Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

Meeting Summary
Outstanding Resource Water: Illinois River & Rough and Ready Creek

Rulemaking Advisory Committee Meeting #1
June 10, 2026, virtual meeting (Zoom)

List of Attendees

Rule advisory committee representatives present:

Stuart Blanco	Tidewater Contractors
Steve Burns	Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest
Zachery Collier	Kalmiopsis Guides Association
Michael Dotson	Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Tyler Ernst	Oregon Forest Industries Council
Keri Morin Handaly	Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
Eric Larsen	City of Grants Pass on behalf of Oregon Association of Clean Water Agencies
David Moryc	American Rivers
Brian Paul	Cave Junction
Shawn Simpson	Bureau of Land Management
Barbara Ullian	Friends of the Kalmiopsis
Ann Vileisis	Kalmiopsis Audubon Society

Government advisors:

Vaughn Balzer	Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries
Michelle Maier	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Kelly Meinz	Oregon Water Resources Department
Becky Anthony	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality staff:

Aron Borok, Tatyana Isupov, James McConaghie, Connie Dou, Trina Mayberry

Interested parties:

Don Elder (Pacific Rivers), Kirk Blaine (ODFW), Maelagh Baker (Illinois Valley resident), Julia Watson (Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest)

Translations or other formats

Español | 한국어 | 繁體中文 | Русский | Tiếng Việt | العربية

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Materials provided before the meeting – available on DEQ's rulemaking webpage

- Meeting 1 agenda
- Roster
- Charter
- Illinois River
  - Nomination Letter
  - Supporting Documents
- Rough and Ready Creek
  - Nomination Letter
  - Supporting Documents

Agenda

9 a.m.	Introductions and Rulemaking Advisory Committee Charter (Tatyana Isupov, facilitator)
9:30 a.m.	Project and Outstanding Resource Water Overview (Aron Borok, rulemaking lead)
9:50 a.m.	Break
10 a.m.	Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek ORW Scope and Qualifications (Aron Borok, rulemaking lead)
11:30 a.m.	Wrap Up & Next Steps (Tatyana Isupov, facilitator)
12 p.m.	Adjourn

Meeting Summary

I. Introductions and Rulemaking Advisory Committee charter

- Tatyana Isupov welcomed the group and reviewed Zoom logistics and meeting agenda.
- DEQ representatives, RAC members and agency advisors introduced themselves
- Tatyana Isupov reviewed the ground rules from the RAC charter.

II. Project Objectives, Background, and Schedule

Aron Borok gave a presentation covering the project objectives, schedule, and a general ORW overview. The presentation included:

a) Project purpose and objectives: DEQ is designating nominated portions of the Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek as Outstanding Resource Waters and adopting rules to protect their outstanding water quality values.
b) Rulemaking schedule: The process includes multiple RAC meetings (June 10, August 12, and tentatively September 2026), a public comment period and public hearing in October through November, and a proposal to the Environmental Quality Commission March 2027.
c) ORW regulatory background: Oregon's antidegradation rules include three tiers of water quality protection. Tier 3 (ORWs) provides the highest level of protection, prohibiting activities that lower existing water quality except emergency or restoration actions.
d) Current and proposed ORW context: Oregon currently has three waterbodies that are designated as ORWs in the state rule. The National Wild and Scenic Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek were nominated through the 2024 Triennial Review process and identified as high-priority due to exceptional resource values and strong public support.

Questions and Comments from RAC members:

1. Stuart Blanco asked, considering Clean Water Act downstream protection obligation, does ORW designation create any new regulatory requirements, reporting obligations, or permit review triggers for operations on the Rogue River, which receives approximately 25% of its flow from the Illinois River?
    a. Aron responded that because operations in the Rogue River are downstream of the designation, the ORW designation shouldn't affect operations in the Rogue River.
    b. Connie added that today's activities in the ORW constitute the baseline for water quality. Thus, current operations would generally be able to continue as they currently are.
2. Barbara Ullian shared a link to two recent National Forest press releases announcing the continuation of prohibitions to provide for visitor safety along the Wild and Scenic Illinois River due to the high public use during the summer.

Break

III. Geographic Scope and ORW Proposal Qualifications

Aron Borok reviewed the proposed geographic scope and qualifications for ORW designation for the Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek.

1. Wild and Scenic Illinois River: nomination submitted by Friends of the Kalmiopsis, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, and Kalmiopsis Audubon Society.
    a. Proposed geographic scope of designation includes the congressionally designated mainstem from the Forest Service Boundary downstream to Nancy Creek, all tributaries from the boundary to Lawson Creek (except Deer Creek), wetlands, small lakes, and ponds, excluding the lowest 3.8 river miles.
    b. Current Management
        i. The river is designated as a National Wild and Scenic River, an Oregon Scenic Waterway, and it partially lies within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.
        ii. Majority of the Illinois River watershed is managed by Rogue River–Siskiyou National Forest, with additional management by BLM, industrial forestland owners, and small private inholdings.
    c. Qualifications
        i. Illinois River exhibits exceptional water quality, outstanding ecological values and also has outstanding fisheries, scenic, botanical and recreational values. Based on these values and its status as a National Wild and Scenic River, State Scenic Waterway and critical habitat, the proposed waters qualify as ORWs.

