



## Washington Outstanding Resource Waters Designation

### Proposal Questions

#### Mission/History Of Organization

WA Wild protects and restores wild lands and waters in WA State through advocacy, education and civic engagement. Since our founding in 1979, we've helped to permanently protect nearly 3 million acres of Wilderness. WA Wild is committed to an approach based on building winning coalitions, highlighting compelling and

#### JEDI Efforts and Impact

Washington Wild began an organizational Diversity, Equity and Inclusion journey in 2019, working to demonstrate our commitment to protecting wild lands and waters for ALL of us. As a historically white-led organization, our board and staff has come to recognize that the impacts on our climate, clean air, and water and

diverse voices in support of protecting our remaining ancient forests, clean and safe drinking water, responsible recreation and wildlife habitat. We still adhere to these values, even while seemingly less organizations have the capacity or interest in working in partnerships and coalitions. Each year, we coordinate a dozen letters on conservation issues in WA State signed by more than 600 elected officials, local businesses, faith leaders and conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations. This creates capacity for organizations to weigh in on these issues, highlight a diversity of voices supporting conservation, and provide one-stop-shopping for key decision makers.

**Final Success**

Provide protection from future water quality degradation by designating approximately 400,000 acres of the Ruby/Granite Creek, Upper Sultan River, Upper Lewis River and Methow River watershed as Outstanding Resource Waters by the Washington Department of Ecology for the benefit of fish and wildlife, responsible recreation and tribal treaty rights and lifeways.

**Location Details**

environment are often felt first, and disproportionately, by people of color, indigenous peoples and less affluent communities. As an organization we are working to include more diverse perspectives on our board and staff internally, as well as change how, and to whom, we do outreach toward protecting Washington's wild lands and waters. We have established a DEI statement on our website, finalized a resolution to respect tribal treaty rights and lifeways and have begun providing tribal land acknowledgements at all of our events. We look forward to continuing to expand these efforts.

In 2023, we were successful in designating the first ever Outstanding Resource Water (ORW) designation in the state of Washington (Cascade, Napeequa and Green Rivers) with funding from The Conservation Alliance. For this second cohort of ORW designations, we are looking at four different watersheds to submit formal nominations for:

- Ruby/Granite Creek (138,600 acres, Skagit Watershed, Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest, Whatcom and Skagit Counties) –Ruby Creek (and its tributaries - Granite and Canyon Creeks) were found “eligible” Wild and Scenic Rivers by the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service for their scenery (Mountain vistas, waterfalls), recreation (Kayaking, fishing, hiking, camping), and fish (Dolly Varden, rainbow trout, cutthroat and bull trout). An ORW designation would add an important and permanent layer of water quality.
- The Upper Sultan River (43,600 acres, Skykomish Watershed, Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest, Snohomish County) – The area being proposed for ORW designation is above the Spada dam, beyond which provides clean and safe drinking water for the City of Everett and much of South Snohomish County. Last year, an unauthorized helicopter crashed in Copper Lake in this basin, raising concerns about impacts to water quality. The nomination area includes several hiking trails and Spada Lake provides non-motorized paddling opportunities.
- The Upper Lewis River (149,400 acres, Columbia Basin, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, Skamania County) – The Upper Lewis River flows from its source in the Mount Adams Wilderness through stretches of old-growth, past rocky cliffs, and into Swift Reservoir. The river provides valuable habitat for coho

salmon, steelhead, and bull trout and was identified by the EPA as one of 12 primary thermal refugia for the Columbia River.

- The Methow Headwaters (TBD between 20,000 and 80,000 acres, Methow Valley, Wenatchee-Okanogan National Forest, Okanogan County) – We are finalizing conversations with the Methow Valley Citizens Council (MVCC) in identifying the exact reaches in the upper Methow Watershed that would be best suited for an ORW designation (including Early Winters Creek and the Chewuch River). We plan to work with MVCC to identify and gather support from key local businesses, electeds and other stakeholders in the Methow Valley.

