

(10) Proceed southwest in a straight line for 24.3 miles, crossing onto the Olathe map, to the southwest corner of section 11, T14S/R22E, northwest of Gardner; then

(11) Proceed west-southwest in a straight line for 8.6 miles, crossing onto the Lawrence map, to the southwest corner of section 33, T14S/R21E, northeast of Black Jack; then

(12) Proceed west-northwest in a straight line for 75.5 miles, crossing through the southwest corner of the Topeka map and onto the Manhattan map, to the southwest corner of section 33, T10S/R9E, north of Tabor Valley; then

(13) Proceed northwest in a straight line for 68.4 miles, crossing over the Blue Rapids map and onto the Concordia map and returning to the beginning point.

Signed: August 11, 2026.

Mary G. Ryan,
Administrator.

Approved: August 12, 2026.

Kevin M. Salinger,
Acting Assistant Secretary of the Treasury
(Tax Policy).

[FR Doc. 2026-16668 Filed 8-13-26; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau

27 CFR Part 9

[Docket No. TTB-2026-0004; Notice No. 242]

RIN 1513-AD16

Proposed Establishment of the Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley Viticultural Area

AGENCY: Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, Treasury.

ACTION: Notice of proposed rulemaking.

SUMMARY: The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) proposes to establish the approximately 4,898-acre “Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley” American viticultural area (AVA) in Walla Walla County, Washington. The proposed viticultural area lies entirely within the established Columbia Valley and Walla Walla Valley AVAs. TTB designates viticultural areas to allow vintners to better describe the origin of their wines and to allow consumers to better identify wines they may purchase. TTB invites comments on this proposed addition to its regulations.

DATES: TTB must receive comments on or before October 13, 2026.

ADDRESSES: You may electronically submit comments to TTB on this proposal and view copies of this document, its supporting materials, and any comments TTB receives on it within Docket No. TTB-2026-0004 as posted on *Regulations.gov* (<https://www.regulations.gov>), the Federal e-rulemaking portal. Please see the “Public Participation” section of this document below for full details on how to comment on this proposal via *Regulations.gov* or U.S. mail, and for full details on how to obtain copies of this document, its supporting materials, and any comments related to this proposal.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Karen A. Thornton, Regulations and Rulings Division, Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, 1310 G Street NW, Box 12, Washington, DC 20005; phone 202-453-1039, ext. 175.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In accordance with 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(4), a summary of this rule may be found at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/TTB-2026-0004>.

Background on Viticultural Areas

TTB Authority

Section 105(e) of the Federal Alcohol Administration Act (FAA Act), 27 U.S.C. 205(e), authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury to prescribe regulations for the labeling of wine, distilled spirits, and malt beverages. The FAA Act provides that these regulations should, among other things, prohibit consumer deception and the use of misleading statements on labels and ensure that labels provide the consumer with adequate information as to the identity and quality of the product. The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) administers the FAA Act provisions pursuant to section 1111(d) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, as codified at 6 U.S.C. 531(d). In addition, the Secretary has delegated certain administrative and enforcement authorities to TTB through Treasury Order 120-01.

Part 4 of the TTB regulations (27 CFR part 4) authorizes TTB to establish definitive viticultural areas and regulate the use of their names as appellations of origin on wine labels and in wine advertisements. Part 9 of the TTB regulations (27 CFR part 9) sets forth standards for the preparation and submission of petitions for the establishment or modification of American viticultural areas (AVAs) and lists the approved AVAs.

Definition

Section 4.25(e)(1)(i) of the TTB regulations (27 CFR 4.25(e)(1)(i)) defines a viticultural area for American wine as a delimited grape-growing region having distinguishing features as described in part 9 of the regulations and, once approved, a name and a delineated boundary codified in part 9 of the regulations. These designations allow vintners and consumers to attribute a given quality, reputation, or other characteristic of a wine made from grapes grown in an area to the wine's geographic origin. The establishment of AVAs allows vintners to describe more accurately the origin of their wines to consumers and helps consumers to identify wines they may purchase. Establishment of an AVA is neither an approval nor an endorsement by TTB of the wine produced in that area.

