



- [Close Window](#)
- [Print This Page](#)
- [Expand All](#) | [Collapse All](#)

Washington Outstanding Resource Waters Designation 2026/27

Applying Organization	Washington Wild	Application Date	5/13/2026
Applying Contact	Tom Uniack	Status	Submitted
Record Type	Member Collective	Created By	Tom Uniack, 5/14/2026, 1:05 AM
		Create Account	<input type="checkbox"/>

Project Overview

Project Name	Washington Outstanding Resource Waters Designation 2026/27	Requested Amount	\$40,000.00
Project/Campaign Name	Washington Outstanding Resource Waters Designation 2026/27		
Type of Project	Designation	Project Multiple Locations	
Project Location (State or Territory)	WA	Longitude	121°34'46.7"W
Latitude	47°57'56.9"N		

Organization Details

Organization Name	Washington Wild	Primary address for organization	305 North 83rd Street Seattle, Washington 98107 United States
Contact Name	Tom L Uniack	Contact Title	Executive Director
Contact Email Address	tom@wawild.org		
Annual Operating Budget	\$715,450.00	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	5	Main Phone	12063691252
Total Membership	10,000	Organization Website/Social Media Feed	https://wawild.org/
BIPOC-led	No	C-Suite Staff	

Grant Details

Awarded Amount		Awarded Date	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		Secondary Project Type	
Term Start Date		Term End Date	

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization	WA Wild protects and restores wild lands and waters in WA State through advocacy, education and civic	Location Details	In 2023, we were successful in designing the first ever WA Outstanding Resource Water (ORW)
--	---	-------------------------	---

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 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 less and less organizations have the capacity or interest in working in partnerships and coalitions. Each year, we coordinate more than 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, highlights a diversity of voices, and provides one-stop-shopping for key decision makers.

designations for the Cascade, Napeequa and Green Rivers) with funding from The Conservation Alliance. This year, we have nominated and received eligibility confirmation for four additional watersheds:

- Ruby/Granite Creek (138,000 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 layer of water quality protection and defend against the potential repeal of the Sawtooth and Liberty Bell Roadless Areas.
- The Upper Sultan River (43,000 acres, Skykomish Watershed, Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest, Snohomish County) – The ORW proposal area is above the Spada dam, which provides clean and safe drinking water for the City of Everett and much of South Snohomish County. In 2024, an unauthorized helicopter crashed in Copper Lake in this basin, raising concerns about impacts to water quality. The designation would provide additional protection for water quality, recreation trails and old growth forests if the Glacier Peak Roadless Area is repealed by the U.S. Forest Service.
- The Upper Lewis River (149,000 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. This designation would guard against water quality impacts from the potential repeal of the Spencer Ridge and Dark Divide Roadless Areas.
- The Methow Headwaters (430,000 acres, Methow Valley, Wenatchee-Okanogan National Forest, Okanogan County) – The proposal includes the upper Methow, Lost River, Early Winters Creek and the Upper Chewuch rivers in the Methow Basin. The designation would provide important protections if the Sawtooth, Liberty Bell, Pasayten Rim and Long Swamp roadless areas are repealed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Final Success	Provide protection from future water quality degradation by designating the Ruby/Granite Creek, Upper Sultan River, Upper Lewis River and Upper Methow River watersheds 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.	Impact on Climate and Bioversity	<p>The four ORW designations we are pursuing would have a positive impact on climate resiliency and biodiversity protection.</p> <p>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 upper watersheds are more climate resilient than those that have been impacted.</p> <p>Additionally, the proposed ORW nominations add water quality protection for contiguous landscapes that increase connectivity for wildlife habitat between other protected lands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and to the east by the Pasayten Wilderness. The proposed area connects one of the largest blocks of protected public land in the continental U.S., providing important habitat for listed species like grizzly bear, wolf, wolverine and lynx. Additionally, efforts are being pursued by local Tribes to provide fish passage above the Ross dam for salmon which would create access to this watershed for salmon spawning. • 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 national forest lands. • 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 much of the headwaters of the Methow are permanently protected by the Pasayten Wilderness, a roughly equal amount of intact forest does not have permanent legislative protection. Some of these areas currently have
----------------------	--	---	---

administrative protections under the 2001 Roadless Rule (currently under repeal) but the rest is managed as general forest by the Wenatchee-Okanogan National Forest. This designation helps connect this habitat for fish and other species.

