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27 COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY
28 AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

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1
2 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

3
4 SUQUAMISH TRIBE, PYRAMID LAKE)
5 PAUITE TRIBE, ORUTSARARMUT) Case No.
6 NATIVE COUNCIL, COLUMBIA)
7 RIVERKEEPER, and SIERRA CLUB,) COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND
8) INJUNCTIVE RELIEF
9 Plaintiffs,)
10 v.) (Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1251 *et seq.*;
11) Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. § 551
12) *et seq.*)
13 ANDREW WHEELER, in his official)
14 capacity as Administrator of the United States)
15 Environmental Protection Agency; UNITED)
16 STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION)
17 AGENCY,)
18 Defendants.)

19 INTRODUCTION

20 1. Congress declared a single yet sweeping objective for the Clean Water Act
21 (“CWA”): “to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the
22 Nation’s waters.” 33 U.S.C. § 1251(a). The Act embodies a cooperative federalism framework
23 that empowers regulators at the federal, state, and tribal levels to work together to pursue this
24 objective nationwide. Section 401 of the Act is an integral component of this cooperative
25 framework. Through this provision, Congress ensured that states and authorized tribes could
26 protect their waters and local environments by giving them broad power to grant, deny, or
27 condition approval for a wide array of projects requiring federal licenses, permits, and approvals.

28 2. The balance between the federal government, states, and federally recognized
Indian tribes reached by Congress in Section 401 has worked well for decades. In 1970,
Congress passed Section 401’s predecessor, section 21(b) of the Water Quality Management Act
of 1970, which served a similar federalist purpose, delegating broad authority to states. In

1 passing the 1972 amendments to the CWA, Congress made only minor changes to the provision,
2 and only one—a directive to EPA to establish test procedures for the analysis of pollutants that
3 must be required in order to approve a project under Section 401—that bears on how the Section
4 is implemented. Since the passage of the 1972 CWA amendments, Congress has hardly altered
5 Section 401 at all because there was no reason.

6 3. Recognizing Congress’s intent, the Supreme Court, as well as lower courts, have
7 interpreted the statute as granting wide latitude to states and tribes to condition and deny federal
8 permits for environmentally harmful projects that result in discharges into local waters. The
9 Environmental Protection Agency’s (“EPA”) guidance and implementing regulations pertaining
10 to Section 401 have, since the provision’s passage, echoed this view of expansive state and tribal
11 authority. States and tribes around the country have come to rely on the consistent agency
12 guidance and practice on Section 401. This status quo arrangement has worked well with tens of
13 thousands of federal permits requiring certification every year by a state or tribe.

14 4. Plaintiffs challenge a final rule promulgated by the EPA upending the
15 longstanding regulations interpreting CWA Section 401. *Clean Water Act Section 401*
16 *Certification Rule*, 85 Fed. Reg. 42,210 (July 13, 2020) (“Section 401 Rule” or “Final Rule”).
17 By promulgating the rule, EPA has upset the federal/state/tribal balance and substantially
18 narrowed the authority of states and tribes to protect themselves from the harmful environmental
19 impacts of federally licensed projects resulting in discharges into their waters. EPA has made
20 these major revisions for reasons that are contrary to the objectives of the CWA, prioritizing the
21 development of environmentally ruinous fossil fuel infrastructure over the integrity of the
22 nation’s waters.

23 5. Plaintiffs Tribes are federally recognized Indian tribes. The Pyramid Lake Paiute
24 Tribe was approved for “Treatment in the same Manner as a State (“TAS”) for purposes of CWA
25 Section 401 in January 2007. Plaintiff Tribes rely on Section 401 provisions that are essential
26

1 for the protection of their waters, fisheries, and tribal resources. Plaintiff Tribes work either
2 directly or in cooperation with states and EPA to ensure that discharges into the waters they
3 depend upon occur only in compliance with all relevant laws and regulations.

4 6. Plaintiffs Columbia Riverkeeper and Sierra Club are environmental advocacy
5 organizations that partake in Section 401 proceedings as part of their broader toolkits to protect
6 the integrity of the Nation’s waters. For example, both organizations played significant roles in
7 the campaign against the construction of the environmentally destructive Millennium Bulk Coal
8 Terminal, a major fossil fuel project that was denied Section 401 certification.

9 7. The Section 401 Rule exceeds the authority granted to EPA by Congress in the
10 CWA. As the Supreme Court has observed, the Act strikes a delicate balance between federal
11 and state- or tribal-level regulators in accord with the principles of cooperative federalism.

12 8. The Section 401 Rule is also arbitrary and capricious. EPA failed to explain its
13 decision to deviate from the agency’s longstanding, prior interpretation of CWA Section 401,
14 and EPA failed to consider important aspects of the problem, including the effects of stripping
15 away a crucial tool of states and tribes seeking to protect waters and communities in their
16 jurisdictions.

17 9. The Final Rule was also promulgated without observing requisite procedures
18 mandated by law. Specifically, EPA failed to conduct meaningful consultation with tribal
19 authorities as required by Executive Order 13,175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian
20 Tribal Governments and EPA’s May 2011 Policy for Consultation and Coordination with Indian
21 tribes.

22 10. For these violations of law, Plaintiffs ask the Court to vacate and set aside the
23 Section 401 Rule, enjoin reliance on the Section 401 Rule, and reinstate the prior CWA
24 regulations in force.

1 JURISDICTION AND VENUE

2 11. This Court has jurisdiction over this action under 28 U.S.C. § 1331 (federal
3 question). This action is brought pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act (“APA”), 5
4 U.S.C. §§ 701–06.

5 12. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e), as some Plaintiffs
6 reside, have offices, and have members in California, and many of the consequences of the
7 defendants’ violations of the law giving rise to the claims have occurred or will occur in this
8 district.