Requirements

Section 4.25(e)(2) of the TTB regulations (27 CFR 4.25(e)(2)) outlines the procedure for proposing an AVA and allows any interested party to petition TTB to establish a grape-growing region as an AVA. Section 9.12 of the TTB regulations (27 CFR 9.12) prescribes standards for petitions to establish or modify AVAs. Petitions to establish an AVA must include the following:

- Evidence that the area within the proposed AVA boundary is nationally or locally known by the AVA name specified in the petition;
- An explanation of the basis for defining the boundary of the proposed AVA;
- A narrative description of the features of the proposed AVA that affect viticulture, such as climate, geology, soils, physical features, and elevation, that make the proposed AVA distinctive and distinguish it from adjacent areas outside the proposed AVA boundary;
- The appropriate United States Geological Survey (USGS) map(s) showing the location of the proposed AVA, with the boundary of the proposed AVA clearly drawn thereon; and
- A detailed narrative description of the proposed AVA boundary based on USGS map markings.
- If the proposed AVA is to be established within, or overlapping, an existing AVA, an explanation that both identifies the attributes of the proposed AVA that are consistent with the existing AVA and explains how the proposed AVA is sufficiently distinct from the existing AVA, and therefore appropriate for separate recognition.

Petition To Establish Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley

TTB received a petition submitted on behalf of local vineyard owners and winemakers that proposed establishing the “Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley” AVA.

The proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA is located in Walla Walla County, Oregon, and lies entirely within the boundaries of the established Columbia Valley AVA (27 CFR 9.74) and the established Walla Walla Valley AVA (27 CFR 9.91). The proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA contains approximately 4,898 acres, with twelve commercially-producing vineyards covering a total of 282 acres distributed throughout the proposed AVA. There are currently five wineries within the proposed AVA.

According to the petition, the distinguishing features of the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA include its geography, geology, soils, and climate. Unless otherwise noted, all information and data pertaining to the proposed AVA contained in this document are from the petition for the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA and its supporting exhibits.

Name Evidence

According to the petition, most of the land within the boundaries of the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA is located either within the current watershed of Mill Creek or is situated on an old alluvial fan of Mill Creek. Mill Creek Road forms most of the southern boundary of the proposed AVA. The wineries and vineyards in this section of the Walla Walla Valley AVA are commonly referred to as being located in the “Mill Creek area” or “Mill Creek region,” and the oldest vineyard in the proposed AVA is known as the “Mill Creek Upland” vineyard. Appendix A to the petition includes several references that cite wineries, vineyards, and properties located in the “Mill Creek area” of the Walla Walla Valley. A 2020 newspaper article noted that Echolands Winery of Walla Walla purchased “340 acres of Mill Creek property.”¹ A 2023 press release discussed Echolands Winery’s plans for building a new facility “located in the Mill Creek area of the Walla Walla Valley AVA in the foothills of the Blue Mountains, some of the highest elevations in Washington State.”² A

local hotel’s website noted that when the owners of Menozzi Estate Vineyards were searching across the Walla Walla Valley for a location, they eventually focused on “the upland Mill Creek area in the foothills of the Blue Mountains.”³ In 2020, a local newspaper published an article about a family rebuilding after the flood that occurred on their “Mill Creek property.”⁴

The petition mentions that Mill Creek is a major tributary of the Walla Walla River, and its lower reaches are considered part of the greater Walla Walla Valley. According to the petition, “Walla Walla Valley” is included in the name of the proposed AVA to emphasize its location within the Walla Walla Valley and to distinguish the area from other regions in the U.S. that have streams named Mill Creek.

