

# Focus on: Outstanding Resource Waters: Soap Lake



Figure 1. Soap Lake in winter. Photo by Alison Gooding, Soap Lake Conservancy

## 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

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

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 Soap Lake

In 2021, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Soap Lake Conservancy [submitted a nomination](#)<sup>2</sup> to Ecology to designate Soap Lake as an ORW.

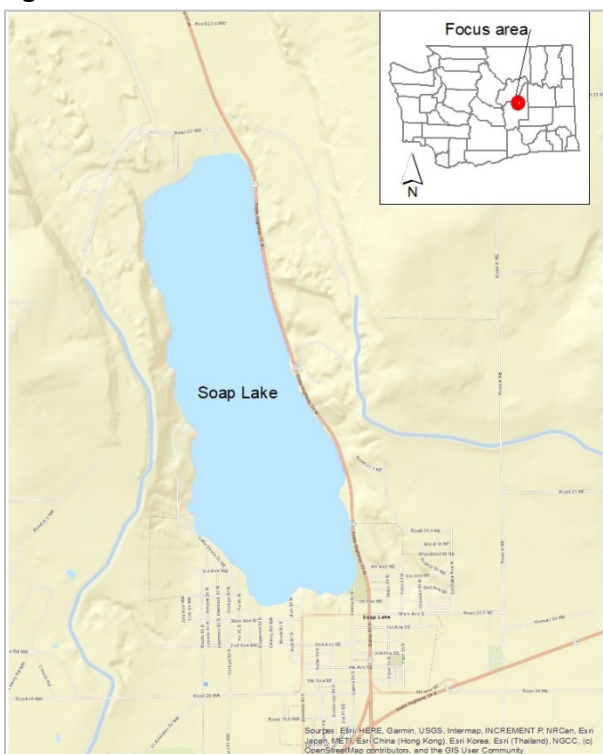
Soap Lake is the last of a series of lakes that begin at the foot of Dry Falls in the Lower Grand Coulee, in Grant County.

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

Soap Lake is a truly unique lake in Washington. The water is naturally salty and has many minerals. The lake has a unique layer of deep, very salty water that never mixes with the rest of the lake. Soap Lake is culturally significant to Tribes and is a popular tourist destination due to its unique water.

## Outstanding attributes of Soap Lake

We propose designating Soap Lake based on its unique and regionally rare habitat, unique recreational value, and statewide 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](mailto:swqs@ecy.wa.gov), or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341