2. Rough and Ready Creek: nomination submitted by Friends of the Kalmiopsis and Kalmiopsis Guides Association.
    a. Proposed Geographic Scope includes the entire watershed, including all tributaries, springs, wetlands, and lake, except a portion of Parker Creek as it transects private land. Parker Creek appears to lack flow during parts of the year.
    b. Current Management
        i. River was determined to be eligible for Wild and Scenic designation and partially lies within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. The watershed is primarily managed by the National Foerst with a small portion managed by BLM, and private land or private inholdings.
    c. Qualifications
        i. Rough and Ready Creek exhibits exceptional water quality, outstanding hydrologic, geologic, ecological and botanical values and outstanding recreational and aesthetics values. Based on these values and location within a Wilderness Area, the proposed waters qualify as ORWs.

Questions and Comments from RAC Members

a) Barbara Ullian noted that Rough and Ready Lake is in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. BLM manages Rough & Ready Creek as an area of critical environmental concern. Rough and Ready Creek is also critical habitat for coho salmon.
b) Maelagh Baker asked if DEQ could speak more to the ecology related to hyporheic flow mentioned in the slides.
    a. Barbara said the extensive hyporheic zone contributes to the aquifer. The lower part of Rough and Ready Creek is a losing system that contributes a lot of water to the underlying aquifer. The hydrology supports many springs on private lands and extensive wetlands.
    b. Connie added definition of Hyporheic Zone: It is an active transition area connecting open river channels to deep regional groundwater.
c) Tyler Ernst asked if Aron could speak to the proposed boundary for the Illinois river and how the designation could impact the watershed upstream of the designated boundary.
    a. Aron said we would get into that topic in the next meeting as we discuss the impacts of the proposed rule.
    b. If there are certain activities that are already occurring, ORW designation protects the initial water quality as of the date of adoption.
    c. ORW designation doesn't prohibit activities, but it does mean that any proposed activities must ensure they will protect the existing water quality within the proposed designation.
d) Vaughn Balzer shared a link that discusses the unique geology and setting of Rough and Ready Creek.
e) Eric Larsen asked, given that Illinois meets all the standards except temperature, do we see in the future a TMDL that would impact the Illinois River? Do we expect temperature limits for dischargers upstream?
    a. Aron replied that the temperature impairment is addressed separately in the Rogue River TMDL.
    b. Keri Morin Handaly wanted to note the temperature impairment in the area. In the Umpqua TMDL, they discussed DEQ offering buffers of ~120 feet for large waterbodies as being adequate for temperature improvements. If forest practices leave the buffers in place, it could improve naturally over time.
    c. Aron said the scope of the Rogue TMDL includes a lot of the tributaries within the Rogue basin - that's a separate process to improve the temperature and reiterated that the ORW project doesn't affect how waste load allocations are set or implemented in the TMDL.
    d. Connie - add that we really appreciate questions on the TMDL process - will take them back to the TMDL team for more information. RAC members should feel free to participate in the TMDL public comment process.
f) Ann Vileisis commented that many of the tributaries that flow directly into the Wild and Scenic reach contribute cool clear water —which helps the Illinois river.
g) David Moryc added that Rough and Ready Creek and the Illinois River are exceptional in many ways that support qualifications for ORW. Many align with the regulations that guide ORWs. He noted that the exceptional tributaries provide flow to the Illinois River, are critical habitat for listed coho and support strong populations of winter steelhead and fall chinook that support strong fishing and recreational economies in the lower Rogue as well.
h) Barbara Ullian requested a modification to the nomination to add the Darlingtonia Botanical Wayside, which would protect an associated wetland of the Illinois River.
    a. Aron shared an image of the Botanical Wayside and the actual forest service boundary (on the river). USFS land within the Forest Service boundary includes roughly the lower half of the actual wetland. The upper part of the wetland is BLM land and part of the BLM Eight Dollar Mountain Area of Critical Environmental Concern.
    b. Shawn confirmed that it is BLM land- part of the 8 Dollar Mountain ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern) that BLM manages. It's a small parcel that is BLM managed. If the RAC wanted to include it as part of this proposal it looks like it makes sense to BLM.

