluted in the Willamette Valley due to its proximity to a significant amount of human activity, both rural and urban. During the

last 50 years the use of fertilizers and pesticides has increased significantly. As a result, farm crop yields have increased, but so has pollution in streams. Farm runoff carries high levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, chemicals and sediment into the water.

Urban runoff also carries fertilizers and pesticides but may contain more toxic pollutants, including petroleum products, chemicals and metals. Cities and towns are required by the Clean Water Act to have active stormwater management plans. The city of Eugene, for example, has had an approved plan in place since 1994. Stormwater from Eugene is discharged, untreated, either directly into the Willamette or into Amazon Creek, a headwater branch of the Long Tom.

The plan includes a program of management practices such as street sweeping, control of illegal discharges, quick cleanup of materials spilled on streets, and public education about stormwater. Rural residents and landowners also have a personal stake in reducing the pollution that is so often contained in stormwater runoff. Most rural residents get their domestic water from wells.

Contaminates on the soil get washed into the groundwater system by rainwater and can end up in drinking water. Most contaminants can be reduced or eliminated. Many contaminants can take years to be eliminated from the aquifers after they are stopped from entering.

Here are some of the sources of human generated pollution runoff listed by the (DEQ):

Household and vehicle maintenance chemicals and soaps running off driveways, roofs and yards into streets and roads and down into storm drains or directly into streams and rivers; fertilizers and pesticides running off agricultural lands and urban areas such as yards, parks, golf courses and landscaped areas; oil, antifreeze, and other toxic materials that run off of roadways into storm drains or directly into streams or soak into groundwater; soil erosion from construction sites, unpaved driveways and roads, logging activities and agricultural lands; failing septic tanks that cause both surface and groundwater pollution; livestock and pets, which pollute the water with bacteria, cause erosion, and destroy aquatic habitat.

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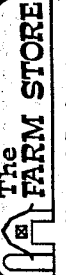


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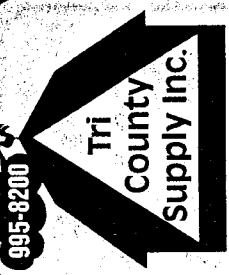
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