9 INTRADISTRICT ASSIGNMENT

10 13. This case is properly assigned to the San Francisco Division or the Oakland
11 Division under Civil L.R. 3-2(c) because some plaintiffs and their members are located in
12 counties within those districts.

13 PARTIES

14 A. Plaintiffs

15 14. Suquamish Tribe is a signatory to the 1855 Treaty of Point Elliott, one of the
16 Stevens Treaties, named after the U.S. negotiator and Washington Territorial Governor Isaac
17 Stevens. In a series of treaties with the U.S. government in 1854 and 1855, the Indian tribes of
18 what is now Puget Sound and the Washington coast ceded their aboriginal lands to the United
19 States and retained or reserved certain lands, sovereignty, as well as fishing rights in their usual
20 and accustomed fishing grounds, and hunting and gathering rights on open and unclaimed lands.

21 15. The Suquamish Tribe is located on the Port Madison Indian Reservation in
22 Suquamish, Washington and is in Kitsap County. There are approximately 1,100 enrolled
23 Suquamish Tribal members. The Suquamish Tribe is a federally recognized Indian tribe with a
24 governing body recognized by the Secretary of the Interior. This action is brought by the
25 Suquamish Tribe on its own behalf and on behalf of its members *parens patriae*. By bringing
26

1 this action, the Suquamish Tribe does not waive its sovereign immunity from suit.

2 16. The Suquamish Tribe relies on land and resources in the Salish Sea and along its
3 shorelines for traditional, commercial, economic, and cultural purposes. The Suquamish Tribe’s
4 “usual and accustomed” treaty-reserved fishing grounds extend well beyond the Port Madison
5 Reservation boundaries and includes marine waters of Puget Sound from the northern tip of
6 Vashon Island to the Fraser River in Canada, including Haro and Rosario Straits, the streams
7 draining into the western side of Puget Sound and Hood Canal. The Suquamish Tribe actively
8 protects all of its treaty-reserved natural resources through avoidance of impacts to habitat and
9 natural systems throughout its aboriginal territory in Western Washington. The Suquamish Tribe
10 needs to ensure protection and restoration of the treaty reserved rights, resources, and habitats,
11 and to safeguard the health, livelihoods, and wellbeing of Suquamish Tribal members for the
12 next seven generations.

13 17. Since time immemorial, the Suquamish have lived, fished, hunted, and gathered
14 in this area. Salmon and shellfish play a central role in the Tribe’s subsistence, economy,
15 culture, spiritual life, and day-to-day existence. These treaty-reserved resources and the ability
16 to continue traditional activities require a healthy ecosystem in the Salish Sea. Members of the
17 Suquamish Tribe use and enjoy areas throughout the Salish Sea to exercise their treaty-reserved
18 fishing and shellfishing rights and for spiritual, cultural, aesthetic, subsistence, and commercial
19 purposes. The Suquamish Tribe is directly harmed by EPA’s attempts to dilute the authority
20 under CWA Section 401 of tribes eligible for TAS to review, set conditions upon, and deny
21 federal licenses for activities that may discharge waters into its jurisdiction.

22 18. When EPA proposed the challenged Section 401 regulation, the Suquamish Tribe
23 submitted substantial and substantive comments.

24 19. The Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe is a federally recognized Indian tribe with
25 approximately 2,288 enrolled members, based on the 477,000-acre Pyramid Lake Reservation
26

1 located thirty-five miles northeast of Reno, Nevada. This action is brought by the Pyramid Lake
2 Paiute Tribe on its own behalf and on behalf of its members *parens patriae*. By bringing this
3 action, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe does not waive its sovereign immunity from suit.

4 20. Pyramid Lake is a 125,000-acre terminus desert lake fed by the Truckee River
5 which lies entirely within the boundaries of the Pyramid Lake Reservation. As a terminus lake,
6 Pyramid Lake has no outlet. Pyramid Lake is an important and central cultural and spiritual
7 resource of the Tribe, and also provides fishing and recreational activities that are a significant
8 source of tribal employment and revenue. In addition, Pyramid Lake is the only habitat in the
9 world for the endangered Cui-ui fish, and also is prime habitat for threatened Lahonton Cutthroat
10 Trout. In its native Numu language, the Pyramid Lake Paiute people are called *cui-ui ticcutta*,
11 which means Cui-ui eaters.

12 21. The Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe's application for TAS was approved by the EPA
13 on January 30, 2007. The Tribe developed and implements EPA-approved tribal water quality
14 standards within the reservation—including the first water quality standards ever developed for
15 Pyramid Lake. The Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe is directly harmed by EPA's attempts to dilute its
16 authority under CWA Section 401 to review, set conditions upon, and deny federal licenses for
17 activities that may discharge waters into its jurisdiction.

18 22. When EPA proposed the challenged Section 401 regulation, the Pyramid Lake
19 Paiute Tribe submitted substantial and substantive comments.

20 23. Orutsararmiut Native Council is a federally recognized sovereign tribal
21 government responsible for the health, safety, and well-being of its citizens in Bethel, Alaska,
22 located along the Kuskokwim River. Its mission is to promote the general welfare, enhance
23 independence, encourage self-sufficiency/self-motivation, enhance quality of life, and preserve
24 cultural and traditional values of the Tribe, and to exercise tribal authority over resources
25 through educational, economic, and social development opportunities. Orutsararmiut Native
26

1 Council brings this action on its own behalf and on behalf of its citizens *parens patriae*. By
2 bringing this action, Orutsararmiut Native Council does not waive its sovereign immunity from
3 suit.