**Biodiversity in Project Area**

The four ORW designations we plan to nominate would have a positive impact on climate resiliency and biodiversity protection. The initial designations of the Cascade, Green and Napeequa Rivers in 2023 were recognized by President Biden’s Council of Environmental Quality as how to contribute to the America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge: “Many states and Tribal governments are already using their own authorities and resources to better protect America’s freshwater systems ... Washington recently protected almost 1,000 miles of rivers as Outstanding National Waters”

An ORW designation specifically focuses on protecting intact watersheds that are functioning and providing ecosystem benefits like clean water, cold water refugia, salmon habitat, responsible recreational opportunities and tribal treaty rights and lifeways. While local governments, Tribes and others are focused on the expensive and difficult work of restoring watersheds that we have lost, we need to simultaneously protect those investments by protecting the upper watersheds that remain intact. These areas are important to retain intact because they are more climate resilient than those that have been impacted.

Additionally, the proposed ORW nominations add water quality protections that increase connectivity for wildlife habitat between other protected lands.

- The Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission has described the Ruby and Granite Creek watershed as the American “donut hole” of the Skagit because it lacks the legislative permanent protections afforded to the west through North Cascades National Park Complex and to the east by the Pasayten Wilderness.

**Expected Economic & Recreational Impact**

The four proposed nominations for ORW designations would preserve and enhance recreational opportunities by protecting the future water quality and values of these areas.

- The Ruby/Granite Creek watershed includes a popular section of the North Cascades Scenic Highway before it descends into the scenic Methow Valley. Several trails including Devils Dome, Easy Pass, Canyon Creek, East Creek and Rainy Pass offer hiking, camping and climbing including adjacent areas of North Cascade National Park, Pasayten Wilderness and several 9,000 ft high peaks like Liberty Bell and Golden Horn. The Pacific Crest Trail meanders through the watershed along the Cascade Crest as well.

- The Upper Sultan proposal includes solitude hiking along the Boulder Lake, Greider Lake, Bald Ridge and Walt Bailey Trails as well as the Bear Creek and Nighthawk picnic areas and Cutthroat Lakes campground. Kayaking and other paddle sports are available on Spada Lake. Outdoor enthusiasts fill up their vehicles and their bellies at the small town of Sultan on Highway 2.

- The Lewis River proposal includes several trails that view the majestic lower, middle and upper Lewis falls along the Lewis River Trail. Other trails explore the Mount Adams and Indian Heaven Wilderness Areas including Stagman Ridge, Williams Mine, Cultus Creek and Salt Creek Trails. The area includes the Twin Falls Campground and the Lewis Horsecamp for equestrian adventures as well as a section of the Pacific Crest Trail.

- The Upper Methow sections under consideration for an ORW nomination include a variety of trails that accommodate hiking, mountain biking, equestrian use, climbing and camping.

- The Upper Sultan River nomination would provide important water quality protection on state lands in between the headwaters of the basin which are protected by the Wild Sky Wilderness and the Glacier Peak Roadless Area on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

- The Lewis River nomination would provide protection from future water quality degradation to much of the watershed which lies between its headwaters in the Mount Adams Wilderness to the east and the Indian Heaven Wilderness to the south.

- While the headwaters of the Methow are permanently protected by the Pasayten Wilderness, much of the rest of the upper watershed is intact forest and wild streams but managed as general forest by the Wenatchee-Okanogan National Forest. An ORW designation protecting water quality would be meaningful.

These opportunities make the Methow Valley a sought-after destination for so many people from Washington and beyond.



**Strategy & Timeline For Final Success**

ORW Process Overview – Washington Department of Ecology’s (WDOE) process for an ORW designation includes the following steps. First, a formal nomination(s) are submitted by an individual, organization, government or Tribe detailing the qualification and eligibility of the nominated river. WDOE then has 60 days to respond to each nomination indicating if it meets its eligibility requirements and makes a decision to begin a public rulemaking. Third, WDOE will announce the opening of the CR101 public rulemaking period which is an informal outreach period for the agency to consult with relevant tribes and local stakeholders about the nominations, including informational webinars. Fourth, WDOE will open a CR102 public rulemaking period which is a 70-day formal public comment period with an in-person public meeting for each ORW nomination and a deadline for comments submitted by writing or email. After the close of the CR102 period WDOE will make a decision on the proposed ORW designations.