Boundary Evidence

According to the petition, the boundaries of the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA encompass the mostly south-facing slopes with elevations between 1,200 and 2,000 feet of the interfluvium separating the Mill Creek floodplain, located south of the proposed AVA, from the Spring Creek and Dry Creek floodplains, located north of the proposed AVA. The northern boundary of the proposed AVA lies near the ridge line or crest of the interfluvium. The proposed eastern boundary coincides with the boundaries of the established Columbia Valley and Walla Walla Valley AVAs. The proposed southern boundary approaches the northern boundary of the Mill Creek and Blue Creek floodplains. The western boundary of the proposed AVA coincides with the former Northern Pacific rail lines and has elevations above 1,200 feet.

Distinguishing Features

According to the petition the distinguishing features of the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA are its geography, geology, soils, and climate.

Geography

According to the petition, the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA lies at the place where the relatively flat floor of the Walla Walla Valley meets the foothills of the Blue Mountains. In the vast majority of the proposed AVA, slope angles range between 2–10 degrees with an average

slope of 5 degrees. East of the proposed AVA slopes can exceed 25 degrees. Slope angle ranges in the areas west and north of the proposed AVA are mostly similar to those within the proposed AVA. The area immediately to the south is also similar to the proposed AVA, although the region slightly farther south has a few slopes that are significantly steeper with angles above 25 degrees. The gentle to moderate slopes within the proposed AVA are ideal for viticulture, as they are steep enough to promote cold air drainage but shallow enough to farm with conventional tractors.

The proposed AVA is generally composed of the south-facing slopes of the interfluvium between the floodplains of Mill Creek and Spring Creek, which drain westward from the Blue Mountains. According to the petition, south-facing slopes are generally preferred for viticulture in the northern hemisphere since they receive the greatest solar insolation, resulting in higher soil temperatures that encourage the onset of the stages of vine growth and speed ripening. To the north and south of the proposed AVA are the southern sides of the Spring Creek and Mill Creek valleys, both of which are dominated by north-facing slopes. The petition did not include information about the direction of the slopes to the east and west of the proposed AVA.

The petition notes that within the proposed AVA elevations range from 2,041 to 1,260 feet with an average elevation of approximately 1,550 feet. To the east and southeast of the proposed AVA, elevations in the Blue Mountains are higher, rising to elevations over 5,000 feet. West of the proposed AVA, elevations start at 1,400 feet and descend to 1,200 feet or lower. The region immediately to the south of the proposed AVA has elevations generally between 1,500 and 1,300 feet. According to the petition, cool air drains off the higher elevations to the east and moves through the proposed AVA on the way to the lower elevations to the west. The petition states that this cold air drainage, aided by the elevation differences, affects the climate of the proposed AVA.

Geology

According to the petition, the area of the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA lies within a geologic province which is characterized by the underlying basalt bedrock formed from extremely thick accumulations of lava flows. In the areas south and east of the proposed AVA, tectonic compression uplifted the bedrock to form the Blue Mountains. The erosion of the Blue

¹ https://www.union-bulletin.com/local-columnists/strictly_business/echolands-winery-purchases-340-acres-of-mill-creek-property/article_5b9a97f0-a323-5e95-886c-55e37a665579.html.

² https://www.prweb.com/releases/Echolands_to_Open_New_Mill_Creek_Winemaking_Facility_by_Fall_2023/prweb19349761.htm.

³ <https://lodgheatcolumbiapoint.com/washington-wine/aluvine-winery/>.

⁴ https://www.union-bulletin.com/news/flood-forces-new-pathways-for-mill-creek-family/article_3af10c9a-4960-5fff-8b18-ef3b1128ee09.html.

Mountains supplied the basalt-derived gravel, sand, and clay underlying much of the Walla Walla Valley. The petition notes that geologists classified the gravel from the initial erosion and uplift of the Blue Mountains as “old gravel” to distinguish it from the gravel deposits of the floodplains and modern streams. Geologists classified the ancient lake sediments as the “old clay.” Along the southern and eastern borders of the proposed AVA, the old gravel is exposed in road cuts while the old clay is not exposed anywhere in the Walla Walla Valley.