4 24. Orutsararmiut Native Council has adopted a resolution opposing the proposed
5 Donlin Gold Project and has engaged in administrative and legal processes associated with
6 permits for the mine. The Project would be located along a tributary to the Kuskokwim River
7 upstream from Bethel and would be the world's largest single pure gold mine. The proposed
8 mine requires a CWA Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and
9 accordingly, a Section 401 water quality certification from the state of Alaska. Since submitting
10 comments on the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's notice that Section 401
11 certification review was underway in July 2018, Orutsararmiut Native Council has remained
12 engaged in the administrative process involved with Alaska's issuance of the Section 401
13 certification. The issue is currently on appeal before an Alaska administrative law judge.
14 Orutsararmiut Native Council asserts that Alaska may not issue the certification because it does
15 not have reasonable assurance that the Project will meet the state's water quality standards for
16 mercury and temperature or that existing uses for fish habitat will be protected.

17 25. Orutsararmiut Native Council is vulnerable to environmental harm from changes
18 to Section 401 as it depends upon the state to certify federally licensed activities. For tribes
19 without authority to implement tribal water quality standards, the Final Rule will limit the ability
20 to provide input in determining whether to grant Section 401 certifications or developing
21 conditions on 401 certifications that would serve to protect their interests from the impact of
22 project actions.

23 26. Columbia Riverkeeper is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization with
24 approximately 16,000 members and supporters in Oregon and Washington. Its principal place of
25 business is in Hood River, Oregon. Columbia Riverkeeper's mission is to protect and restore the
26

1 water quality of the Columbia River and all life connected to it, from the headwaters to the
2 Pacific Ocean. To achieve these objectives, Columbia Riverkeeper operates scientific,
3 educational, and legal programs to protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and human
4 health throughout the Columbia River Basin. Columbia Riverkeeper’s vision is to restore clean
5 water and recover healthy, abundant populations of salmon and other species that support both
6 tribal and non-tribal fishing. Columbia Riverkeeper’s members, including member Diane L.
7 Dick, catch and eat fish caught in the Columbia River, drink water from the river, and recreate on
8 and along the river.

9 27. Columbia Riverkeeper submitted comments on EPA’s proposed CWA Section
10 401 regulations, and Columbia Riverkeeper and its members have been deeply involved in
11 Section 401 decisions for many years. Most recently, on May 7, 2020, the Washington
12 Department of Ecology (“Ecology”) issued Section 401 certifications with conditions to ensure
13 water quality standards were met for eight federal hydroelectric facilities on the Columbia and
14 Snake Rivers in Washington. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers challenged the CWA Section
15 401 conditional certifications before the state adjudicatory board; Columbia Riverkeeper has
16 moved to intervene to defend Ecology’s Section 401 conditional certifications.

17 28. Columbia Riverkeeper has also been focused on Ecology’s CWA Section 401
18 certification denial for the Millennium Bulk Terminals—Longview project, a massive coal-
19 export terminal proposed along the banks of the Columbia River in Longview, Washington. On
20 September 26, 2017, Ecology denied the CWA Section 401 certification entirely, based on
21 failure of Millennium to provide reasonable assurance that water quality standards would be met
22 and failure to comply with Washington’s State Environmental Policy Act. Columbia
23 Riverkeeper has intervened in state and federal court litigation to help defend Ecology’s Section
24 401 certification denial.

25 29. Sierra Club is one of the oldest environmental organizations in the United States.

1 Sierra Club is incorporated in the state of California as a Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation
2 with headquarters in Oakland, California. The organization has over 779,000 members
3 nationwide and local chapters across the country. Sierra Club is dedicated to protecting and
4 preserving the natural and human environment, and its purpose is to explore, enjoy, and protect
5 the wild places of the Earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the Earth's
6 ecosystems and resources; and to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality
7 of the natural and human environments.

8 30. Sierra Club and its members regularly participate in state proceedings under
9 Section 401. Examples of Section 401 proceedings in which Sierra Club and its members are
10 currently is engaged include the following:

- 11 • Review by the state of California of relicensing of hydroelectric dams,
- 12 • Review by the state of Alaska of a proposed copper, gold, and molybdenum mine,
- 13 • Review by the state of Minnesota of a proposed tar sands pipeline, and
- 14 • Review by the state of Oregon of a proposed liquefied natural gas export terminal.

15 31. Sierra Club and its members have relied upon and continue to routinely rely upon
16 the CWA Section 401. In California, Sierra Club, through its participation in the Foothill Water
17 Network, has participated in the Section 401 process regarding the Federal Energy Regulatory
18 Commission's ("FERC") relicensing of the Yuba-Bear hydroelectric project. Sierra Club
19 submitted comments opposing the operator's request for a determination that California had
20 waived CWA Section 401 authority and requested rehearing of FERC's determination of waiver.
21 On August 17, 2020, Sierra Club appealed FERC's determination that California had waived
22 CWA Section 401 authority to the 9th Circuit. By seeking to preserve California's authority to
23 impose conditions on this project, Sierra Club works to protect, *inter alia*, the interests of Sierra
24 Club members who recreate in and on the rivers near the project's component dams.

25 32. In Alaska, on August 24, 2020, Sierra Club submitted comments on an
26 application for CWA Section 401 certification for the proposed Pebble mine, an open pit copper,

1 gold, and molybdenum mine in the headwaters of the Bristol Bay watershed. Sierra Club argued
2 that there is no reasonable assurance the project will comply with water quality standards. The
3 Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation has yet to issue a decision on the application
4 for CWA Section 401 certification. Sierra Club's work here supports the interests of Sierra Club
5 members like Todd Radenbaugh, who fishes in and hikes and hunts around Bristol Bay.

6 33. In Oregon, Sierra Club has been extensively involved in the CWA Section 401
7 process for the Pacific Connector Gas Pipeline and Jordan Cove liquefied natural gas export
8 project. Sierra Club submitted comments to the state of Oregon regarding the joint CWA
9 Section 401 application on August 6, 2018. Oregon denied certification in May 2019. When the
10 applicants later asked FERC to determine that this denial was too late and was therefore
11 ineffective, Sierra Club, who was already a party in the pertinent FERC docket, submitted
12 comments to FERC supporting the state. This issue remains pending before FERC.