i) Zach Collier commented that the Illinois River water quality is important to support the economic activity of their business. He also commented favorably on the distinctive qualities of Rough and Ready Creek.
j) Barbara added that Silver and Indigo Creeks, tributaries of the Wild Section of the Illinois River, each provide ~ 20% of the flow to the Illinois River and therefore contributes water to the Rogue. Josephine Creek provides roughly 17% of the flow to the Wild and Scenic Illinois River just downstream of the Forest Service Boundary. Silver and Indigo Creeks are US Forest Service Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers and some of the most productive steelhead habitat in the Rogue and Illinois River Basins.
k) Aron asked the Forest Service if they had any comments or questions since they are the agency that manages the vast majority of the area.
    a. Steve Burns said that there is an overarching requirement to uphold water quality for the NW Forest Plan - especially in Briggs Creek where there may be some forest management for fire and fuels. Riparian protection provides protection to rivers, and where there is Coho, they uphold Endangered Species Act responsibilities. He also noted that populations of Chinook and steelhead, and a robust population of Pacific Lamprey are present as well.
l) Barbara added that the nominations rely on USFS and BLM studies and environmental analysis. Mentions of exceptional WQ and values are often the words of the agencies that manage the land.
m) Eric Larsen wondered about how it would impact the City of Cave Junction and temperature limits.
    a. Aron stated that whatever temperature limits would come through the TMDL would be applicable. He will check with Bill Meyers, Roque River Basin Coordinator at DEQ about the status of the TMDL.
    b. Notes that Cave Junction discharges 5 miles upstream of the designation, and since the nomination targets current water quality that discharge is already accounted for in the water quality. If there was ever any expansion of the discharge, the City would have to ensure that any expanded discharge would not result in degradation in water quality in the ORW designated waters.
n) Steve Burns would like more information on what the administrative requirements are for activities to manage recreational resources. For instance, what would be the requirements if there were restoration of the swinging bridge.
    a. Aron said we can consider this when we develop the rule language for any accommodations for construction or repairing recreational facilities, like those included for Crater Lake.

IV. Wrap Up and Next Steps

Tatyana Isupov noted that the only outstanding questions seems to be information about how the Rogue River TMDL requirements intersect with the ORW. DEQ staff will follow up prior to the next RAC meeting.

Continued Discussion from RAC

a) Stuart Blanco asked two final questions (1) Is there any mechanism by which ORW designation on a tributary could be used as a basis to petition for ORW or enhanced protections on the receiving water body — in this case the Rogue? (2) Has DEQ considered whether establishing the Illinois as an ORW sets a precedent or creates a logical basis for future ORW nominations on the Rogue itself?
    - Aron responded that DEQ takes nominations individually and evaluate them individually. At some point, someone could nominate the Rogue River as an ORW, and we would evaluate that on its own merits. As DEQ evaluates nominations, we consider what the impacts would be on various users of the waterbody.
b) Barbara Ullian notes that in one of the first slides, the photo of the confluence of the Illinois River and the Rogue showed the clarity of the Illinois was outstanding relative to the Rogue). This highlights the importance of the Illinois River to natural populations of salmon and steelhead on the Rogue.
c) Aron asked for suggestions for a venue for the second RAC meeting to accommodate a hybrid meeting.
d) Don Elder from Pacific Rivers commented: We are very supportive of expansion of Oregon's ORW program and believe Illinois and Rough and Ready are fine places to start. Thanks for your initiative and for the chance to listen in today.

e) Eric, referring to the temperature TMDL, asked if this rulemaking were to go through when it would come into effect.
    - Aron replied that we intend to go to the commission for ORW designation in March, and the TMDL is due in March or May 2027.
f) Eric asked if the ORW is approved, what is the timeline that point discharges would have to comply with these limits?
    - Aron would have to refer to our TMDL program if there will be temperature limits for dischargers. The ORW designation does not require or determine whether temperature limits.
    - Connie noted that specific permit timelines are addressed when the NPDES permit is renewed.
g) Ann asked for clarification that if the ORW sets the current baseline, when does that baseline come into effect?
    - Aron responded that ORW protects current existing water quality. If a temperature limit comes in before ORW designation, then the facility would have to meet that. If it happens after the ORW designation it would be an improvement in water quality and would become the new baseline. The ORW nomination does not impact that separate process.
h) Kirk Blaine offered that the ODFW Fish Habitat Distribution Map is a great resource - Both the Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek are habitat for ESA listed Coho, Fall Chinook, and Winter Steelhead.
i) Aron asked if any non-members wanted to address the committee.
    - Kirk Blaine (Wild Salmon Center) said the fish habitat values were covered well. He wanted to highlight how the fall Chinook Salmon are key to providing for the commercial fishing operation off the coast. Protecting these waters is critical to supporting the economic activity in those fisheries.
j) Connie added a little information regarding the Cave Junction questions referring to the antidegradation Tiers. Tier 3 protection is mainly applicable to parameters that have higher water quality than water quality standards. The TMDL addresses parameters that aren't meeting WQ standards (temperature). The TMDL brings the water body into Tier 1. The ORW doesn't change the temperature limit - the TMDL addresses temperature because it does not currently meet the temperature standard.

Tatyana Isupov adjourned the meeting at 11:01 a.m.

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