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it was just a complaint driven system; if a complaint came in, they would go check it out, but there was no actual affirmative look to see if people were complying with the rules of the law."

But now, Hensey says, the ODA is working on a new strategy to provide more oversight. Her organization along with nine other stakeholders, including the Oregon Association of Clean Water Agencies, Oregon Wild, League of Woman Voters and Tualatin Riverkeepers are attempting to work with the ODA to address some areas of the program that they say need improving, such as amount of time it could take to assess all the state's private farmlands for water quality compliance. "I hope they will dedicate more resources to assessing more areas more quickly, under their current schedule," says Hensey.

Despite being two decades into its water quality program, ODA water quality program manager John Byers said the ODA doesn't know the number of sites housing agricultural activities affecting water quality in its jurisdiction. What is known is that most of them have never been checked to see whether or not they're in compliance with state water quality standards. If preliminary plans discussed by the ODA to proactively assess all of these sites comes to fruition, advocacy groups say it could take hundreds of years to assess all of them. In the meantime, riparian conditions and runoff from most farmlands will go unchecked. Riparian conditions on agricultural land also have an impact on the health of waterways - without vegetation, water temperatures rise and erosion occurs, allowing contaminated sediment to fall into rivers and streams.

Earlier this month, the nine advocacy groups sent a letter to ODA directors and managers asking that they schedule a meeting with the letter's represented organizations and municipality stakeholders to discuss their new proactive approach to water quality oversight.

The advocacy groups say ODA needs to ensure farmers know what's expected - a recent report by one of the department's own advisory committees states there is a lack of awareness among farmers and landowners about the water quality program and its rules.

They also recommended developing standardized, science-based criteria for assessments. "We've heard from ODA staff that whether a landowner is in compliance is a matter of professional judgment, and more specific compliance criteria do not exist," the letter states.

Hensey says it's important to remember that we all have to eat and that we value farmers in the Oregon economy. "We want to find ways to reduce runoff pollution in



On September 28, Groundwork Portland and Pacific Northwest Social Forum led a March for a Clean Willamette, which concluded with a banner drop at the Hawthorne Bridge. Organizers say the time for a new vision of the Willamette River is now, and the millions of dollars that go into cleaning up the stretch of river that runs from Broadway Bridge to Sawie Island should be used to train and employ workers living in Portland.

agricultural areas that work for farmers to still be profitable," she says.

ODA water quality program manager John Byers was unable to give an estimation of how long it will take his department to assess compliance among private agricultural landowners. He says the numbers discussed in March, leading to fears it would take hundreds of years for a full assessment, were preliminary and taken out of context. "The numbers that were discussed originally, there was nothing scientific about it, it was just numbers," he says. "We have 3,100 (subwatershed) sites. It's our intention to be able to prioritize those, eliminating certain elements that wouldn't be part of our jurisdictional properties," he says.

So how long will it take? "I really can't tell you," says Byers. He says he's currently working prioritization. A rate of assessing six to 12 sites every two years was also thrown out in preliminary discussions, but Byers says he doesn't know what the actual rate will look like at this time.

In addition to speeding up the assessment process, the letter asks that ODA establish agreed upon goals and standards with the ODEQ, with whom it's

been in discussions with for some time.


According to Byers, the ODA is engaged in continual ongoing discussions with ODEQ about both reduction of pollutants and riparian vegetation. "We work together, which we are very proud to say. It's not so true in other states, but in this state we work very well with ODEQ," he says. When asked if any agreed upon goals had been set, he says, "It's an ongoing discussion."

But even if every agricultural site in the state were in compliance with current regulations, it wouldn't be enough to rehabilitate the state's waterways. "As we often see with other environmental laws, implementing our laws effectively is often a problem. Both because we don't have the resources to do it well and sometimes there's not the political will to do it well. In terms of actual water quality rules for agricultural areas, I think its generally acknowledged that just enforcing those alone won't enable us to meet water quality standards, and that we are going to have to invest in a lot of voluntary conservation at a higher level to see the improvements we need to meet water quality standards," says Hensey.

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