13 34. In Minnesota, Sierra Club has been actively engaged in the review by the state of
14 an application under CWA Section 401 for a proposed tar sands pipeline. With its partners,
15 Sierra Club submitted comments on the state's draft permit on April 10, 2020 and currently is an
16 intervenor in an administrative hearing proceeding under state law to review specific factual
17 questions about the pipeline's impacts to water quality and whether the project can be certified
18 under Section 401. Sierra Club members, including Jami Gaither, live and recreate along the
19 pipeline's proposed route, which would pass through some of Minnesota's most pristine
20 waterways and wetlands.

21 35. When EPA proposed the challenged CWA Section 401 regulation, the Sierra Club
22 submitted substantial and substantive comments.

23 B. Overarching Interests

24 36. EPA failed to conduct meaningful government-to-government consultation with
25 the Suquamish Tribe, Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, and Orutsararmut Native Council on the
26

1 changes to the CWA Section 401 regulations, violating Executive Order 13,175, Consultation
2 and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments and EPA's policies regarding Tribal
3 Consultation and Coordination and its Policy for the Administration of Environmental Programs
4 on Indian Reservations. EPA also has a legal obligation under the United States' general trust
5 responsibility to protect tribal lands and treaty-reserved resources, including the water that flows
6 through and over tribal lands and the natural resources that depend on those waters. Tribal treaty
7 rights are often dependent on clean water and productive ecosystems. EPA's changes to CWA
8 Section 401 regulations undermine that trust responsibility and fail to address treaty rights.

9 37. If the Section 401 Rule is allowed to stand, all of the Plaintiffs and their members
10 will suffer significant additional harm. The new rule leaves Plaintiffs and their citizens and
11 members more vulnerable to environmental degradation because the new rule would limit review
12 of projects to only a subset of the large number of environmentally harmful activities that
13 currently are covered by Section 401. The scope of the review certifying authorities would be
14 permitted to engage in, and the conditions certifying authorities could impose, would be far less
15 comprehensive. As a result, far fewer federally permitted activities that could degrade the
16 quality of state and tribal waters will be curtailed and mitigated. Plaintiffs' citizens and members
17 will suffer from increased impairment of their local waterways and wetlands.

18 C. Defendants

19 38. Andrew Wheeler, the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection
20 Agency, is sued in his official capacity. Mr. Wheeler has responsibility for implementing and
21 fulfilling the duties of the EPA, including the administration of the CWA. Mr. Wheeler signed
22 the CWA Section 401 Rule on June 1, 2020.

23 39. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, a federal agency charged with
24 administering the CWA.

1 BACKGROUND

2 I. SECTION 401 OF THE CLEAN WATER ACT

3 40. The overarching objective of the CWA “is to restore and maintain the chemical,
4 physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters.” 33 U.S.C. § 1251(a).

5 41. The Act protects waters from pollution, and from damage or destruction from
6 dredging or filling, by prohibiting “the discharge of any pollutant by any person” except in
7 compliance with the Act’s permitting requirements and other pollution-prevention programs. *Id.*
8 § 1311(a) (incorporating *id.* §§ 1312, 1316, 1317, 1328, 1342, and 1344). The Act followed and
9 sought to reverse years of failed efforts to protect and clean up the Nation’s waters through the
10 implementation of state-based water quality standards. S. Rep. No. 92-414 at 7 (1971), *reprinted*
11 *in* 1972 U.S.C.C.A.N. 3668, 3672.

12 42. Congress empowered regulators at both the federal and state level to pursue the
13 Act’s expansive aims through a number of mechanisms in line with a cooperative federalism
14 framework. *See U.S. Dep’t of Energy v. Ohio*, 503 U.S. 607, 633 (1992); *Arkansas v. Oklahoma*,
15 503 U.S. 91, 101 (1992). For example, Congress established the National Pollutant Discharge
16 Elimination System to require collaboration between states and EPA in the distribution of
17 permits to point source polluters. *EPA v. Cal. ex rel. State Water Res. Control Bd.*, 426 U.S.
18 200, 205–08 (1976). Congress also included provisions in the Act allowing states to set
19 standards for pollution, and to set requirements that exceed federal minimums. 33 U.S.C.
20 §§ 1313, 1342(b), 1370. Congress went so far as to remark that states have “the *primary*
21 responsibilities and rights ... to prevent, reduce, and eliminate pollution.” *Id.* § 1251(b)
22 (emphasis added).

23 43. Section 401 is an integral component of the CWA’s larger cooperative federalism
24 framework. Section 401’s “terms have a broad reach,” *S.D. Warren Co. v. Maine Bd. of Env’tl.*
25 *Prot.*, 547 U.S. 370, 380 (2006), allowing states and tribes to exercise their regulatory powers to
26 block federal licenses for activities that may result in discharges into navigable waters in their

1 jurisdictions. Specifically, states and tribes have discretion under Section 401 to deny
2 certification or impose conditions on a federal license or permit. The state or tribe with
3 jurisdiction over the territory in which the discharge originates may deny or condition federal
4 licenses pursuant to applicable effluent limitations guidelines, new source performance
5 standards, toxic pollutant restrictions, and any other appropriate requirements of state or tribal
6 law.

7 44. Once a discharge into navigable waters triggers the requirement for certification
8 under Section 401, the conditions of certification need not specifically pertain to the discharge
9 that triggered the certification process, but instead may apply to the activity of the applicant as a
10 whole.

11 45. Section 401 also provides the state or tribe with “a reasonable period of time
12 (which shall not exceed one year) after receipt of such request” to act on an application under
13 Section 401 before certification is waived.

14 46. The CWA does not give the federal agencies unfettered discretion to set deadlines
15 that prevent states and tribes from exercising their substantive authority under Section 401. In
16 limited, though not all, circumstances a state or tribe may request that an applicant withdraw and
17 resubmit a certification application to restart the statutory reasonable period of time.

