



# Water Protector Legal Collective

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## WPLC PUBLIC COMMENT HOW-TO GUIDE

In the United States, government agencies are in charge of regulating many things that affect our daily lives. One way that people can influence agency decisions is through the public comment process.

***What is the public comment process?*** Before making a rule or issuing a decision, an agency will take public comments on the proposed action. **The comment period** is usually open for **30-60 days** after the agency publishes notice of the action. The notice will tell you how and where to submit written comments, and whether there will be public hearings for oral comments.

***What should a public comment contain?*** Effective comments can and will influence an agency action. Here are some tips for making your written comments as effective as possible!

- **Remember that a comment is not a vote.** One thoughtful, well-researched comment will be more effective than a thousand form letters.
- **Substantive comments are the best comments.** Do not simply say you agree or disagree with the agency action; support your argument with facts, data, and personal experiences. This takes more work than a simple “yes” or “no,” but it’s worth the effort.
- **Quality over quantity.** Your comment should be thorough but it does not need to be long. Introduce yourself and explain why you’re commenting, state your position, support your position, and end by asking the agency to act in line with your position.
- **It is not necessary to comment on every issue.** Agency actions are usually complicated, and even public notices are written in technical or legal language. Don’t be intimidated! Focus your research and comment on the issues that are important to you.
- **If the agency asks a question, answer it.** Notice of a proposed action may include specific issues or questions the agency wants feedback on. Provide that feedback clearly and directly.
- **Tell your own story.** Public comments, especially good ones, will affect the outcome of an agency action. But the end result is not the only reason to comment. It is not just the agency that reads the comments, but everyone else who is interested in the same action. Even if the decision does not go your way, sharing your story and hearing the stories of others is worthwhile because it builds solidarity and becomes part of the public record.