

Ms. Marla Koberstein
WA Department of Ecology
Via email using agency comment form

Re: Cascade River, Tier III(A), Outstanding Resource Waters

Dear Ms. Koberstein:

Please accept our public comment regarding your agency's proposed designation of Outstanding Resource Waters. We strongly support the designation of the Upper Watershed of the Cascade River and its tributaries included in the proposed designation as Tier III(A) Outstanding Resource Waters, the highest level of protection.

We have been residents of Skagit County for nearly 20 years. We enjoy hiking on public lands along Skagit's rivers, including the Cascade River, viewing and photographing wildlife and river scenery. Like many residents of Skagit County we comment on varied environmental issues and have helped with local conservation groups' efforts to restore riverside habitat to benefit wildlife. Our volunteer work has also included opposition to efforts to mine the Upper Skagit Watershed, advocacy for salmon and other wildlife conservation, and recovery for the Orca whales dependent on the salmon. Being along the rivers in Skagit County also provides us with a sense of calm in a busy, increasingly chaotic, world. As customers of the the Skagit Public Utility District, we rely on safe drinking water from the Skagit River Watershed.

Preventing degradation of water quality in this proposed area of the Cascade River is critically important to fish, birds, other wildlife and to and their habitat (all dependant on long term exceptional water quality), to recreational uses and to safe drinking water for Skagit residents downstream. The designation would add a much needed layer of protection for this near-pristine water resource. Different from its current "Wild and Scenic River" status which protects against new dams to ensure the Cascade River remains free flowing, your agency's designation would protect against degradation of water quality in the watershed. This is a critically important difference.

Designation of the identified Cascade River and tributaries as an Outstanding Resource Water meets all the eligibility requirements and will:

- Maintain the Cascade River's exceptional water quality by protecting 149 miles of streams and tributaries from water quality degradation;
- Preserve its unique ecological significance: it provides special wildlife habitat and value as a cold water refuge for salmon (The River, a mosaic of tributary streams, wetlands and shorelines, has excellent habitat to support a variety of fish, birds and other wildlife and aquatic insects. Its salmon habitat supports numerous and varied salmon runs, including endangered species and a

genetically distinct strain of spring Chinook salmon. The salmon, in turn, provide much needed food for Orca whales. Significantly, the value of the River as a vital cold water refuge for salmon will continue to increase with each year of a warming climate.);

- The River, its habitat and wildlife provide a regionally unique recreational value for people like ourselves who observe, photograph and enjoy the area and its wild denizens. But this River also offers unique opportunities for recreational fishing, boaters and cultural Tribal activities (We agree with the caveat - as long as these uses “do not change water quality.”);
- Help protect the public health of Skagit’s residents like us by ensuring the continued good quality of water provided by the Skagit Public Utility District;
- Protect our State’s substantial monetary investment (millions of dollars) in ensuring water quality, river restoration, salmon and Orca recovery. (Experience has shown that proactive protection is much less costly than restoration of water bodies and restoration can take decades - time that the salmon and Orcas do not have if they are to survive.)

Please do not allow logging or other resource extraction industries or perhaps their political allies to undermine or delay your rulemaking. The organizations that collectively nominated the Cascade River and other water bodies in the State for designation held local stakeholder meetings that included representatives from such industries. Following that stakeholder process, the nominated water bodies, like your proposal, is focused on public lands rather lands associated with industrial timber operations, state working forests or private housing developments. Thus for the Cascade River and its tributaries, the agency's proposal includes only areas within the North Cascades National Park, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, and Glacier Peak Wilderness Area. Please adopt your final rule as proposed regarding Tier III(A) Outstanding Resource Waters designation for the Cascade River and its tributaries as soon possible without delay. Thank you for your work on this rulemaking and for your attention to our comment.

Sincerely,
Mary Ruth and Phillip Holder
201 S. 7th St.
Mount Vernon, WA 98274