According to the petition, during the ice age approximately one million years ago, there were several catastrophic floods in the Columbia Basin. Repeated failures of a glacial ice dam between 18 and 12 thousand years ago flooded the Columbia Basin and deposited layers of sand and silt, known as the Touchet beds, in all areas of the Walla Walla Valley below 1,200 feet elevation and in 75 percent of the Walla Walla Valley AVA. The petition notes that the uppermost soil-forming layer of sediment in most parts of the Walla Walla Valley consists of wind-deposited silt known as loess, which was primarily sourced from wind erosion of the deposits of the ice-age floods in areas upwind of the valley. This loess consists primarily of minerals such as granite-derived quartz and mica that indicate they were derived from the erosion of sources other than basalt outside of the Columbia Plateau. The thickness of the loess is 2 to 4 feet in areas below 1,200 feet. In contrast, most areas of the proposed AVA have elevations above 1,200 feet that were never subjected to erosion by the glacial outburst floods and as a result, the loess thickness can reach more than 50 feet.

The petition notes that the distinguishing characteristic of the proposed AVA related to geology is primarily derived from its elevation being above the level of the ice-age era floods. As a result, the proposed AVA contains no sediments that were directly deposited by the floods. Additionally, the thickness of the loess in most areas of the proposed AVA prohibits the roots of grapevines from encountering the underlying basaltic materials that contain higher concentrations of iron, magnesium, and titanium relative to the overlying loess soils. This feature distinguishes the soil chemistry of the proposed AVA from areas in the Walla

Walla Valley AVA where vines are planted in basaltic cobblestones or in shallow loess over basaltic bedrocks.

Soils

The petition notes that the soils within the proposed AVA are almost evenly split between the Walla Walla series and the Athena series, both of which were developed in the thick loess. Both soil series are deep, well-drained silt loam soils with relatively high water-holding capacity but were developed under different precipitation amounts. Walla Walla series soils are lower elevation soils that receive less precipitation, resulting in more calcium carbonate, a higher pH, and a lower clay content than the Athena series. Walla Walla series soils have 10–18 percent clay content, while the higher elevation Athena series soils have 18–27 percent clay content. According to the petition, the higher clay content of the loessal uplands soils increases water retention and helps facilitate viticulture in the proposed AVA without supplemental irrigation, which is a process known as dry-farming.

In the areas east of the proposed AVA, the dominant Palouse series soils contain 20–25 percent clay and have been leached of lime due to higher precipitation in those areas. Soils west of the proposed AVA that are generally classified as either “soils of bottom lands and low terraces” or “soils of loessal and lake-laid terraces,” including Ritzville and Ellisforde series soils, which both have a lower level of clay than the proposed AVA’s soils. The petition notes that in the areas west and north of the proposed AVA, dry-farmed viticulture is not practiced due to decreased precipitation and lower clay content in the soil. South of the proposed AVA is the Mill Creek floodplain, with alluvial soils such as the Yakima series developed in basalt cobblestone gravel, sand, and fluvial silt. The coarse-textured basaltic soils in the floodplain are in contrast to the quartz-rich loess within the proposed AVA. Most of the floodplain has a shallow water table and is not suited for viticulture due to subirrigation of the vines.

Climate

According to the petition, the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA receives an average of more than 20 inches of annual precipitation

due to its location near the Blue Mountains. The higher precipitation, combined with loess-based soil and 18 percent average clay content, allows vines to be grown without supplemental irrigation. By contrast, annual precipitation amounts to the west are lower, making the use of supplemental irrigation necessary.

According to the petition, the most significant distinction of the proposed AVA is its exposure to a robust mountain-valley wind system during the middle of the growing season in July and August. The daytime sun bakes the mostly flat ground of the Walla Walla Valley, heating the air above to become less dense and move up the mountain as a valley breeze. In the evening as the sun sets between 7 and 9 p.m., a cooler, denser air moves down out of the Blue Mountains as a mountain breeze. In the area of the proposed AVA, the mountain breeze is most often a dramatic temperature change. The dramatic cooldown in the proposed AVA helps with the ripening process by slowing and balancing vine growth and preserving grape acidity and the brisk winds discourage fungi growth. Within the proposed AVA, winds are generally westerly during the late morning and afternoon, and easterly from late evening through early morning. By contrast, the region west of the proposed AVA has winds from the west and southwest throughout the day.

