



Kittitas County, Washington
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

District One
Cory Wright

September 27, 2023

Ms. Marla Koberstein
Department of Ecology
Water Quality Program
P.O. Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Submitted Via Online Comment Form

Re: Comments on Proposed Outstanding Resource Water Designations

Dear Ms. Koberstein,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Department of Ecology's (DOE) proposed rulemaking to designate four water resources as Tier III Outstanding Resource Waters.

I represent District One on the Kittitas County Board of Commissioners. Kittitas County is home to many waterways, many of which are vital lifelines for agriculture on which our area's families depend. As the home of the headwaters for the Yakima River, Kittitas County has also been at the forefront of navigating the tenuous relationships between municipal water use, in-stream needs, agricultural requirements, and a host of other interests with vital connections to this river's health. Additionally, Kittitas County was instrumental in the founding and continued success of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (YBIP) on which I am the county's delegated representative. While this rulemaking is currently limited to four waters not located in Kittitas County, I have significant concerns that this may extend to other bodies which may have significant effect on this county and others around the state. As neither I, nor my fellow commissioners, were aware of this pending rulemaking prior to very recently, I am requesting that public comment be extended to at least January 15, 2024.

Kittitas County's history over the last 20 years has been one of managing growth and water resources concurrently. Our history with DOE over this period has been tumultuous, but I am proud to say that the work of my predecessors and my continuation of the spirit of that effort has brought the county and DOE into a mutual understanding of needs to form a present partnership forged out of previous conflict. Additionally, the nationally recognized work of YBIP has brought new collaboration amongst resource agencies, local governments, tribal nations, agricultural interests, and environmental groups to conserve and renew floodplains and riparian areas while ensuring industry and local governmental needs are a critical part of the conversation.

I am extremely concerned that this rulemaking does not appear to foster the collaborative nature required for all parties to move forward as resources are protected. Future implementation of this rule to other waters without a full understanding of potential impacts now will continue to push the undesired belief that our state government agencies follow a pattern of little proactive communication to local governments, property owners and communities possibly affected by the enactment of this rule. I have personally dealt with our

resource agency representatives in Kittitas County, and I know this is neither their intent nor *modus operandi*, but unfortunately I seem to represent the minority of those who do – especially in rural counties and areas most dependent on occupations that make a living off of our land and water resources.

The protections in place have been more than adequate and my constituents are heavily burdened with current regulatory systems. Kittitas County, with 75% of its lands publicly owned, is heavily dependent on ensuring revenue needs are maximized off its remaining quarter of private land holdings. While this rulemaking has been put forth with a focus on resource protection, it is critical to ensure the perception of a heavy-handed approach is diminished. Extending the deadline to allow DOE to further research and answer the many unanswered questions presented by elected officials, interested parties and citizens should take precedence. There is no pending urgency here. Postponing a ruling until next year will be most appreciated.

In consideration of the broad implications surrounding this proposed rulemaking, I urge you to delay closure of the public comment period until at least January 15, 2024. Thank you again for this opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cory Wright', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cory Wright