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. 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 – WA Department of Ecology’s (WDOE) process for an ORW designation includes the following steps. First, a formal nomination(s) are submitted and WDOE will confirm its eligibility within 60 days (COMPLETED AS OF 2/25/26). Second, WDOE will within 60 days confirm the eligibility of the nominations (COMPLETED AS OF 4/25/26). Third, WDOE will announce the opening of a formal rulemaking initiating an informal consultation period with Tribes, agencies and local governments. Fourth, WDOE will open a formal 70-day public comment period including four in-person public meetings. Fifth, after the close of the public comment period, WDOE will make a decision on the proposed ORW designations.

February 2026

- Four ORW nominations submitted for Ruby/Granite Creeks, Upper Sultan Basin, Upper Lewis River and Methow Headwaters by the Protect WA Waters Coalition to WDOE

April 2026

- WDOE Finds all four nominations meet their eligibility requirements

July 2026

- WDOE expected to initiate a formal rulemaking focused on designation of the four nominated watersheds, starting a several month consultation period

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

September 2026 – June 2027 – Informal WDOE Consultation Period

- Coordinate requests for formal letters supporting ORW nominations from relevant Tribes (Tulalip, Upper Skagit, Swinomish, Sauk Suiattle, Yakama, Colville, Cowlitz, Methow Descendants)
- Subcontract with Cascade Forest Conservancy to lead outreach to the Yakima and Cowlitz Tribes and local stakeholders (for the Upper Lewis proposal) \$4,000
- Subcontract with Methow Valley Citizens Council to lead outreach to the Colville Tribe, Methow Descendants and local stakeholders (for the Methow Headwaters proposal) \$2,000
- Coordinate renewed outreach to local agencies and other key entities including U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington

Department of Fish and Wildlife, Snohomish PUD and Seattle City Light.

- Finalize and submit three support sign-on letters from (1) recreation groups and outdoor industry businesses; (2) hunter and angler organizations; and, (3) general support from WA elected officials, local businesses and conservation, recreation and wildlife groups.
- Work with other coalition members to provide supportive earned media (2 articles/OPEDS, 2 letters-to-the-editor) in local news outlets on the nominations.
- Meet with key elected officials and local stakeholders in the relevant counties for each of the four ORW nominations prior to the formal public comment period.

July – September 2027 – Formal WDOE Public Comment Period (70 days)

- Coordinate five separate formal public comment letters including one focused on local signers within the county(s) of each of the four ORW nominations and a general support letter for statewide supporters for all four nominations.
- Work with Tribes to submit formal support through comment letters
- Coordinate members of the coalition and other organizations to generate supportive individual comments through grassroots action alerts on the ORW proposals with a goal of 500 individual comments.
- 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.
- Work with other coalition members to provide supportive earned media (2 articles/OPEDS, 2 letters-to-the-editor) in local news outlets on the nominations.

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

October 2027

- Meet with WDOE staff to assess if there is any information they need leading up to a decision on designation.

November 2027

- Potential designation decision from WDOE for all four ORW nominations

Yes. Both outdoor industry businesses and local businesses in rural communities near ORW nominated rivers are a key source of support and one that can be increased significantly during this grant period. During the first effort to designate the first three ORW rivers (2023) there were 64 businesses that supported ORW designations (including 33 members of our WA Brewshed® Alliance and only 1 of the 21 TCA member companies in WA). This creates a great opportunity to potentially significantly increase the business supporters during the current designation

Key Decision Makers

It is WA Department of Ecology’s decision to designate an ORW. Our coalition has established a stronger rapport with agency leaders during past ORW designations and a reputation for providing a thorough nomination and comprehensive outreach to Tribes and local stakeholders.

- Ruby/Granite Creek– In advance of nomination, we have held more than 20 meetings with the Upper Skagit, Swinomish, Sauk-Suiattle and Samish Tribes, local elected officials in Whatcom and Skagit Counties, The Mt. Baker

Working With Business Community

Snoqualmie National Forest, WA Department of Transportation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We expect to receive strong support from Tribes and local stakeholders based on this outreach and previous work on the Skagit Headwaters Campaign (2022) and the Cascade River ORW (2023) – both funded by TCA.