The petition also includes data collected from 2020 through 2022 on the average temperature, average maximum and minimum temperatures, and average frost-free days for three locations southwest of the proposed AVA and one location within the proposed AVA. The petition did not provide data for temperature and frost-free days for areas north and east of the proposed AVA during this time. Additionally, the petition includes growing degree data from three locations outside the proposed AVA. The petition notes that such data were unavailable from within the proposed AVA and instead provided data from the Walla Walla Airport, which is at a similar elevation to the proposed AVA, as a proxy. However, because the data were not from within the actual proposed AVA, TTB is unable to determine whether growing degree days are a distinguishing feature of the proposed AVA.

TABLE 1—AVERAGE GROWING SEASON⁵ TEMPERATURE COMPARISON 2020–2022

Weather station (direction from proposed AVA)	Average temperature (degrees fahrenheit)	Average minimum temperature (degrees fahrenheit)	Average maximum temperature (degrees fahrenheit)	Average frost-free days
2020				
Tracy (within)	63.2	51.7	75.4	189
Touchet (southwest)	64.0	48.7	78.1	187
College Place (southwest)	63.2	48.3	77.9	188
Airport (southwest)	64	51.9	76.1	189
2021				
Tracy (within)	64.8	52.8	77.0	182
Touchet (southwest)	65.4	49.4	79.7	169
College Place (southwest)	65.2	49.7	79.9	174
Airport (southwest)	65.9	53.4	78.3	182
2022				
Tracy (within)	62.5	52.0	74.2	206
Touchet (southwest)	63.6	49.4	77.3	195
College Place (southwest)	63.2	49.3	77.3	206
Airport (southwest)	64	52.4	75.6	206

According to the petition, the climate of the proposed Mill Creek-Walla Walla Valley AVA is suitable for growing a wide range of warm climate grape cultivars, while the cooler climate of the lower elevations to the west and southwest is very near the cool limit for the same varieties. The petition also notes that the longer growing season

length of the proposed AVA is sufficient to ripen most grape varieties, while the shorter growing season length of the regions to the west and southwest would prevent many varieties from achieving ripeness.

Summary of Distinguishing Features

In summary, the geography, geology, soils, and climate of the proposed Mill

Creek-Walla Walla Valley AVA distinguish it from the surrounding regions. The following table, derived from information in the petition, compares the features of the proposed AVA to the features of the surrounding areas.

TABLE 2—COMPARISON OF PROPOSED AVA TO SURROUNDING REGIONS

Region	Characteristics
Proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA.	Gentle to moderate slopes (mostly south-facing); elevations from 1,260 to 2,041 feet, with average elevation of approximately 1,550 feet, which is above the level of the ice-age era floods; thick loessal uplands soils with 10–27 percent clay content, high quartz content, and high water-holding capacity; average annual precipitation above 20 inches; average growing season length of 192 days; strong easterly winds in the late evening through early morning.
North	Mostly north-facing slopes; soils with low clay content; lower annual precipitation amounts.
East	Steep slopes and higher elevations; geology consists of “old gravel” from initial erosion of the Blue Mountains; soils with 20–35 percent clay content leached of lime.
South	Elevations between 1,300 and 1,500 feet; mostly north-facing slopes; “old gravel” from initial erosion of the Blue Mountains; quaternary alluvium; mostly coarse soils developed in basalt cobblestone, gravel, and silt and not suited for viticulture.
West	Gentle slopes; lower elevations that were affected by ice-age floods; basalt-derived gravel, sand, and clay from initial mountain erosion; low-terrace soils with 5–18 percent clay content; low annual precipitation amounts; short growing seasons due to low elevations; winds generally from the west and southwest throughout the day.

