

FAQ Regarding Nitrates in Centralia

Q1: Do Centralia water customers have high nitrates in their water?

A1: No, currently the nitrate level for Centralia City-wide is:
Fords Prairie production drinking water wellfield 4.28 MG/L
Tennis Court production drinking water wellfield 1.67 MG/L

Q2: What is the difference between a City production well and a City monitoring well?

A2: A drinking water well, also known as a production well, is a well from which the City draws from the aquifer and then treats for City of Centralia water customers. Monitoring wells are used exclusively for testing.

Q3: Why did Centralia begin groundwater nitrate testing in 1981?

A3: The City was required to sample drinking water wells (production wells) by the Washington State Department of Health annually for state compliance and has continued annually.

Q4: Why did the City install a nitrate monitoring network if it is not required by the State of Washington?

A4: The City proactively installed a network of monitoring wells to further understand the aquifer and to also identify potential contaminants, including nitrates, before they can reach any City of Centralia drinking water wells.

Q5: When did the City proactively start their own nitrate monitoring well network?

A5: December 2019.

Q6: Why did the City drill three additional wells adjacent to the Bob Oke Game Farm, as well as northwest of the Game Farm?

A6: Initial sample results were thought to be skewed because it was within feet of the Game Farms residential septic drain field. Three more monitoring wells were drilled to eliminate the specific drain field as a variable in the data we are collecting.

Q7: Why did the nitrate levels start increasing in the aquifer?

A7: An increase in nitrates is natural with an increase in population. Some solutions to this would include reducing septic systems and adhering to best management practices (BMPs) in regard to agriculture and farming processes, as well as treatment of stormwater catch basins.

Q8: How is Centralia High School drinking water impacted?

A8: Centralia High School is currently on City water and not affected.

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Q9: Why are the results higher northwest of the Game Farm?

A9: Because the aquifer flows in that direction.

Q10: Why didn't the county and City notify the residents more effectively?

A10: Collaboratively, the City and Lewis County Public Health & Social Services notified the affected citizens within 48 hours via pre-recorded phone calls, letters, message boards, and door-to-door contact.

Q11: The Game Farm has been there since the 1950s; why are there nitrates now?

A11: Nitrates were likely in the aquifer back then, but with no nitrate monitoring network, they were undiscovered.

Q12: Why is the City involved in this?

A12: The City is trying to protect Centralia's sole source of drinking water, the aquifer, from all contaminants.

Q13: Why do the Tennis Court Wells (located within Borst Park) have lower nitrates?

A13: Based on the location within Borst Park, the Tennis Court Wells are not as affected by septic systems, agriculture, and farming. Reducing septic systems and adhering to best management practices (BMPs) in regard to agriculture, farming processes, and treatment of stormwater catch basins can decrease nitrate contamination.

Q14: How has the City been working with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) regarding the Game Farm?

A14: The City's hydrogeologist consultant educated WDFW leaders on the vulnerability of Centralia's aquifer and how nitrates can originate from farming practices.

Q15: What has WDFW done after being notified?

A15: The Game Farm did change farming practices in an attempt to reduce nitrate loading.

Q16: How is the City trying to identify the source of the nitrates?

A16: Based on hydrological assessment conducted December 2024 – March 2025, existing water quality and groundwater flow data suggest the primary contaminant source is the Game Farm. The City will continue quarterly sampling of the nitrate monitoring network as the Game Farm makes changes to its farming practices. The secondary source of nitrates is septic systems in the Fords Prairie area. The City is actively installing sewer to move customers from septic to sewer.