

Rebekah Benham

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.