Comparison of the Proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA to the Existing Columbia Valley AVA

T.D. ATF-190, which published in the **Federal Register** on November 13, 1984 (49 FR 44895) established the Columbia Valley AVA. The Columbia Valley AVA is described in T.D. ATF-

190 as a large treeless basin surrounding the Yakima, Snake, and Columbia Rivers in Washington and Oregon. The elevations within the existing AVA are below 2,000 feet. The growing season typically exceeds 150 days, which is similar to the growing season of the proposed AVA.

The proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA has generally low elevations similar to the Columbia Valley AVA, with the maximum elevation just over 2,000 feet. However, the proposed AVA differs in the amount of rainfall it receives annually. Within the proposed AVA, average annual rainfall amount exceeds 20 inches,

⁵ Growing season is defined in the petition as April 1 to October 31.

whereas the average rainfall in the existing Columbia Valley AVA does not exceed 15 inches.

Comparison of the Proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA to the Existing Walla Walla Valley AVA

T.D. ATF-165, which published in the **Federal Register** on February 6, 1984 (49 FR 4374) established the Walla Walla Valley AVA. T.D. ATF-441, which published in the **Federal Register** on February 26, 2001 (66 FR 11540), extended the northern boundary of the existing Walla Walla Valley AVA located in Walla Walla County in Washington State and Umatilla County in Oregon. The Walla Walla Valley AVA is described in T.D. ATF-441 as an area at the foot of the mountain slopes on the Oregon/Washington border with elevations from 820 to 1,968 feet. The growing season ranges from 190 to 220 days and the annual precipitation averages 12.5 inches.

The proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA is located entirely within the eastern region of the existing Walla Walla Valley AVA and shares some broad characteristics with the existing AVA. For example, the soils of the Walla Walla Valley AVA are mostly loess-derived, similar to the soils of the proposed AVA. The proposed AVA also has similar growing season lengths to the established AVA, with an average growing season ranging from 182 to 206 days based on data in the region for the years 2020–2022.

The proposed AVA also has characteristics that differ from the existing AVA. For instance, the petition notes that annual rainfall in the Walla Walla Valley AVA ranges from 10 to 20 inches, while annual rainfall in most of the proposed AVA exceeds 20 inches. As a result, vineyards within the proposed AVA have been dry-farmed for many years, whereas dry-farming is not feasible in 80 percent of the existing AVA due to insufficient precipitation. Additionally, according to the petition, about half of the area within the proposed AVA lies above 1,500 feet, and the highest elevation exceeds 2,000 feet. By contrast, most elevations in the existing Walla Walla Valley AVA descend from about 1,500 feet at the foot of the mountain slopes to about 500 feet where the Walla Walla River cuts through the valley.

TTB Determination

TTB concludes that the petition to establish the approximately 4,898-acre Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA merits consideration and public comment, as invited in this notice of proposed rulemaking.

Boundary Description

See the narrative description of the boundary of the petitioned-for AVA in the proposed regulatory text published at the end of this proposed rule.

Maps

The petitioner provided the required maps, and they are listed below in the proposed regulatory text. You may also view the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA boundary on the AVA Map Explorer on the TTB website, at <https://www.ttb.gov/regulated-commodities/beverage-alcohol/wine/ava-map-explorer>.

Impact on Current Wine Labels

Part 4 of the TTB regulations prohibits any label reference on a wine that indicates or implies an origin other than the wine's true place of origin. For a wine to be labeled with an AVA name or with a brand name that includes an AVA name, at least 85 percent of the wine must be derived from grapes grown within the area represented by that name, and the wine must meet the other conditions listed in 27 CFR 4.25(e)(3). If the wine is not eligible for labeling with an AVA name and that name appears in the brand name, then the label is not in compliance and the bottler must change the brand name and obtain approval of a new label. Similarly, if the AVA name appears in another reference on the label in a misleading manner, the bottler would have to obtain approval of a new label. Different rules apply if a wine has a brand name containing an AVA name that was used as a brand name on a label approved before July 7, 1986. See 27 CFR 4.39(i)(2) for details.

