

Enhanced Nutrient-Reducing Systems Fact Sheet for Existing and New Septic Systems in Springs Basin Management Action Plan Areas

In 2016, the Florida Legislature identified 30 “Outstanding Florida Springs” that require additional protections to ensure their conservation and restoration for future generations. The protections are outlined in restoration plans, known as Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs). These plans are focused on reducing nitrogen pollution sources impacting the water quality of these springs, including onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems (OSTDS, or septic system). BMAPs include OSTDS remediation plans, with requirements to install enhanced nutrient-reducing OSTDS (ENR-OSTDS, or “nitrogen-reducing systems”) rather than conventional septic systems.

What are the current requirements for NEW septic systems?

House bill (HB) 1379 became effective in 2023 and expands the Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act requirements for **NEW** septic systems. These requirements apply in springs BMAPs on lots one acre or less when a new septic system construction permit is required and sewer is not available. These systems must be nitrogen-reducing systems (ENR-OSTDS) rather than conventional septic systems. A new septic system permit is needed when a septic system is installed where a system has never been before. There are other scenarios that call for a new septic system permit, which are listed in DCEH 19-004 on the Department’s [OSTDS Memoranda website](https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-Memos): <https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-Memos>.

What are the requirements for EXISTING septic systems?

Some springs BMAPs OSTDS remediation plans also have requirements for **EXISTING** septic systems. These springs BMAPs require that owners of existing septic systems in specific areas and on certain lots do one of the following things when the system requires a repair or modification permit because the system is in failure or there are changes to the business or structure the septic system is serving:

- Connect to sewer if it is available; or
- If sewer will be available in five years, repair or modify the existing conventional septic system; or
- Install a nitrogen-reducing system (ENR-OSTDS).

When and where do these requirements for existing systems take effect?

BMAPs for springs protection have varying policies regarding which septic systems must be upgraded to nitrogen-reducing systems (ENR-OSTDS) and when existing system requirements become effective. Implementation of existing system requirements across BMAPs will be phased. See [Springs Protection and Basin Management Action Plans](https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-Springs-BMAP) (<https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-Springs-BMAP>) for when existing system policies take effect for each BMAP and where in each BMAP they will be effective. All septic systems

that are subject to a springs BMAP-specific existing system policy must be upgraded no later than 20 years after BMAP adoption.

How do I know if my property is in an area where existing system requirements will become effective?

See the [Springs BMAPs Existing OSTDS Requirements](https://floridadep.gov/Springs-BMAPs-Existing-OSTDS) map tool (<https://floridadep.gov/Springs-BMAPs-Existing-OSTDS>) to determine if a lot is in an affected area.

Why is reducing nitrogen important?

Nitrogen is a pollutant that can cause excess plant and algae growth, which can result in environmental concerns. Nitrogen can also cause drinking water concerns. Discharge from conventional septic systems is one of many sources of nitrogen into the groundwater and surface waters of Florida. The installation of nitrogen-reducing systems (ENR-OSTDS) can lower the impact that septic systems have on the state's groundwater and surface waters.

What types of systems meet the enhanced nutrient-reducing requirements?

There are three types of nitrogen-reducing systems (ENR-OSTDS) that can be used to meet nitrogen-reducing requirements:

- In-ground nitrogen-reducing biofilters (INRBs);
- [Florida-approved nitrogen-reducing \(NSF 245-certified\) aerobic treatment units](https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-ATUs) (<https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-ATUs>); and
- [Florida-approved nitrogen-reducing Performance-Based Treatment Systems](https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-PBTS) (<https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-PBTS>).

For more information about the [three types of nitrogen-reducing systems](https://floridadep.gov/ENR-HB1379), see: (<https://floridadep.gov/ENR-HB1379>).

Is there funding assistance for enhanced nutrient-reducing systems?

There may be funding available for existing systems in certain counties. See [Springs Protection and Basin Management Action Plans](https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-Springs-BMAP) (<https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-Springs-BMAP>) for more information.

How can I find out more about these new requirements?

- Questions about a specific site or property should be directed to the applicable [County Health Department](https://www.floridahealth.gov/all-county-locations.html) Onsite Sewage Program: (<https://www.floridahealth.gov/all-county-locations.html>).
- Specific questions regarding BMAPs should be directed to the Water Quality Restoration Program at 850-245-8460 or emailing them at BMAPPprogram@floridadep.gov.
- General questions can be emailed to the Onsite Sewage Program at the Department of Environmental Protection at OSTDS_Feedback@floridadep.gov or at 850-245-4070.