18 47. Federal licensing authorities are bound to accept any conditions imposed upon
19 their licenses by the state or tribe seeking to regulate water quality in its jurisdiction. A federal
20 licensing authority has no power to review a decision by a state or tribe to impose conditions
21 upon a federal license or to deny certification to an applicant, although it may challenge such a
22 decision in state or federal court. Section 401(a)(1) provides that where a certification request is
23 denied, “no license or permit shall be granted,” although the federal agency may obtain judicial
24 review of the state’s or the tribe’s decision. Similarly, Section 401(d) denies federal permitting
25 agencies authority to review the substance of state or tribal Section 401 conditions of approval,
26

1 providing that any conditions a state or tribe includes in its certification decision “shall become a
2 condition on any Federal license or permit subject to the provisions of this section.”

3 48. The 1987 Amendments to the CWA added provisions allowing EPA to treat
4 federally recognized Indian tribes in a similar manner as states for certain provisions of the Act.
5 33 U.S.C. § 1377(e); 40 C.F.R. § 131.4. Tribes that apply for and are granted TAS are
6 authorized to implement Section 401 and other sections of the Act over tribal lands and waters,
7 in keeping with EPA’s longstanding policy encouraging tribal efforts to develop and administer
8 environmental programs. *See EPA, EPA Policy for the Administration of Environmental*
9 *Programs on Indian Reservations* (1984); *see also* “Revised Interpretation of Clean Water Act
10 Tribal Provision,” 81 Fed. Reg. 30,183 (May 16, 2016).

11 49. In 1971, EPA promulgated the regulations that have governed the implementation
12 of Section 401 since that time.

13 50. In 2010, EPA supplemented these longstanding regulations with a handbook
14 offering “a wide-ranging description of [Section 401] certification provisions and practices” to
15 assist “states and tribes interested in using [Section 401] as an effective water resource protection
16 tool.” The regulations and the guidance took an expansive view of states’ or tribes’ authority
17 under Section 401, in line with the text and history of the statute, as well as judicial precedent.
18 The broad authority of states and authorized tribes under Section 401 has remained unchanged
19 by Congress or EPA for decades.

20 II. REVISION OF CWA SECTION 401 REGULATIONS

21 51. States and tribes rely heavily on Section 401 to prevent environmental
22 degradation in their jurisdictions. EPA acknowledges that from 2013 to 2018, an average of
23 4,266 individual and 58,766 general federal permits requiring Section 401 certification were
24 issued per year. This is an underestimate, as it accounts only for permits issued by the U.S.
25 Army Corps of Engineers, the United States Coast Guard, FERC, and the Nuclear Regulatory
26

1 Commission. States and tribes issue 401 certifications for other federal permits as well.

2 52. The Section 401 regulations and guidance have worked well across the board,
3 allowing most applications for certification filed per year to be processed promptly. As recently
4 as last year, EPA conceded that “denials are uncommon” and that decisions on certification
5 requests occur well within the period of envisioned by Congress. When delays in processing
6 Section 401 applications do occur, EPA concedes that it is most commonly because of
7 “incomplete requests.”

8 53. On April 10, 2019, President Trump issued Executive Order (“EO”) 13,868, the
9 “Executive Order on Promoting Energy Infrastructure and Energy Growth.” The EO asserts that
10 it is “the policy of the United States to promote private investment in the Nation’s energy
11 infrastructure” and instructs a number of federal agencies to take actions in line with that policy.
12 One provision of EO 13868 instructs EPA to review its guidance and implementing regulations
13 related to CWA Section 401.

14 54. In accordance with the EO, on June 9, 2019 EPA rescinded the 2010 Handbook
15 and replaced it with a new guidance document, which reinterpreted Section 401. The document
16 provoked backlash from stakeholders, including state attorneys general across the country, who
17 stated that, if adhered to, the guidance would undermine the authority of states and tribes to
18 protect themselves from environmentally harmful infrastructure projects under Section 401.

19 55. On August 22, 2019, EPA published a Proposed Rule, titled “Updating
20 Regulations on Water Quality Certification,” which further demonstrated the agency’s
21 determination to curtail the regulatory powers of states and tribes under Section 401. 84 Fed.
22 Reg. 44,080 (Aug. 22, 2019) (“Proposed Rule”). EPA received 125,000 comments on the
23 proposed rule in the course of the next two months, including dozens of comments from states
24 and tribes that raised concerns about federal overreach and the rule’s potential to degrade the
25 environment and harm communities within the jurisdictions of these certifying authorities. On
26

1 June 1, 2020, EPA finalized a substantially similar version of the Proposed Rule, retitled Clean
2 Water Act Section 401 Certification Rule. 85 Fed. Reg. 42,210.

3 56. EPA admits that its primary motivation in proposing and finalizing the rule is a
4 desire to facilitate the construction of fossil fuel infrastructure. This purpose is entirely divorced
5 from Congress' intent in passing Section 401 and the CWA. Executive Order 13,868 directs
6 EPA to promote the construction of energy infrastructure to transport "supplies of coal, oil, and
7 natural gas" to market. *See* 84 Fed. Reg. at 44,081–82. Before the promulgation of the Proposed
8 Rule Administrator Wheeler confirmed that its purpose was to "take action to accelerate and
9 promote the construction of pipelines and other important energy infrastructure." The Economic
10 Analysis EPA published along with the proposed rule reflects the agency's intent by focusing
11 largely on the alleged economic effects of state regulation of energy industry projects under
12 Section 401 and ignoring any potential economic effects from degraded water quality caused by
13 the limitations placed on state and tribal authority. Upon the publication of the Final Rule,
14 Administrator Wheeler reiterated that the Trump administration was motivated to revise Section
15 401 by a belief that certifying authorities "have held our nation's energy infrastructure projects
16 hostage" and a desire "to put in place clear guidelines that finally give these projects a path
17 forward."

