

## Focus On: Outstanding Resource Water



It is important to protect Washington's abundance of high quality water so that it can be used by threatened and endangered salmon for habitat, so people can swim and fish, and so tribes can use it for customs and rituals. The Clean Water Act provides an opportunity for states to identify their highest quality waters as outstanding resource waters and provide extra protection from future sources of pollution. People may nominate water bodies for this highest level of protection. This is possible under the state's [antidegradation rules](#)<sup>1</sup>.

### How does Ecology define an outstanding resource water?

We specifically describe protection for outstanding resource water in the antidegradation section of the water quality standards (WAC 173-201A-330). The rule contains specific eligibility requirements to identify the outstanding resources waters that receive special protection.

These would include, but are not limited to, water without multiple sources of pollution that are located in areas such as:

- Federal or state parks
- Monuments
- Preserves
- Wilderness areas
- Wild and scenic rivers

Outstanding resource water could also include water with unique ecological or recreational value located in more urban areas. Once a water body is designated as an outstanding resource water, it needs to be maintained and protected from degradation.

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

## Outstanding resource water eligibility

To be eligible for designation as outstanding resource water, the water must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- The water is in a relatively pristine condition or possesses exceptional water quality, and also occurs in federal and state parks, monuments, preserves, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, marine sanctuaries, estuarine research reserves, or wild and scenic rivers.
- The water has unique aquatic habitat types — such as peat bogs — that are unique and regionally rare examples of their kind.
- The water has both high water quality and regionally unique recreational value.
- The water is of exceptional statewide ecological significance.
- The water has cold water thermal refuges critical to the long-term protection of aquatic species.

## What happens after a water body is nominated?

Nominations must include sufficient information to show how the water body meets the eligibility criteria. If the nomination demonstrates that the water body is eligible, we schedule a designation review. The review will include a formal rulemaking process, including consultation with tribes in the geographic vicinity of the water.

To determine whether or not to designate a water body as an outstanding resource water, we consider factors relating to the social and economic impact of a designation and input from the public and local governments.

After review of public comments, we make a final determination on whether a nominated water body should be adopted into the water quality standards as an outstanding resource water, and whether that water body should be given Tier III(A) or Tier III(B) protection. Tier III(A) prohibits any and all future degradation, and Tier III(B) allows only minor degradation under certain conditions.

## Related Information

- [Ecology's Antidegradation webpage<sup>2</sup>](#)



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<sup>2</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/OutstandingWater>