

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## EMPLOYER GROUP APPLAUDS EPA SUPPORT OF CLEAN WATER RULE DEVELOPED BY STATE OF WASHINGTON

*Rigorous but reasonable and protective Ecology clean water rule will stand*

**OLYMPIA** — A coalition of employer trade groups applauded today's decision by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to reconsider its previous ruling on the clean water rule developed by the State of Washington's Department of Ecology and now accept the state's submission. The Washington rule includes strong environmental and human health protections.

Today's decision comes more than two years after a petition was filed by the employer trade groups requesting that the EPA reconsider its earlier decision. The employer trade groups argued that the state's rule offered an extremely protective, yet feasible approach to water quality.

In February 2017, the employer trade groups filed its petition with EPA demonstrating the agency had unjustifiably usurped the state of Washington's authority to set water quality standards when, in November 2016, it rejected the stringent standards adopted by the state Department of Ecology. The group included eight primary petitioners: 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.

The employer trade groups appreciate the efforts of the EPA to objectively review their petition and the leadership of **Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers** in ensuring that state authority to set water quality standards is honored by EPA.

"From day one, our goal has been to promote balanced water quality standards that will enhance our already strong environmental and human health protections. Although extremely stringent, the Ecology rule is more technically and economically attainable," said **Chris McCabe**, executive director of the Northwest Pulp & Paper Association. "The EPA decision today corrects the agency's earlier decision to reject portions of the Department of Ecology rule. The state rule sets standards that are among the most restrictive and protective in the nation and provides broad protection of human health across all communities in Washington, including those who are most exposed to potential toxics in water and fish."

**Donna Harman**, President and CEO of the American Forest & Paper Association, said the state rule provides a measure of confidence that investments in water quality improvement will result in compliance with the standards and measurable improvement in water quality.

“We applaud the EPA’s actions today. The earlier EPA rule represented costly and ineffective regulatory overreach — plain and simple. That previous approach sets up a system for failure and permitting uncertainty that would detract from everyone’s efforts to improve environmental and health outcomes for Washington residents,” she said.

The former rule, as imposed by the EPA in 2016, would have created unattainable and technologically infeasible water quality standards for local governments and private entities alike.

In press statements when the Washington rule was 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.

**Gary Chandler**, vice president of government affairs for the Association of Washington Business, said the EPA rule would have been a disaster for Washington employers and communities.

“Most of the EPA standards imposed on the state could not be met with existing or foreseeable technologies and would have seriously endangered family-wage jobs at facilities across the state for both private companies and local government agencies,” said Chandler. “Approval of the state standards will 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.”

“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,” said 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. Working together will better serve all the citizens of the state,”