18 57. The Millennium Coal Terminal is one of the energy infrastructure projects the
19 Trump administration cited to as justification for this rulemaking. The Washington Department
20 of Ecology determined that the coal terminal would destroy twenty-four acres of wetlands and
21 five acres of aquatic habitat, as well as impair tribal access to protected fishing sites. Ecology
22 denied the CWA 401 certification on two grounds: first, that project proponents had failed to
23 supply reasonable assurances that state water quality standards would be met, and second, that
24 the certification should be denied under the Washington State Environmental Policy Act due to
25 its significant and unavoidable environmental and public health risks and harms. State and
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1 federal courts, in ongoing litigation, have upheld Ecology’s 401 certification denial.

2 58. The Trump administration cited the Constitution Pipeline as another example to
3 justify the rulemaking. The New York Department of Environmental Conservation denied
4 certification for this pipeline after the applicant failed to provide the state with sufficient
5 information to show that the project would not adversely affect 250 streams across the state,
6 many of which are key to local ecosystems. Project proponents’ efforts to overturn New York’s
7 401 certification denial were unsuccessful.

8 59. EPA also attempted to justify its change in policy by raising perceived
9 inefficiencies in the processing of Section 401 applications for fossil fuel infrastructure projects.
10 84 Fed. Reg. 44,081–82; *see also* 85 Fed. Reg. 42,211, 42,223. It does so in spite of the fact that
11 many—likely most—of the thousands of annual permit decisions requiring Section 401
12 certification are for projects unrelated to coal, oil, and natural gas infrastructure.

13 III. LACK OF ADEQUATE TRIBAL CONSULTATION

14 60. On April 22, 2019—almost two weeks after the EO directing EPA to make
15 changes to Section 401—EPA Assistant Administrator David Ross sent a letter to “all 573 of the
16 Tribes federally recognized at that time,” which announced the agency’s intent to consult with
17 tribes regarding its plans to revise its Section 401 regulations. The brief consultation period
18 formally ended approximately one month later on May 24, 2019, without EPA sharing the text or
19 any details about its proposed changes and without any time for meaningful back and forth
20 exchanges between tribal governments and EPA about what EPA had planned. Two
21 “Informational Webinars” were held for tribes in May 2019, but little information was provided
22 by EPA in the webinars, and multiple requests for additional time for consultation were denied.
23 Informal communication with tribes continued thereafter, but EPA released its proposed rule
24 only two weeks later. By the EPA’s own admission “[c]onsultation was not done” with several
25 tribes that made requests with the agency, including the Suquamish Tribe and Pyramid Lake
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1 Paiute Tribe, who both requested government-to-government consultation in their comments on
2 the proposed rule, submitted October 21, 2019.

3 61. Prior to promulgation of the deregulatory Final Rule described below, EPA had
4 long acknowledged that “there is a gap in water quality protection under the CWA for waters on
5 Indian reservations.” The Final Rule further diminishes the protections afforded to Plaintiff
6 Tribes under the CWA, despite EPA’s longstanding interpretation that Congress expressed a
7 preference for tribal regulation of surface water quality on reservations to assure compliance
8 with the goals of the CWA. 56 Fed. Reg. 64,876, 64,878–79 (Dec. 12, 1991). The Final Rule’s
9 restriction of tribal authority to ensure that federal actions comply with tribal laws, combined
10 with the lack of tribal consultation in promulgating the Rule, violate both EPA’s stated policy to
11 work with tribes as sovereign entities with primary authority over their land and water resources
12 and the duty to uphold the federal government’s trust responsibility to tribes as expressed in
13 treaties and the basic tenets of federal Indian law.

14 IV. SIGNIFICANT RULE CHANGES

15 62. As described below, the sprawling Final Rule reinterprets Section 401 to 1) limit
16 the types of projects for which a certification application is required, 2) limit the scope of
17 activities states and tribes may review in the course of the certification process, and 3) expand
18 the role of federal agencies in determining how much time certifying authorities have to conduct
19 their review of certification applications and whether the state or tribe has waived its authority to
20 review a project under Section 401. Cumulatively these revisions strip away a significant share
21 of the authority Congress intended to delegate to states and tribes, leaving these local authorities
22 far less capable of protecting their waters and their residents from environmental degradation
23 resulting from federally licensed projects.

24 A. Reducing the Number and Types of Projects for Which Certification Is Required

25 63. In spite of the fact that the term “point source” is used nowhere in Section 401,
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1 the Final Rule states that an applicant only needs to seek certification for a project that results in
2 a point source discharge. 85 Fed. Reg. 42,229–31.

3 B. Narrowing the Scope of Certifying Authority Review

4 64. For those projects that require Section 401 Certification, EPA reinterpreted the
5 “scope” of Section 401 to limit the review of certifying authorities to a project proponent’s
6 discharges from point sources into the regulatory-defined waters of the United States. *Id.* at
7 42,250–251.

8 65. EPA stated that certifying authorities may only review an applicant’s discharge
9 under Section 401, rather than the activity of the applicant as a whole. *Id.* at 42,251–53.

10 66. EPA failed to adequately explain how this narrowing of the scope of Section 401
11 conforms with the provision’s essential purpose, which is to assure “that Federal licensing or
12 permitting agencies cannot override state water quality requirements.”

13 67. EPA further asserted that in processing an application a certifying authority may
14 only consider whether the point source discharge in question complies with “water quality
15 requirements,” which the regulations limit to those requirements outlined in sections 301, 302,
16 303, 306, and 307 of the CWA and the requirements of state and tribal laws and regulations that
17 pertain specifically to point source discharges into waters of the United States. *Id.* at 42,253–54.
18 According to EPA, the sweeping language contained in Section 401(d), stating that a certifying
19 authority must assure that an applicant complies with “any other appropriate requirement of state
20 law,” does not broaden the permissible scope of review beyond a discharge’s compliance with
21 this narrow subset of “water quality requirements.” *Id.* at 42,254–56.

