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The Department of Ecology (Ecology) is proposing to adopt new rules for the Deschutes Watershed (Water Resource Inventory Area 13--WRIA 13. These new rules, would allow continued water drilling of new permit-exempt wells in the watershed without any requirement for mitigation, metering, or monitoring, and without consideration of impacts on streamflows or other habitat in the Deschutes. This is wrong. Ecology developed these rules without any apparent consultation with organizations and persons who are actively working in the watershed to restore and enhance it. This is the first public hearing, we need more study before we can proceed with discussions of these new rules. We must protect the fragile Deschutes River, and the watershed. We must protect the water levels for the fish, the wild-life, the biology of the area. This is a climate change issue, this is an issue that is changing rapidly; how much water is in the river over time, how much water is in the watershed.

The Squaxin Island Tribe provided preliminary comments to Ecology in October 2025, objecting to the proposed adoption of these new rules without providing further protection for streamflows. They also objected on the basis that the Deschutes Watershed and Restoration Committee (WREC), convened pursuant to state law to develop a plan to restore and enhance the watershed, overwhelmingly recommended revising the existing rules instream flow rules--adopted in 1980. The WREC also recommended other ideas for better water resource management. Why was this not done? We need a plan to restore this watershed, climate change issues are drying up the area, drying up the land. There is less water, we need to address this issue.

In its latest notice Ecology continues to limit the proposed new rules to simply allowing additional wells, and not addressing the instream flow issues or other recommendations of the WREC. This is wrong, new water wells will lower the water table. There is much new development in the area, we must be aware of how this will effect the water table. We must be aware of how this will effect the endangered species of fish, frog, and bird life (gophers too!). We cannot proceed with these rules without this study, this knowledge.