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Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Aron Borok, Water Quality Standards Specialist

October 9, 2024

Ch'ee-la xwii-nvtlh-t'e,

I am writing on behalf of the Northwest American Indian Coalition to express our strong support for the designation of the nominated reaches of the Illinois River and its tributary, Rough and Ready Creek, as Oregon Outstanding Resource Waters. These pristine waterways, fed by remote tributaries and springs, are essential to the health and well-being of both the natural environment and the communities that depend on them. They provide cold, clear water to the Rogue River, supporting critical runs of Chinook, steelhead, coho, and the sacred lamprey, while also playing a vital role in the health and cultural well-being of Indigenous communities in Southwestern Oregon and Northeastern California.

The health of these rivers is inseparable from the health of the fish and wildlife that depend on them—and ultimately, the health of the people who rely on these species for food, cultural practices, and spiritual connection. The lamprey, in particular, holds deep cultural and spiritual significance to our people, symbolizing resilience and continuity. The continued survival of this species, alongside salmon and other fish, is critical to our cultural identity and sustenance. Protecting the Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek as Outstanding Resource Waters will ensure that these species, which have sustained our people for generations, continue to thrive in their natural habitats.

Our organization is dedicated to honoring our ancestral heritage, fostering inter-tribal solidarity, and advocating for the well-being of present and future generations. This commitment includes protecting the purity of water, which is the lifeblood of all living things. We recognize that the health of our rivers is intrinsically linked to the health of our communities. Clean, unspoiled waters mean thriving ecosystems that not only sustain fish and wildlife but also provide safe, pure water for human use—essential for the physical and spiritual well-being of all.

The nomination of the Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek for Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW) designation is crucial for protecting these rivers from the ongoing and future threats posed by mining and other harmful activities. The ORW designation will ensure that the exceptional water quality of these rivers is preserved, safeguarding critical habitats that support not only fish and lamprey but also the overall ecological and cultural health of the region. The cold-water refugia provided by these rivers are vital for the survival of fish populations, especially as climate change intensifies.



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The goals of the Clean Water Act's ORW designation—to prevent the degradation of high-quality waters—are ones we fully support. The Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek, with their cold, clear waters, undoubtedly merit the highest level of protection from future degradation. Protecting these waters will ensure that they continue to provide the essential habitat and clean water necessary for the survival of species like salmon and lamprey, which are central to both the ecological balance and the cultural fabric of the Tribal nations and communities of this region.

We understand that existing legal water uses will not be affected by this designation, but it is critical to restrict future activities that could degrade the exceptional water quality of these rivers. Protecting the Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek from potential threats, such as mining, will safeguard these waters for generations to come, ensuring they remain a source of life and well-being for both wildlife and people.

In 2017, Tribal nations in Oregon and California supported the designation of the North Fork Smith River as an Outstanding Resource Water to protect its water quality. We believe it is time to extend the same protection to the Illinois River and Rough and Ready Creek, ensuring that these sacred waterways remain healthy and vibrant for fish, lamprey, wildlife, and the human communities that depend on them.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We strongly urge you to move forward with the Outstanding Resource Water designation to protect these vital waters for the health and well-being of all who rely on them.

Shu' 'aa-shii nin-la (thanking, I am to you)!

Katrina Thompson-Upton

She/her/hii | Chit-dee-ni', T'uu-du'-dee-ni'

Founder | Board Chair

Northwest American Indian Coalition, Inc.

Nuu-wvn srxii-xe xuu-srxii-xe hii-chu xuu-srxii-xe hii-chuf xaa-ma

(For our children, their children and their children)