22 68. Under the Final Rule, conditions on federal permits or outright denials of
23 certification must comply with the Final Rule’s narrow interpretation of the scope of Section
24 401—*i.e.*, certifying authorities may place conditions only upon point source discharges in order
25 to ensure compliance with water quality requirements and may deny only projects where a point
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1 source discharge violates water quality requirements. *Id.* at 42,256.

2 C. Expanding Federal Authority Over the Section 401 Process

3 69. In the Final Rule, EPA substantially expanded the role of federal agencies in the
4 states and tribes' Section 401 review process by significantly increasing federal authority to find
5 that the certifying agency waived its Section 401 authority, suggesting restrictions on what
6 information certifying agencies can request, and establishing additional procedural hurdles for
7 certifying agencies.

8 70. EPA gave federal licensing authorities broad discretion to set the length of the
9 reasonable period of time to act on a given certification request. *Id.* at 42,259–60. The Final
10 Rule requires the federal licensing agency to inform the certifying authority of the reasonable
11 period of time within 15 days of receipt of the certification request. *Id.* at 42,248. If the
12 certifying authority disagrees with the amount of time it is given by the federal agency, the Final
13 Rule leaves it without an appeals process, except to seek recourse through judicial review, which
14 almost certainly would not provide relief within the time allotted. *Id.* at 42,260. The Final Rule
15 also provides that no matter what circumstances certifying agencies encounter, including
16 recalcitrant applicants or particularly risky or complicated projects, it is wholly within the power
17 of the federal licensing agency—again, effectively without any recourse to any effective
18 appeal—to decide whether a certifying agency will be given more time beyond what the federal
19 agency initially provided. *Id.* at 42,260–61.

20 71. The Final Rule categorically prohibits the certifying authority from requesting
21 that an applicant withdraw a certification request or taking action independent of the federal
22 licensing agency to extend the reasonable period of time. *Id.* at 42,260–62. EPA concluded that
23 a waiver occurs even if the applicant voluntarily withdraws its application and submits a new
24 application within the original one-year period, except if the project has been modified to the
25 point of requiring a new certification request. *Id.* at 42,262. EPA did not define what kind of
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1 project change would be sufficiently significant to warrant submitting a new request that would
2 restart the one-year clock, and gave the power to decide that question with the federal licensing
3 agency. *Id.* at 42,267.

4 72. The Final Rule further aggrandizes EPA’s role by defining when the clock begins
5 to run from the point when certifying agencies receive the materials EPA has determined are
6 sufficient to commence review. The Final Rule sets a list of materials that starts the clock but
7 fall far short of what is needed to begin a meaningful review. Notably, the Final Rule does not
8 include a requirement that the applicant provide information on all of the project’s potential
9 impacts to water quality, information on the designation of the waterway receiving the discharge,
10 or whether and to what extent the project might result in more than one discharge in the same
11 waterway that could have cumulative effects. *Id.* at 42,244, 42,285–86.

12 73. The Preamble to the Final Rule also suggests that certifying agencies are limited
13 to requesting information from applicants that can be “produced and evaluated within the
14 reasonable time,” rather than whatever the certifying agency, in its discretion, deems is needed to
15 evaluate whether the project will comply with the CWA. *See id.* at 42,246.

16 74. The Final Rule grants federal licensing agencies the power to declare that a
17 certifying authority has waived its right to set conditions upon or deny an application. *Id.* at
18 42,263. The federal licensing agency may use this veto power if a state or tribe fails to comply
19 with detailed requirements—described by EPA as “procedural” requirements—when taking
20 action to condition or deny a federal permit. *Id.* at 42,263, 42,267–68.

21 75. Furthermore, against the precautionary spirit of Section 401, the Final Rule shifts
22 the burden for proving compliance with these narrow water quality requirements from the
23 applicant to states and tribes and gives the federal licensing agency additional power to find a
24 waiver. *Id.* at 42,256. If a certifying authority seeks to condition a permit, then the state or tribe
25 must provide the federal licensing agency with an explanation in writing that the condition on a
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1 license is necessary to ensure that the relevant discharge is in compliance with those water
2 quality requirements that fall within the narrow scope of review permitted by the Final Rule. *Id.*
3 at 42,263. In order to deny an application, a certifying authority must, in writing and complete
4 with legal citations, explain why a discharge will not comply with the aforementioned water
5 quality requirements, or, alternatively, describe the specific water quality data or information that
6 the applicant failed to submit that would be necessary to ensure that the discharge complied with
7 water quality requirements. *Id.* In addition, the Final Rule does not require federal licensing
8 authorities to allow states and tribes to remedy conditions and denials deemed deficient. *Id.* at
9 42,269. Federal licensing agencies may review these written explanations, and, upon the
10 discovery of a failure to follow EPA's newly-prescribed procedural requirements, may reject the
11 certifying authorities' conditions and denials. *Id.* at 42,263.

12 76. Even if a certifying authority were to make it through this gauntlet and
13 successfully impose conditions upon a federal license, under the Final Rule, states and tribes lack
14 authority to enforce any of their 401 certification conditions. Instead, the federal permit, with its
15 incorporation of state or tribal conditions, becomes the operative action. *Id.* at 42,263.

16 CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

17 COUNT I

18 Violation of the Clean Water Act and the Administrative Procedure Act: 19 The Final Rule Is Contrary to the Clean Water Act

20 77. The CWA's single objective is to restore and protect the physical, chemical, and
21 biological integrity of the Nation's waters and to do so as broadly as possible. 33 U.S.C. § 1251.

22 78. To achieve the Act's broad purpose, Congress expressly created a partnership
23 between the states and authorized tribes on the one hand and the federal government on the
24 other. The Act gives states and tribes broad authority under Section 401 to review federal
25 projects that may affect water quality within their jurisdictions.

