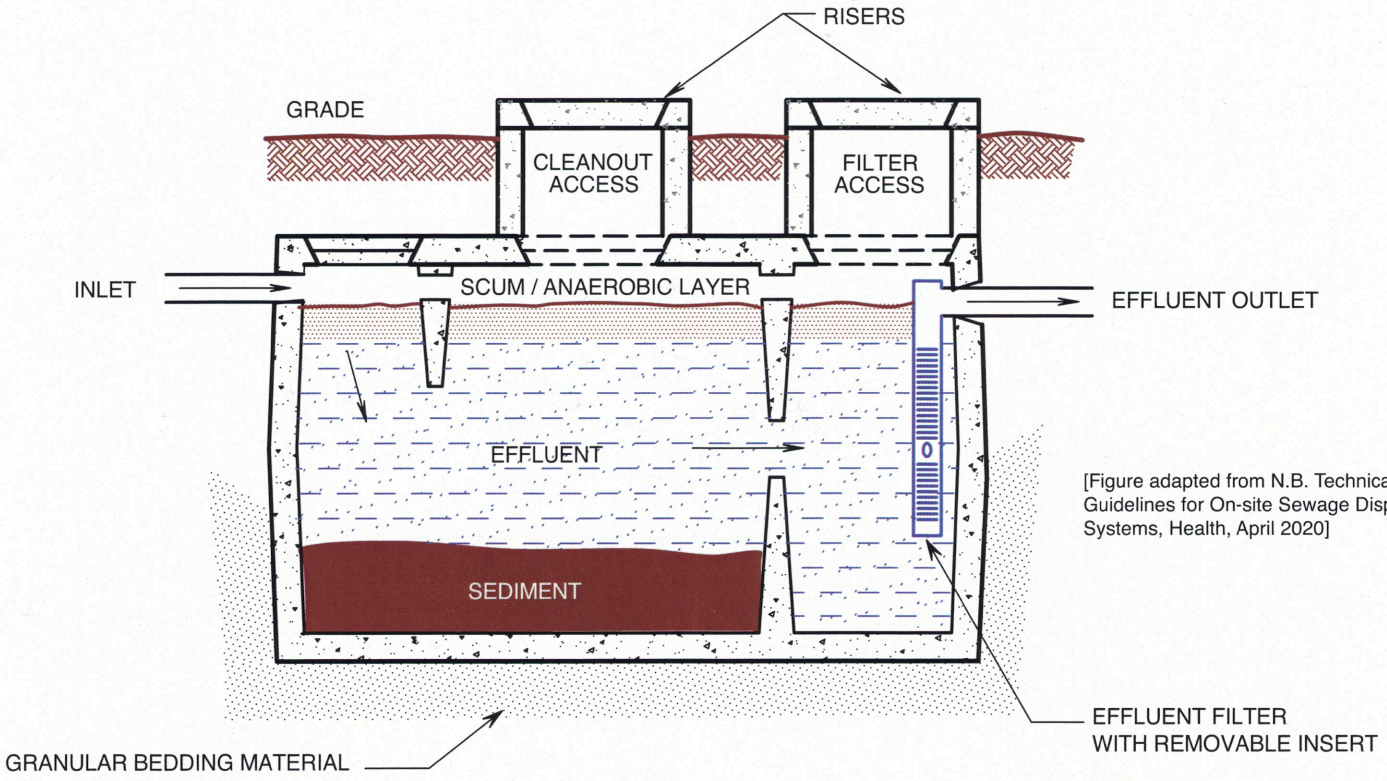
How Your Septic System Works



[Figure adapted from N.B. Technical Guidelines for On-site Sewage Disposal Systems, Health, April 2020]

Jemseg Grand Lake Watershed Association

www.jemseggrandlakewatershed.ca

A healthy watershed ecosystem for all!





Photo: Peter DeGannes

New Nouveau Brunswick
Your Environmental Trust Fund at Work

A healthy watershed ecosystem for all!

Jemseg Grand Lake Watershed Association
www.jemseggrandlakewatershed.ca

How Your Septic System Works

A septic tank is simply an underground sedimentation tank used for wastewater treatment through a process of biological decomposition and drainage. In southern New Brunswick the most common tanks are concrete, ranging in size from 500 gallons (common in older homes), to 600, 750 and 1,000 gallons. As of 2009, septic tanks are required to have two compartments with an effluent filter. While steel tanks still exist, they are no longer approved. Steel tanks should be replaced. Any work done on a septic system must be done by a licensed septic system installer.

A properly maintained septic system allows for safe disposal of wastewater. Inside the tank, bacteria break down the solid waste allowing the liquids to separate and drain away faster. Once in the tank, the sewage separates into three layers; a scum or anaerobic layer at the top containing fats, effluent in the middle, and a sediment or sludge layer at the bottom. Waste and paper products float for 24 to 48 hours, then settle into the sediment layer. The top anaerobic layer contains the bacteria and enzymes that liquify organic waste. In a well-maintained tank the middle effluent layer is largely free of any solids. **For every litre entering the system from the house, a litre must exit the system into the drainage field.** Only effluent is allowed to exit the tank. Effluent is slowly absorbed by the ground in the drainage field. Cleaning out the septic tank regularly keeps vital bacteria and enzymes in the tank working properly to break down waste, and prevents toxins and antibacterial substances from building up. Regular maintenance of septic tanks is important. For example, the effluent filter should be cleaned every year. Septic system failure can be very costly. In the worst case, **failure can lead to complete removal of the polluted material before a new field can be installed.** Information on how often septic tank pump-outs are needed can be found on our website. Check out our website (search for "septic systems") for more information, including how often septic tank pump-outs are required. Ask septic system service providers for a "multiple clean-out discount" when you and your neighbours get a pump-out done on the same day.

