

Focus on: Outstanding Resource Waters: Cascade River



Figure 1. Cascade River. Photo by Thomas O'Keefe

Protecting Outstanding Resource Waters

Washington has an abundance of high quality water that is important to protect for uses such as habitat for threatened and endangered salmon, tribal customs, and recreation. The Clean Water Act provides an opportunity for states to identify their highest quality and most unique waters as outstanding resource waters and provide extra protection from future sources of degradation. People may nominate waterbodies for the state to designate for this highest level of protection. This is possible under the state's [antidegradation rules](#).¹

How does Washington define an Outstanding Resource Water?

The antidegradation rules contains specific eligibility requirements to identify outstanding resources waters that receive special protection.

These would include, but are not limited to, waters without multiple sources of pollution that are located in protected areas, waters with exceptional ecological value, or unique attributes or recreational value that distinguish them among state waterbodies and warrant special protection. This designation stops

¹ <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-201A-330>

further degradation, except for certain temporary projects or discharges, or to protect public health or property in an emergency.

Current rulemaking

The Department of Ecology proposes designating four waterbodies in Washington as Tier III(A) or Tier III(B) outstanding resource waters (ORWs).

Proposed Tier III(A) waterbodies

- Portions of the Napeequa River and tributaries (Chelan County)
- Upper watershed of the Cascade River and tributaries (Skagit County)
- Upper watershed of the Green River and tributaries (Skamania County)

Proposed Tier III(B) waterbody

- Soap Lake (Grant County)

What are the two levels of protection?

We can assign a waterbody Tier III(A) or Tier III(B) protection.

Tier III(A)

This designation is the highest level of protection. It prohibits degradation of water quality in a waterbody after it is designated.

Tier III(B)

This level of protection would place extra requirements on new or expanded point source discharges to ensure pollution from wastewater is kept to a minimum.

Protecting the Cascade River

In 2021, the Pew Charitable Trusts, American Rivers, Cascade Forest Conservancy, Wild Salmon Center, American Whitewater, Washington Wild, and Trout Unlimited [submitted a nomination](#)² to Ecology to designate the Cascade River as an ORW.

The Cascade River in Skagit County flows for 29 miles from the South Cascade Glacier on Sentinel Peak to the Skagit River at the town of Marblemount.

² https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/ezshare/wq/standards/ORW_Nomination_3Rivers.pdf

The Cascade River within the proposed boundary is relatively pristine, flowing through national park, wilderness area, and national forest land. It provides unique recreational opportunities for kayakers, and provides critical habitat for threatened fish.

Proposed ORW boundary

We propose designating the Cascade River as an ORW upstream from the west boundary of Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest to headwaters. One private parcel within the national forest is inside the proposed boundary.

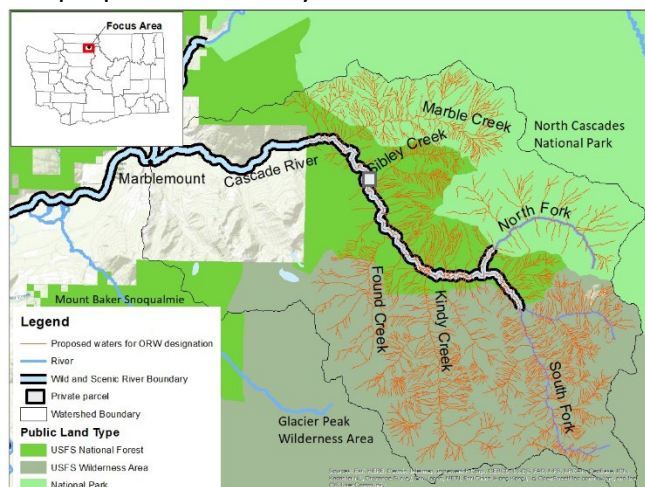


Figure 2 Map of proposed Cascade River ORW boundary

Outstanding attributes of the Cascade River

We proposed designating the Cascade River based on its relatively pristine condition and parts of the river within a protected area, its high water quality and unique recreational value, and exceptional ecological significance.

Get involved

We invite you to comment on our rule proposal until Sept. 27, 2023. You can comment in the following ways:

- You can [submit comments online](#) (until 11:59 p.m. on Sept. 27, 2023)
- By U.S. mail (must be postmarked by Sept. 27, 2023):

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- At any of our public hearings listed on our rulemaking webpage: <https://ecology.wa.gov/2206-ORW>.

We are hosting five public workshops with hearings for this proposal. Four are in-person in different locations and one is virtual.

Learn more

Visit our [rulemaking webpage](#) to learn more about the proposed ORW designations.

There you can read about how we:

- [evaluated each waterbody for eligibility](#),
- [plan to implement the rule](#), and
- evaluated the [potential economic impacts](#) of the rule.



Scan this QR code to go to Ecology's Outstanding Resource Waters webpage.

Contact information

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ADA accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6600 or email at swqs@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.