



September 27, 2023

Marla Koberstein
Department of Ecology
P.O. Box 47696
Olympia, WA 98504-7696

Re: Support for Rulemaking - Outstanding Resource Waters, Chapter 173-201A WAC for the Cascade River

Dear Ms. Koberstein:

The 53 undersigned organizations and businesses represent conservation and civic groups, elected officials, local businesses and other Washington State stakeholders write today in support of the proposed rulemaking to designate parts of the Cascade River system as a Tier III(A) Outstanding Resource Water (ORW) pursuant to WAC 173-201A-330 and strongly urge Ecology to adopt the new rule.

We reside, serve, or represent individuals in Skagit, Whatcom, San Juan and northern Island Counties, who rely on the Skagit Watershed (including the Cascade River) to sustain our local economies, safe and clean drinking water, public health, responsible recreational opportunities, quality of life and livelihoods. Additionally, the Cascade River is critical to honoring the treaty rights and lifeways of several local Tribes. So much so, that recently nearly every local government, tribal government, water provider and land use authority in Skagit County took action to express their opposition to proposed mine in the headwaters of the Skagit River, resulting in an agreement to stop the mining threat to clean water, salmon and other values downstream.

The vast majority of Skagit and north Island County's drinking water comes directly from the Skagit River (of which the Cascade is a major tributary) via the Anacortes Water Treatment Plant and the Skagit Public Utility District. Many of our agricultural fields are irrigated with Skagit River water. Local citizens eat salmon caught in the Skagit River and swim, play, and earn a living from the Skagit River. The Skagit River is one of the most productive strongholds for salmon, steelhead, and bull trout in Puget Sound and provides 30% of the fresh water into Puget Sound. As a source of freshwater and chinook salmon, the Skagit is critical toward the recovery of the endangered Southern Resident Orca Whale population.

We consider adoption of the Cascade River system as an ORW to be a necessary step to protect the natural resources we still have intact, while we continue to invest in the hard and expensive work of restoring what we have lost. Protecting outstanding resource waters in the Skagit basin protect the significant investment of millions of dollars of public money spent to protect and restore habitat and fight off extinction of these iconic Pacific Northwest species and meet our Tribal Treaty obligations.

Climate change makes these conservation efforts even more urgent. Science tells us that certain areas and species will be impacted more quickly and severely, including freshwater ecosystems, which are declining at a rate faster than terrestrial and marine ecosystems. By increasing protection of still-healthy river systems, we are giving those systems and the communities that rely on them their greatest chance at a resilient future.

The Cascade River in Washington State meets several of the ORW regulatory criteria, any one of which would qualify it for this meaningful designation. The Cascade River is unique among rivers in the Skagit River basin for its exceptional water quality, which renders the river a critical resource for salmon recovery. The Skagit River system, including the pristine Cascade River, provides habitat for Chinook, chum, coho, sockeye, pink salmon, and trout species, and the Cascade River alone has a wild and unique spring Chinook stock. Sustained by high-quality waters, these keystone salmon in turn provide sustenance for a terrestrial web of linked species, including old growth forest, the northern spotted owl, the marbled murrelet, and more. While the Cascade River's Wild and Scenic River designation affords limited protection to some stretches of the river, it does not preserve the river's essential quality in perpetuity. Finally, much of the river flows through national park and wilderness areas.

Outreach to Tribes, County commissioners, local elected officials and other stakeholders early on prior to an outstanding resource water nomination for the Cascade River, generated important feedback that was included in the current designation being proposed by the Washington Department of Ecology. A key change that was made was to focus the designation on the federal land area of the Cascade River (Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest and North Cascades National Park). The current designation addressed concerns about potential restrictions to local private landowners, private timber companies and state working forest lands by not including private and state land ownership in the designation.

Designation of this river system would benefit the people, economy, wildlife, and salmon of these northwest Washington counties and the entire state. It is essential that the state take steps now to protect some of its remaining high-quality rivers that provide numerous benefits to Washingtonians. As impacts from climate change become increasingly more evident, protecting our high-quality rivers and streams is an essential investment for our future.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We recognize and appreciate that the Department of Ecology has prioritized ORW rulemaking for the Cascade River and presented a balanced and common-sense designation based on local feedback. We offer our support to protect this high-quality resource of statewide significance.

Sincerely,

Dave M Paul
State Representative (10th Legislative District)
Washington State House of Representatives

Clyde Shavers
State Representative (10th Legislative District)
Washington State House of Representatives

Liz Lovelett
State Senator (40th Legislative District)
Washington State Senate

Alex Ramel
State Representative (40th Legislative District)
Washington State House of Representatives

Debra Lekanoff
State Representative (40th Legislative District)
Washington State House of Representatives

Satpal Singh Sidhu
Executive
Whatcom County

Kaylee Galloway
Council Member (District 1)
Whatcom County Council

Todd Donovan
Council Member (District 2)
Whatcom County Council

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City of Anacortes

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Councilmember, Ward 2
City of Anacortes

Jeremy Carter
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Amanda Hubik
Councilmember, Position 4 (At Large)
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Bruce McDougall
Councilmember, Position 5
City of Anacortes

Carolyn Moulton
Councilmember, Position 6
City of Anacortes

Anthony Young
Councilmember, Position 7
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Hollie Huthman
Councilmember, Ward 2
City of Bellingham

Daniel C. Hammill
Councilmember, Ward 3
City of Bellingham

Edwin H. (Skip) Williams
Councilmember, Ward 4
City of Bellingham

Lisa A. Anderson
Councilmember, Ward 5
City of Bellingham

Michael Lilliquist
Councilmember, Ward 6
City of Bellingham

Kristina Michele Martens
Councilmember, At-Large
City of Bellingham

Richard May
Mayor Pro Tem
City of Blaine

Annie Taylor
Councilmember, Position 1
Town of La Connor

MaryLee Chamberlain
Councilmember, Position 4
Town of La Connor

Mary Wohleb
Councilmember, Position 5
Town of La Connor

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Councilmember, Ward 1
City of Mount Vernon

Richard Brocksmith
Councilmember (At Large)
City of Mount Vernon

Chuck Owen
City Councilmember, Ward 5
City of Sedro-Woolley

Joe Burns
City Councilmember, Ward 6
City of Sedro-Woolley

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Skagit Audubon Society (Mount Vernon)

Larry Lober
President
Greater Bellingham Running Club (Bellingham)

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Skagit Land Trust (Mount Vernon)

Eric Hayes
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Superfeet Worldwide (Ferndale)

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Evergreen Islands (Anacortes)

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Aslan Brewing Co. (Bellingham)

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Mt. Baker Club (Bellingham)

Frank W Koterba
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Fourth Corner Fly Fishers (Bellingham)

Jen Barker
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Terramar Brewing & Distilling (Edison)

Scott Willison
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The Confluence Fly Shop (Bellingham)

Monika Wieland Shields
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Orca Behavior Institute (Friday Harbor)

Marnie Jackson
Executive Director
Whidbey Environmental Action Network
(Langley)

Becca Gray and Nate Schons
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Becky Chaney
Chair, Conservation Committee
Skagit Indivisible (Mount Vernon)

Colleen Chad Kuehl
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Wander Brewing (Bellingham)

Judith Atkins
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(Bellingham)

Bridget Moran
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North Sound Chapter of Trout Unlimited
(Bellingham)