

## 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. These 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 systems). 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, which became effective in 2023, expanded 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. For more information on HB 1379 and when a new construction permit is required, see the Department’s website: <https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-ENR>.

### What are the requirements for EXISTING septic systems?

Some of the springs BMAPs OSTDS remediation plans have requirements for existing septic systems. These springs BMAPs require that owners of **EXISTING** septic systems on certain property sizes in areas called Priority Focus Areas (PFAs) do one of the following things when the system requires a repair or modification permit:

- Connect to sewer if it is available; or
- If sewer will become available<sup>1</sup>, repair or modify the existing septic system; or
- Upgrade by installing a nitrogen-reducing system (ENR-OSTDS).

These permits are required when the system has failed or may be triggered by changes to the business or structure the septic system is serving.

### Where is information about each spring’s requirements for existing systems?

BMAPs for springs protection have varying policies regarding which septic systems must be upgraded to nitrogen-reducing systems (ENR-OSTDS). See Springs Protection and Basin Management Action Plans (<https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-Springs-BMAP>) for current existing system policies in each BMAP. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> For information on the criteria for sewer availability, see individual BMAPs at: <https://floridadep.gov/dear/water-quality-restoration/content/basin-management-action-plan-documents>.

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

Implementation of existing system requirements across BMAPs varies. See the Springs BMAPs Existing OSTDS Requirements map tool (<https://floridadep.gov/Springs-BMAPs-Existing-OSTDS>) to determine if a lot is in an affected area. Click on the BMAP for the effective date.

## 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 ENR-OSTDS can lower the impact that septic systems have on the state's groundwater and surface waters.

## What approved nitrogen-reducing 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>); and
- Florida-approved nitrogen-reducing Performance-Based Treatment Systems (<https://floridadep.gov/OSTDS-PBTS>).

For more information about the three types of nitrogen-reducing systems, 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. 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>) 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 permitting authority. In most areas, this is the County Health Department Onsite Sewage Program: (<https://www.floridahealth.gov/all-county-locations.html>). In the Florida Panhandle (Escambia through Jefferson County) and Marion County, contact the Department's permitting hub: <https://floridadep.gov/water/onsite-sewage/content/onsite-sewage-faq-permitting>.
- Specific questions regarding BMAPs should be directed to the Water Quality Restoration Program at 850-245-8460 or emailing them at [BMAPPProgram@floridadep.gov](mailto:BMAPPProgram@floridadep.gov).
- General questions can be emailed to the Onsite Sewage Program at the Department of Environmental Protection at [OSTDS\\_Feedback@floridadep.gov](mailto:OSTDS_Feedback@floridadep.gov) or at 850-245-4070.