April 2025

- WA Wild will lead efforts to garner support from conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations as well as local elected officials and businesses through a sign-on letter for ORW designations broadly as part of an upcoming comment period for the WA Department of Ecology’s Triennial Review (Target 100 signatories, with 40 from Whatcom and Skagit Counties)

----- START OF GRANT PERIOD -----

July 2025 – Tribal Outreach

**Key Decision Makers**

It is WDOE’s decision to designate an ORW. Our Coalition has established a stronger rapport with agency leaders during past ORW designations and a strong reputation for providing a thorough nomination, comprehensive outreach to Tribes and statewide support from recreation and conservation groups as well as a diversity of local supporters from the county and smaller gateway communities closest to the watersheds.

- Ruby/Granite Creek– We have reached out initially with the Upper Skagit Tribe who has expressed interest in the designation and have also reached out to the Swinomish and Samish Tribes. We expect to receive strong support from elected officials and local businesses from Bellingham, Whatcom County and Skagit County from our work on the Skagit Headwaters Campaign (2022) and the Cascade River ORW (2023) – both funded by TCA.

- Upper Sultan Basin – We have reached out but not yet connected with the Tulalip Tribes. We will build on our relationships in the small Sky Valley towns of Index, Gold Bar and Monroe from successful campaigns to designate the Wild Sky Wilderness and stop Sunset Falls Dam. Key local businesses targets include Outdoor Adventure Center (Index) Sky Valley Chamber of Commerce (Sultan) and Hardcore Paddles (Gold Bar).

- Upper Lewis River – Cascade Forest Conservancy has reached out to the Cowlitz Tribe which supported the Green River ORW and the Yakama Nation. A portion of this grant will support their outreach efforts to local elected officials

- Prior to submitting a nomination, WA Wild will lead outreach to the Upper Skagit, Swinomish and Samish Tribes (for the Ruby /Granite Creek ORW proposal) and the Tulalip Tribes (for the Upper Sultan ORW proposal).
- WA Wild will subcontract with Cascade Forest Conservancy to lead outreach to the Yakima and Cowlitz Tribes (for the Upper Lewis proposal)
- WA Wild will subcontract with Methow Valley Citizens will lead outreach to the Colville Tribe and local Methow indigenous groups (for the Upper Methow proposal)
- WA Wild will subcontract with Tom O'Keefe from American Whitewater to get quality photos of all four ORW proposal areas for use for advocacy and education.

#### August 2025 – Stakeholder Outreach

- WA Wild will work with GIS specialists at Pew Trusts to review a proposal map and a timber impact analysis GIS map for all four ORW proposals.
- WA Wild will lead outreach to 6-12 local stakeholders in Whatcom and Skagit Counties to gain feedback and support for a Ruby/Granite Creek ORW nomination and to 6-12 local stakeholders in Snohomish and King Counties around the Upper Sultan ORW proposal.
- WA Wild will subcontract with Cascade Forest Conservancy to lead outreach to local businesses, elected officials and conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations in southwest Washington (for the Upper Lewis proposal)
- WA Wild will subcontract with Methow Valley Citizens to lead outreach to local businesses, elected officials and conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations in southwest Washington (for the Upper Methow proposal)

#### September 2025 – Nominations Submitted to WDOE

- WA Wild will work with the Protect Washington's Water Coalition and Cascadia Law Group to finalize, review, and formally submit formal nominations for all four ORW proposals.
- WA Wild will coordinate local earned media attention (2 articles, 3 letters-to-the-editor, 1 OPED) around support for the each of the four ORW nominations
- WA Wild will coordinate requests for formal letters supporting ORW nominations from relevant Tribes

#### Nov 2025 – March 2026 – Preliminary Informal WDOE Public Outreach Period CR101

- WA Wild will coordinate outreach to local agencies including U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Department of

in Skamania, adjacent counties and Vancouver. We plan to build on the strong support generated for the Green River ORW.

- Upper Methow –Methow Valley Citizens Coalition will take the lead on local outreach (i.e., Twisp, Winthrop, Mazama). A portion of this grant would support their outreach to the Colville Tribe and local businesses and conservation/recreation groups. They expect to re-engage local endorsers of the successful mineral withdrawal designation from a decade ago.



Fish and Wildlife.

