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I am writing today in support of the proposed rulemaking to designate parts of the Cascade, Green, and Napeequa River systems as Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW).

As Washington State grapples with a booming population, the plight of our endangered salmon and orca, and the impacts of the climate crisis, now is the time to conserve our most valued freshwater sources for future generations, using all available tools. ORW designation is consistent with the billions of dollars that Washington has already invested in salmon recovery, river restoration, and ensuring clean drinking water. It is a critical step to protect what we have while we continue to invest in the hard work of restoring what we have lost.

The Cascade, Green, and Napeequa Rivers are incontrovertible candidates to be the first rivers to gain ORW designation in Washington. All three rivers—each flowing through protected areas—meet multiple regulatory criteria by exhibiting excellent water quality, providing unique recreational value, and having statewide ecological significance.

As a Washingtonian, I want to see the state's precious freshwater resources safeguarded. Designating these river systems would benefit Washington State's communities, wildlife, salmon, and local economies, and honor tribal treaty rights. I strongly urge Ecology to designate the Cascade, Green, and Napeequa River systems as the state's first Outstanding Resource Waters. Protecting the Cascade River is especially important to my family. Last winter, we introduced our three year-old son to the wonders of the bald eagle restoration and the wonders of our native ecosystem along the Cascade River's banks. Watching the eagles fish in its pristine waters one foggy, overcast morning is a lasting memory that my son still continues to talk about. Protecting the water quality of the Cascade River will continue to ensure the Skagit River system maintains a healthy fish population, which will help the eagle population continue to rebound. Growing up in western Washington during the 1990's, I have seen ecological restoration in many of our local rivers and I hope our state will continue to expand on these previous efforts. Timely action is crucial as our local wildlife face increased stressors due to climate change and development. I hope we (Washington State) can continue to be leaders in environmental protection and that my children can grow up in a healthier state ecologically than my generation. Taking action now to protect these three rivers will be an important step in this direction.