

WAC 173-201A-330 Tier III—Protection of outstanding resource waters. Where a high quality water is designated as an outstanding resource water, the water quality and uses of those waters must be maintained and protected. As part of the public process, a qualifying water body may be designated as Tier III(A) which prohibits any and all future degradation, or Tier III(B) which allows for de minimis (below measurable amounts) degradation from well-controlled activities.

(1) To be eligible for designation as an outstanding resource water in Washington, one or more of the following must apply:

(a) The water is in a relatively pristine condition (largely absent human sources of degradation) or possesses exceptional water quality, and also occurs in federal and state parks, monuments, preserves, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, marine sanctuaries, estuarine research reserves, or wild and scenic rivers;

(b) The water has unique aquatic habitat types (for example, peat bogs) that by conventional water quality parameters (such as dissolved oxygen, temperature, or sediment) are not considered high quality, but that are unique and regionally rare examples of their kind;

(c) The water has both high water quality and regionally unique recreational value;

(d) The water is of exceptional statewide ecological significance; or

(e) The water has cold water thermal refuges critical to the long-term protection of aquatic species. For this type of outstanding resource water, the nondegradation protection would apply only to temperature and dissolved oxygen.

(2) Any water or portion thereof that meets one or more of the conditions described in subsection (1) of this section may be designated for protection as an outstanding resource water. A request for designation may be made by the department or through public nominations that are submitted to the department in writing and that include sufficient information to show how the water body meets the appropriate conditions identified in this section.

(3) After receiving a request for outstanding resource water designation, the department will:

(a) Respond within 60 days of receipt with a decision on whether the submitted information demonstrates that the water body meets the eligibility requirements for an outstanding resource water. If the submitted information demonstrates that the water body meets the eligibility requirements, the department will schedule a review of the nominated water for designation as an outstanding resource water. The review will include a public process and consultation with tribes.

(b) In determining whether or not to designate an outstanding resource water, the department will consider factors relating to the difficulty of maintaining the current quality of the water body. Outstanding resource waters should not be designated where substantial and imminent social or economic impact to the local community will occur, unless local public support is overwhelmingly in favor of the designation. The department will carefully weigh the level of support from the public and affected governments in assessing whether or not to designate the water as an outstanding resource water.

(c) After considering public comments and weighing public support for the proposal, the department will make a final determination on whether a nominated water body should be adopted into this chapter as an outstanding resource water.

(4) A designated outstanding resource water will be maintained and protected from all degradation, except for the following situations:

(a) Temporary actions that are necessary to protect the public interest as approved by the department.

(b) Treatment works bypasses for sewage, waste, and stormwater are allowed where such a bypass is unavoidable to prevent the loss of life, personal injury, or severe property damage, and no feasible alternatives to the bypass exist.

(c) Response actions taken in accordance with the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), as amended, or similar federal or state authorities, to alleviate a release into the environment of substances which may pose an imminent and substantial danger to public health or welfare.

(d) The sources of degradation are from atmospheric deposition.

(5) Outstanding resources waters can be designated for either Tier III(A) or Tier III(B) protection.

(a) Tier III(A) is the highest level of protection and allows no further degradation after the waters have been formally designated Tier III(A) under this chapter.

(b) Tier III(B) is the second highest level of protection for outstanding resource waters and conditionally allows minor degradation to occur due to highly controlled actions. The requirements for Tier III(B) are as follows:

(i) To meet the goal for maintaining and protecting the quality of Tier III(B) waters, sources of pollution, considered individually and cumulatively, are not to cause measurable degradation of the water body.

(ii) Regardless of the quality of the water body, all new or expanded point sources of pollution in Tier III(B) waters must use applicable advanced waste treatment and control techniques that reasonably represent the state of the art and must minimize the degradation of water quality to nonmeasurable levels where total elimination is not feasible. Nonpoint sources must use all applicable structural and nonstructural BMPs with the goal of reducing the degradation of water quality to nonmeasurable levels where total elimination is not feasible.

(6) Waterbodies designated as outstanding resource waters are listed under WAC 173-201A-332.

[Statutory Authority: Chapter 90.48 RCW and 40 C.F.R. 131.12. WSR 24-01-088 (Order 22-06), § 173-201A-330, filed 12/18/23, effective 1/18/24. Statutory Authority: Chapters 90.48 and 90.54 RCW. WSR 03-14-129 (Order 02-14), § 173-201A-330, filed 7/1/03, effective 8/1/03.]