26 79. EPA cannot adopt regulations that are manifestly contrary to the text and purpose

1 of the CWA and Section 401. 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A). The Final Rule is contrary to law, because
2 it upends the balance struck by Congress and seeks to carve out key aspects of powers given to
3 the states and authorized tribes.

4 80. EPA also exceeded its authority and acted contrary to the CWA, 33 U.S.C.
5 § 1341, by adopting provisions in the Final Rule that (1) limit the scope of the states' and tribes'
6 review over projects subject to Section 401 to pollution from point sources rather than the
7 activity as a whole; (2) limit the ability of states and tribes to deny a certification except when
8 there is no reasonable assurance that the discharge from a point source, rather than the activity as
9 a whole, will comply with water quality requirements; (3) limit the conditions a state or tribe
10 may include in a certification to ones that are related to water quality requirements and imposed
11 on a discharge from a point source; (4) prevent states and tribes from enforcing Section 401
12 conditions; (5) give federal agencies the power to veto the decisions by states and tribes to
13 condition or deny federal permits, (6) deny states and tribes the opportunity to ensure that they
14 have a reasonable period of time to review an application for certification, (7) shift evidentiary
15 burdens for proving compliance with relevant water quality requirements and local laws from the
16 applicant for a federal license to the state or tribe.

17 81. EPA's adoption of the Final Rule is in excess of statutory authority and arbitrary,
18 capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law, in violation of the
19 APA, 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A), (C).

20 COUNT II

21 Violation of the Clean Water Act and the Administrative Procedure Act: 22 Failure of Rational Decision Making

23 82. When promulgating regulations, EPA must articulate a satisfactory explanation
24 for its actions, including a rational connection between the facts and the agency's choice. A
25 regulation is arbitrary and capricious under the APA where:

26 [T]he agency has relied on factors which Congress has not intended it to consider,
entirely failed to consider an important aspect of the problem, offered an explanation for

1 its decision that runs counter to the evidence before the agency, or is so implausible that
2 it could not be ascribed to a difference in view or the product of agency expertise.

3 *Motor Vehicle Mfrs. Ass'n of U.S., Inc. v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 463 U.S. 29, 43
4 (1983).

5 83. EPA has for decades interpreted and implemented Section 401 in a manner that
6 has been to the satisfaction of several successive presidential administrations, states, tribes,
7 Congress, and the Courts. When an agency changes or amends its prior position, including its
8 interpretation of a statute, it must provide an adequate explanation. A change in prior policy
9 must be supported by a more detailed justification than a new rule crafted from scratch when
10 claiming facts have changed or where there are reliance interests implicated by the policy
11 change. Any unexplained inconsistency between the agency's prior position and its replacement
12 is grounds for finding that the agency's interpretation is arbitrary and capricious.

13 84. EPA has presented no credible justification for dramatically changing its long-
14 term interpretation of the scope of Section 401 or presented a sound justification for why the
15 Final Rule will be more protective of water quality. There are not pervasive delays stemming
16 from the Section 401 process as it has been implemented without intervention by Congress for
17 decades. Facilitating the extraction of fossil fuels and the construction of energy infrastructure is
18 an impermissible rationale for a reinterpretation of Section 401, contrary to the factors that
19 Congress intended agencies to consider when rulemaking under the CWA.

20 85. EPA's adoption of the Final Rule was arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion,
21 or otherwise not in accordance with law, in violation of the APA, 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A), (C).

22 COUNT III

23 Violation of Responsibilities to Tribes

24 86. The United States has a trust responsibility to protect Indian lands, resources, and
25 other interests. The trust responsibility is a legally enforceable fiduciary duty that arises out of a
26 number of sources of law, including treaties, statutes, Executive Orders, and the common law. In

1 carrying out the federal trust responsibility, EPA must ensure that tribal resources are protected
2 and that tribal concerns and interests are considered before an agency takes action that will
3 impact tribal interests. On- and off-reservation fishing rights that are protected by treaty, rights
4 to water necessary to fulfill the original purpose of the reservation, and the right to subsistence
5 resources are protected interests of the Plaintiff Tribes.

6 87. EPA's trust responsibility includes the duty to meaningfully consult with tribes
7 prior to promulgating a rule that affects tribal interests. EPA is required to adhere to "an
8 accountable process" for consultation with tribes. Consultation should occur early enough to
9 allow tribes to provide input prior to the promulgation of a proposed rule and should continue
10 throughout the rulemaking process. A series of meetings between a Tribe and EPA may be
11 required over the course of the rulemaking process.

12 88. In promulgating the Final Rule, EPA failed to meaningfully consult Plaintiff
13 Tribes. The responsibility to provide meaningful consultation is reflected in and incorporated
14 into internal EPA policy documents, such as "EPA Policy for the Administration of
15 Environmental Programs on Indian Reservations" and "EPA Policy on Consultation and
16 Coordination with Indian Tribes."

17 89. EPA's decision to adopt the Final Rule without meaningfully consulting with
18 Plaintiff Tribes; its failure to comply with its own policies and procedures relating to its
19 responsibilities to tribes when promulgating the Section 401 rulemaking; and the agency's failure
20 to analyze how the Final Rule and its implementation will affect tribes is arbitrary, capricious,
21 and contrary to law, in violation of the APA, 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A), (C).

22 REQUEST FOR RELIEF

23 Plaintiffs respectfully request that the Court:

- 24 A. Adjudge and declare that the Section 401 Rule is arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of
25 discretion, and not in accordance with law;

- 1 B. Vacate and set aside the Section 401 Rule;
2 C. Enjoin EPA from applying or otherwise relying upon the Section 401 Rule;
3 D. Award Plaintiffs their reasonable fees, costs, expenses, and disbursements,
4 including attorney's fees; and
5 E. Grant Plaintiffs such additional and further relief as the Court may deem just and
6 proper.

7 DATED this 31st day of August, 2020.

8 Respectfully submitted,

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