

Focus on: Outstanding Resource Waters: Green River



Figure 1. Green 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.

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

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 Green 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 Green River as an ORW.

The Green River begins near Spirit Lake and Mount St. Helens and flows about 37 miles to the North Fork Toutle River, which then drains into the Cowlitz River.

The Green River is an exceptionally unique waterbody in Washington. Flowing along the outer region of the blast zone, the Green River and

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

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

surrounding region were significantly impacted by the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens. The Green River provides an extremely unique opportunity for scientists studying the ecological processes of recovery from an eruption, and for the public to learn about and recreate in such a singular landscape.

Proposed ORW boundary

We propose designating the Green River upstream from the boundary of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and private timberlands to headwaters, including tributaries. Within this area, the river flows through national monument and national forest land.

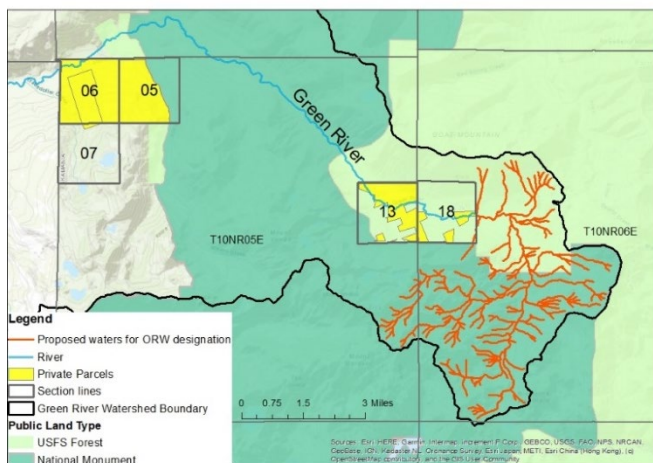


Figure 2 Map of proposed Green River ORW boundary

Outstanding attributes of the Green River

We proposed designating the Green 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 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 U.S. 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.



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

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, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.