- Upper Sultan Basin – We have held nearly 20 meetings with Tribes and key stakeholders leading up to the nomination, including the Tulalip and Snoqualmie Tribes, Snohomish Public Utility District, WA State Department of Natural Resources and local elected officials in Snohomish County. We will build on our relationships in the Sky Valley from past campaigns to designate the Wild Sky Wilderness and stop Sunset Falls Dam.

- Upper Lewis River – Cascade Forest Conservancy has reached out to the Cowlitz Tribe, Yakama Nation, Skamania County Commissioners and the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. A portion of this grant will support their outreach efforts to local elected officials in Skamania and adjacent counties and other stakeholders to build on the support generated for the Green River ORW.

- Upper Methow –Methow Valley Citizens Council has led more than 15 local outreach meetings pre-nomination. A portion of this grant would support their continued outreach to the Colville Tribe, Yakama Nation and Methow Descendants, local landowners, the Wenatchee-Okanagan National Forest and local elected officials in Okanogan County and the towns of Twisp, Mazama and Winthrop.

effort for the four ORW candidates. We plan to solicit signers onto a recreation letter that will include WA based recreation groups and outdoor industry businesses. We will work with TCA staff to engage their 21 members in WA state to consider signing on in support. We will also pursue support from local chambers of commerce.

Elevate Voices

Washington Wild began an organizational Diversity, Equity and Inclusion journey in 2018, 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 environment are often felt first, and disproportionately, by people of color, indigenous peoples and less affluent communities.

The Protect Washington's Waters Coalition is comprised of organizations that value, and are committed to, elevating under-represented voices. For each of our four nominations, we reached out with local Tribes (early and often) seeking their feedback prior to submitting a nomination.

Another key focus is to make sure we have organizations in our coalition that have strong connections in the local

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 (including key meetings with Tribes and stakeholders and strategic planning).
2. Increase the overall support list (including Tribes, elected officials, local businesses and other stakeholders) for Outstanding Resource Waters in WA State from 211 to 275 .
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 2-5 articles, OPEDs, letters-to-the-editor or editorials supporting the ORW designation campaign in local media outlets.

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 communities.

- Methow Valley Citizens Council, with the local relationships and credibility, is leading outreach efforts in the Methow Valley.
- Cascade Forest Conservancy, based in Vancouver, is similarly leading education efforts in southwest WA on the Lewis ORW.
- Washington Wild has strong connections in Skagit and Whatcom Counties based on our leadership with the Skagit Headwaters and the Cascade ORW Campaigns.
- American Whitewater plays a lead role in outreach on the Upper Sultan ORW. 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.

TCA Funding Plan

The funding amount is sufficient to get the necessary advocacy done between September 2026 and the end of 2027 leading to formal designations for the four nominated ORWs. We recently met with the WA Department of Ecology. They plan to formally initiate the public rulemaking in July 2026 and proceed with a consultation period through June 2027 followed by a 70-day public comment period starting in July 2027 with a decision by the end of 2027. Additionally, all four of our ORW candidates include important roadless areas that have contributed to the watershed's high water quality. TCA and WA Wild are aligned in working on both of these important issues to achieve the same goal – preserving water quality in these four landscapes. Lastly, we appreciate that ORW designations were added to the TCA strategic goals to build support for a new conservation tool in WA State when federal conservation tools are less available given the current administration and leadership in Congress.

Confidential Items

For the purposes of this grant application, I have included acreages of the entire nominated watersheds proposed for protection as Outstanding Resource Waters. Because, the designation would prohibit any future activities that would degrade water quality in the designated river and all tributaries upstream of the starting point, it is very much a watershed protection (which can be measured in acres). However, the Protect Washington Waters Coalition has not yet come to agreement as to the most appropriate measurement of the protections (i.e., acres vs. river miles). This decision will be made prior to final designation. For this reason, I would request that the acreages listed in this grant application not be shared publicly.

Other Relevant Application Details