



TINA KOTEK
GOVERNOR

June 28, 2024

Crook County Commission
300 NE 3rd Street
Prineville, OR 97754

Dear Commissioners Crawford, Hermreck, and Barney:

I want to thank Commissioner Crawford for his recent letter highlighting the concerns from your residents about the groundwater quality within their domestic wells. There is growing concern about groundwater quality conditions in domestic wells across the state, and this is something that the state will be investigating further.

Because domestic wells are not regulated by the state or federal government, water quality of domestic wells is the responsibility of private well owners. However, given the troubling situation we are seeing in Crook County and in communities across the state, it is time for the state to evaluate its role in protecting the water quality and quantity of domestic wells.

In response to the concerns that have been raised in your county, Oregon's state agencies have been working for the past year to identify the ways in which we can be helpful to address the situation. I believe that we must do more to address the serious concerns that residents are raising in Crook County. We must build trust with community members and develop immediate next steps to address domestic well drinking concerns. Therefore, I have directed state agencies to take the following actions:

- Develop a sampling plan of the region's groundwater. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will work with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) to develop a plan which includes domestic well testing from the impacted areas, both upstream and downstream from the Knife River mining facility. This includes testing the "water storage lagoon."
- Ensure that the sampling plan provides independent analysis at local mining sites and includes witnesses from both industry and the affected residents to ensure transparency of collected data, in advance of DEQ proceeding with analyzing said data.
- Move as quickly as possible on the sampling plan. All levels of government will need to partner to make a difference in the region. While the federal government reviews options for long-term funding of a comprehensive sampling and testing plan in the region, my office will be working with the State Legislature to consider funding through the Legislative Emergency Board for DEQ to conduct their own sampling plan in the immediate future. DEQ will be starting this sampling plan as soon as resources can be contracted for, in September or earlier.

These actions that I am asking state agencies to take are in addition to the following actions that the state has taken since the concerns were raised by residents:

- DOGAMI visited Prineville and met with concerned community residents in early summer of 2023.
- DOGAMI conducted an investigation, based on pre-existing and current nearby groundwater sampling data, and did not find substantial evidence connecting the mine operation to residential groundwater operations. The mine in question is downstream from groundwater flow. Results of this investigation were communicated to the complainants.
- In March 2024, DEQ sent a Community Initiative Project request for federal resources to conduct sampling in the region. This will inform a long-term sampling effort bolstered by the state Emergency Board resources to conduct immediate testing.
- On May 30, 2024, OHA and DEQ hosted a community health assessment event in Prineville to understand the health concerns of residents consuming water with high levels of manganese. The information that OHA received is being used to help develop the sampling plan that will begin to be implemented as soon as possible.

I am hopeful that the sampling plan that DEQ will do will provide additional information for domestic well owners and provide further information to the state regarding the underlying reasons behind the water quality situation in the basin and proposed steps to address remediation.

While the state is committed to beginning this sampling process, it is clear that additional resources will be needed as we move forward. There needs to be a long-term sampling effort of the entire basin to determine underlying aquifer health and safety. We are encouraged by the interest from our Congressional delegation and are hopeful that our Community Initiative Project request through Senators Wyden and Merkley will be funded. This challenge will take all levels of government working together to achieve results and build trust with the public. The long-term sampling and analysis will follow the immediate work that the state is embarking on and lead to further clarity for the residents of Crook County.

Again, thank you for your advocacy for your residents, and I look forward to the county working closely with the state as we move forward and find solutions for the community.

Sincerely,



Governor Tina Kotek