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EPA Proposes to Restore Protective Pollution Standards for Washington Waters

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Contact Information

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SEATTLE – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today announced a proposed rule to restore protective federal water quality standards for the state of Washington. When finalized, this action would help protect the health of Washingtonians and Tribal members who eat locally caught fish.

“At EPA, we know that protecting public health goes hand in hand with following science,” said **EPA Assistant Administrator for Water Radhika Fox** “This action exemplifies that connection by identifying science-based limits on harmful chemicals in Washington’s waters while advancing toward a clean water future, where people can safely eat the fish they catch.”

“It’s critical that fish from Washington waters are safe to eat, and the human health criteria are an important component of that,” said **Laura Watson, director of the Washington Department of Ecology**. “EPA’s proposal embraces the more protective standards that Washington Tribes and community members have championed, and we welcome this renewed commitment to safe, clean, healthy waters in our state.”

“The Tribe relies on clean water to exercise its Treaty rights and to protect the health of Tribal members, who continue to depend on fish and seafood as a fundamental part of our diet,” said **Patrick DePoe, Vice Chairman of the Makah Tribal Council**. “While the Tribe is disappointed in the long detour to get back to 2016 standards, it is never too late to do the right thing. Clean water will benefit the exercise of Treaty rights and all Washingtonians.”

Under the Clean Water Act, the agency is proposing limits (called “human health criteria”) for dozens of chemicals that pose a health risk. Over the objections of state and Tribal leaders, the previous administration rolled back protective water quality standards established by EPA in 2016. As a result of this rollback, water quality standards being implemented in Washington are inadequate to protect human health. This proposed rule follows through on the agency’s June 2021 commitment to restore protective, science-based human health criteria in the state.

EPA’s proposal would establish clear and vital protections while providing the state with flexibility to work constructively to address compliance challenges. The proposal also supports the agency’s commitment to protecting Tribal reserved rights in water quality standards in the Office of Water’s Tribal [Action Plan](#).

The agency will accept comment on this proposal for 60 days. EPA will also hold two virtual public hearings on this proposal. For more information, visit www.epa.gov/wqs-tech/federal-human-health-criteria-washington-state-waters.

This year, EPA is commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act. Since 1972, the Clean Water Act has achieved transformational progress. Waters that were once toxic and caught fire have been cleaned up and communities are returning to the water—to swim and to fish. However, significant challenges remain, and EPA is committed to working toward a clean water future for all Americans.

Background

Water quality standards define the water quality goals for a waterbody and provide a regulatory basis for many actions under the Clean Water Act, including reporting on water quality conditions and status; developing water quality-based effluent limits in National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permits for point-sources; and setting targets for Total Maximum Daily Loads.

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