- WA Wild will work with other coalition members to provide supportive earned media (2 articles, 2 letters-to-the-editor) in local news outlets on the nominations.

April – June 2026 – Formal WDOE Public Comment Period CR102 (70 days)

- WA Wild will coordinate a support letters with local signers (in home counties) for each of the ORW proposals
- WA Wild will coordinate a series of broader support letters from (1) general supporters, (2) hunting and fishing groups; and (3) recreation groups.
- WA Wild will coordinate members of the coalition and other organizations to generate supportive individual comments through grassroots action alerts on the ORW proposals
- WA Wild will work with other coalition members to identify and support at least 3 individuals to testify in person at the public meetings for each ORW proposal.

----- END OF GRANT PERIOD -----

December 2026 – Designation Decision by WDOE

- Potential designation decision from WDOE for Ruby/Granite/Canyon Creek

**Elevate Voices**

WA Wild is a leader in the Protect Washington's Waters Coalition, comprised of organizations that value, and are committed to, elevating underrepresented voices as we work to achieve our missions of protecting wild lands and waters. The coalition includes Pew Trusts, Washington Wild, American Whitewater (AW), American Rivers, Trout Unlimited, Cascade Forest Conservancy (CFC) and Methow Valley Citizens Council (MVCC).

One of the key principles we all agree on is the importance of reaching out to local Tribes early on (before submitting a nomination). Often Tribes feel like they are invited to dessert by conservation colleagues late in the process or after the fact.

Another key focus is to make sure we have organizations in our coalition that have strong connections in the local communities and region where we are proposing an ORW designation. These are often rural communities that are underrepresented in a variety of ways and rely heavily on industries like natural resources and timber as well as outdoor recreation and tourism. We design our ORW proposals to get feedback from these communities before we finalize our nominations so that we can get the protection the watersheds deserve and avoid unintended impacts to these rural

**Measurable On-Ground Outcomes**

1. Play a leadership role in the Protect Washington's Waters Coalition during and in between bi-weekly meetings during the grant period.
2. Reach out and meet with 40 conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations, local businesses or elected officials about the ORW candidates soliciting their endorsement.
3. Coordinate and submit 4 sign-on letters totaling more than 100 signatories supporting the designation of the four ORW candidates in advance or during WA DOE's formal public comment period.
4. Generate turnout to public meetings and/or comments to WA DOE's formal comment period by 500 individuals.
5. Generate 3-6 articles, OPEDs, letters-to-the-editor or editorials supporting the ORW designation campaign in local media outlets.



communities.

Washington Wild has strong connections in Skagit and Whatcom Counties based on our leadership with the Skagit Headwaters and the Cascade ORW Campaigns. We regularly work with the Skagit Land Trust, Skagit Audubon Society, Triad Rafting and others. AW's Tom O'Keefe led efforts in the Sky Valley to stop the Sunset Falls Dam and has worked on recreation access efforts on the Sultan River and the Wild Sky Wilderness. CFC has been the key conservation group focused on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in SW Washington for decades and they have strong ties with local stakeholders. MVCC has deep ties to the Methow Valley which is the local community that will benefit and be impacted by that ORW designation.

**TCA Funding Plan**

The funding amount is sufficient to get the necessary advocacy done between July 2025 and late summer 2026 when we expect the formal public comment period close. We have met with WDOE to run through the candidates that we are considering, and we know that once we submit a nomination later this year, the agency will move forward with consideration of our nominations.

Additionally, many of our organizations have had to shift to play defense against the increasing attacks on our federal lands and federal employees. A grant of this size focused on a proactive protection campaign is an incredible opportunity to balance the defense work we are committed to with an opportunity here in Washington State to continue to pursue additional protections at the state level impacting federal public lands.

Lastly, ORW designations were added to the TCA strategic goals and this is an opportunity to pay that forward and build on support for a new conservation tool in Washington State.

**Confidential Items**

No

**How long it took to complete application**

**Other Relevant Application Details**

The funds requested in this TCA grant for the ORW designations during the grant period should move us through the end of the formal public comment period. If things are delayed, Washington Wild is confident that we have additional funding for this project that will allow us to complete all tasks, even if outside the TCA grant period to get us to a designation decision.

