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EMPLOYER GROUP APPLAUDS EPA MOVE TO MAKE WAY FOR CLEAN WATER RULE DEVELOPED BY STATE OF WASHINGTON

*Department of Ecology-developed clean water rule is significantly more rigorous
than prior standards, but is attainable*

OLYMPIA — A coalition of employer trade groups today applauded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announcement that it will rescind a federal water quality rule the agency previously had imposed on the State of Washington. The move makes way for implementation of a rigorous clean water rule developed by the State of Washington's Department of Ecology.

In February 2017, the employer trade groups requested that the EPA reconsider its earlier decision to reject the state-developed standards and impose a federal mandate in its place. The groups argued that the state's rule offered an extremely protective approach to water quality which was significantly more stringent than the water quality standards that were in place before development of these new standards. At the same time, they agreed that these stringent new state standards were achievable with significant investment and effort.

The employer group included eight primary petitioners to EPA: Northwest Pulp & Paper Association; American Forest & Paper Association; Association of Washington Business; Greater Spokane Incorporated; Treated Wood Council; Western Wood Preservers Institute; Utility Water Act Group; and Washington Farm Bureau.

"Like everyone, we want clean water for our state and for future generations, so we've been actively working with the Department of Ecology on this issue for years," said **Chris McCabe**, executive director of the Northwest Pulp & Paper Association. "A water quality standard is only meaningful when it's attainable. The state's original proposal recognized that, and EPA's decision to rescind its rule and allow the state rule to stand also recognizes that."

"Agriculture is the backbone of our state economy and water is the backbone of agriculture, so no one cares more about water quality than our members," added Washington Farm Bureau CEO **John Stuhlmiller**. "We look forward to working with the state Department of Ecology to implement the more balanced approach they had developed, which includes some of the most restrictive and protective water quality standards in the nation, protecting all communities across the state, including those who are most exposed to potential toxics in water and fish."

“EPA’s announcement recognizes Washington’s stringent, but attainable standards to protect human health for all communities, and we will work to see that this dynamic is ultimately maintained,” said AF&PA President and CEO **Donna Harman**. “Washington has a long record of scientifically-based environmental stewardship. In contrast, the 2016 EPA rule proposed for withdrawal imposed federally-mandated, unachievable standards that provide no measurable human health improvement.”

Gary Chandler, vice president of government affairs for the Association of Washington Business, said the EPA’s decision to accept the state rule means that everyone in Washington – regulators, permit holders, local governments, and others – can now focus on implementing the standards, knowing that investments in water quality improvement will result in both compliance and measurable improvement in water quality.

“Working together on implementing achievable standards developed by Washington stakeholders and Washington regulators will better serve all the citizens of the state than an unattainable standard that results in failure and uncertainty for permit holders,” he said.

In press statements when the Washington rule was originally announced, Gov. Jay Inslee and Ecology Director Maia Bellon voiced support for the state rule, noting it balanced protecting human health and the environment while helping local governments and businesses comply. The state’s protective-yet-attainable approach was also widely supported in editorials from newspapers across the state.

The state’s clean water rule was adopted and submitted to EPA after more than four years of public process, including multi-stakeholder consultation, Ecology technical science and policy review under the Administrative Procedures Act, a full State Environmental Policy Act review process, and multiple opportunities for public comment.

But the rule imposed by the EPA in 2016 – and now being rescinded – overturned the state’s work and would have created unattainable and technologically infeasible water quality standards for local governments and private entities alike.

“Most of the standards imposed on the state by EPA in 2016 could not be met with existing or foreseeable technologies,” said Chandler. “In contrast, the state-developed standards give local employers an opportunity to work on water quality improvement without the potential loss of family-wage jobs, and allow local governments to control costs for wastewater treatment while benefitting all ratepayers with meaningful water quality improvement.”