



May 2018

Molalla's Wastewater Improvements Aligning Molalla's Wastewater Permit With Oregon Regulatory Requirements

Molalla's Wastewater Improvement Program

Sewage from Molalla homes and businesses is treated at the Molalla Wastewater Treatment Plant along the Woodburn-Estacada Highway. Despite efforts to improve operations, the plant has been unable to reliably meet permit requirements.

The City has been conducting an in-depth evaluation of the Wastewater Treatment Plant and sewer system to bring the plant into compliance and expand capacity. As part of those evaluations, the City's engineering consultants identified portions of the City's wastewater treatment plant permit inconsistent with Oregon rules and peer facilities across the state.

Why is Molalla's permit inconsistent with Oregon rules?

In short, because the discharge location changed, but the permit stayed the same. Until 2004, the Molalla wastewater treatment plant discharged to Bear Creek during the winter wet season. Molalla's NPDES permit has very low limits, intended to protect Bear Creek.

In 2004, the City made a big investment in a new pump station and pipeline to instead discharge to the Molalla River, to protect Bear Creek. The Molalla River is a bigger river with a much greater capability to accept treated wastewater. Molalla's permit was not changed to reflect the new discharge point.

Bringing Molalla's permit into regulatory compliance

Molalla is now seeking an interim permit for the wastewater treatment plant that is consistent with Oregon rules and the City's discharge to the Molalla River. The interim permit is designed to protect water quality in the Molalla River while also maintaining affordability for Molalla homes and businesses.

Molalla has submitted a proposed interim permit to DEQ based on Oregon Administrative Rules and supplemented with advanced water quality modeling of the Molalla River. The City will be working collaboratively with DEQ to develop final requirements.

Who makes the rules for wastewater treatment plant discharges?

Discharges from wastewater treatment plants are regulated by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) under rules created to protect Oregon streams for both people and aquatic life. Oregon's rules are based on the federal Clean Water Act and codified in the Oregon Administrative Rules.

Some rules apply to all wastewater treatment plants in Oregon; others are based on the specific river or stream where the treatment plant discharges. A treatment plant's discharge requirements are described in its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit.



The City of Molalla is working closely with DEQ to identify the right path forward. The City is committed to keeping customers informed about plans for wastewater improvements, protecting water quality in the Molalla River and maintaining affordability.