

# Focus on: Outstanding Resource Waters: Napeequa River



Figure 1. Napeequa 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](#).<sup>1</sup>

### How does Washington define an Outstanding Resource Water?

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

This includes 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 further

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

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

### Current rulemaking

Ecology proposes designating four waterbodies in Washington as 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?

### 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 Napeequa 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](#)<sup>2</sup> to Ecology to designate the Napeequa River as an ORW.

The Napeequa River in Chelan County flows for 16 miles from the Butterfly Glacier in the Glacier Peak Wilderness into the White River, which flows into Lake Wenatchee.

Rather unique among Washington's rivers, the majority of the Napeequa River is accessible only by

<sup>2</sup> [https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/ezshare/wq/standards/ORW\\_Nomination\\_3Rivers.pdf](https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/ezshare/wq/standards/ORW_Nomination_3Rivers.pdf)

trail. Only the last mile of river, before it meets the White River, flows through private developments. The Mountaineers organization describes the Napeequa River Valley as one of the most “revered and wildest valleys in the state.”<sup>3</sup>

**Proposed ORW boundary**

We propose to designate the Napeequa River as an outstanding resource water from the boundary of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and private land near river mile 1 upstream to the headwaters, including tributaries. The proposed boundary is on federal land only.

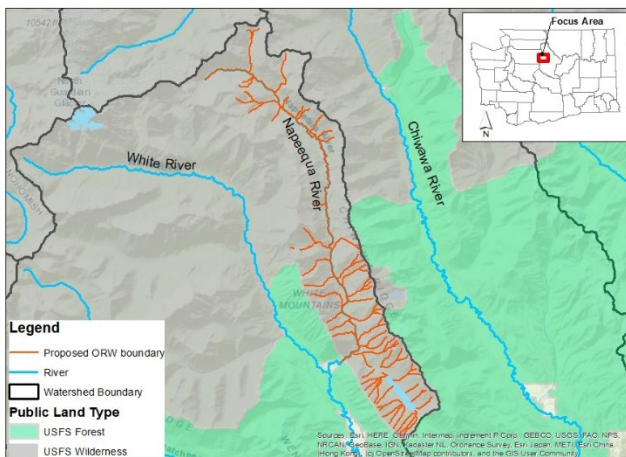


Figure 2 Map of proposed Napeequa River ORW boundary

**Outstanding attributes of the Napeequa River**

We propose designating the Napeequa River based on its relatively pristine condition, location mostly within a protected area, its high water quality, unique recreational value, and exceptional ecological significance.

**Get involved**

We invite you to comment on our proposal until Sept. 27, 2023. Here are ways to comment:

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

Marla Koberstein  
 WA Department of Ecology  
 PO Box 47696  
 Olympia, WA 98504-7696

- 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.

**Contact information**

Marla Koberstein  
 Marla.koberstein@ecy.wa.gov  
 360-628-6376

**ADA accessibility**

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6600 or email at [swqs@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:swqs@ecy.wa.gov), or visit Service or TTY call 7711 or 877-833-6341.



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

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/napeequa-valley>