If TTB establishes this proposed AVA, its name, “Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley,” will be recognized as a name of viticultural significance under § 4.39(i)(3) of the TTB regulations (27 CFR 4.39(i)(3)). The text of the proposed regulation clarifies this point. Consequently, wine bottlers using “Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley” in a brand name, including a trademark, or in another label reference as to the origin of the wine, would have to ensure that the product is eligible to use the viticultural area's name “Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley.” The approval of the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA would not affect any existing AVA, and any bottlers using “Walla Walla Valley” or “Columbia Valley” as an appellation of origin or in a brand name for wines made from grapes grown within the Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA would not be affected by the establishment of this

new AVA. If approved, the establishment of the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA would allow vintners to use “Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley,” “Walla Walla Valley,” “Columbia Valley,” or any combination of the three AVA names as appellations of origin for wines made from grapes grown within the proposed AVA, if the wines meet the eligibility requirements for the appellation.

Public Participation

Comments Invited

TTB invites comments from interested members of the public on whether TTB should establish the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA. TTB is interested in receiving comments on the sufficiency and accuracy of the name, boundary, and other required information submitted in support of the AVA petition. In addition, because the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA would be within the existing Walla Walla Valley and Columbia Valley AVAs, TTB is interested in comments on whether the evidence submitted in the petition regarding the distinguishing features of the proposed AVA sufficiently differentiates it from the existing AVAs. TTB is also interested in comments on whether the geographic features of the proposed AVA are so distinguishable from the Walla Walla Valley and Columbia Valley AVAs that the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA should not be part of these established AVAs. Please provide any available specific information in support of your comments.

Because of the potential impact of the establishment of the proposed Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley AVA on wine labels that include the term “Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley” as discussed above under Impact on Current Wine Labels, TTB is particularly interested in comments regarding whether there will be a conflict between the proposed area names and currently used brand names. If a commenter believes that a conflict will arise, the comment should describe the nature of that conflict, including any anticipated negative economic impact that approval of the proposed AVA will have on an existing viticultural enterprise. TTB is also interested in receiving suggestions for ways to avoid conflicts, for example, by adopting a modified or different name for the proposed AVA.

Submitting Comments

You may submit comments on this proposal by using one of the following methods:

- **Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:** You may send comments via the online comment form posted with this document within Docket No. TTB–2026–0004 on “*Regulations.gov*,” the Federal e-rulemaking portal, at <https://www.regulations.gov>. A direct link to that docket is available under Notice No. 242 on the TTB website at <https://www.ttb.gov/regulated-commodities/beverage-alcohol/wine/notices-of-proposed-rulemaking>. Supplemental files may be attached to comments submitted via *Regulations.gov*. For complete instructions on how to use *Regulations.gov*, visit the site and click on the “FAQ” link at the bottom of the page.

- **U.S. Mail:** You may send comments via postal mail to the Director, Regulations and Rulings Division, Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, 1310 G Street NW, Box 12, Washington, DC 20005.

Please submit your comments by the closing date shown above in this document. Your comments must reference Notice No. 242 and include your name and mailing address. Your comments also must be made in English, be legible, and be written in language acceptable for public disclosure. We do not acknowledge receipt of comments, and we consider all comments as originals.

Your comment must clearly state if you are commenting on your own behalf or on behalf of an organization, business, or other entity. If you are commenting on behalf of an organization, business, or other entity, your comment must include the entity’s name as well as your name and position title. If you comment via *Regulations.gov*, please enter the entity’s name in the “Organization” blank of the online comment form. If you comment via postal mail, please submit your entity’s comment on letterhead.

You may also write to the Administrator before the comment closing date to ask for a public hearing. The Administrator reserves the right to determine whether to hold a public hearing.

Confidentiality

All submitted comments and attachments are part of the rulemaking record and are subject to public disclosure. Do not enclose any material in your comments that you consider to be confidential or inappropriate for public disclosure.

Public Disclosure

TTB will post, and you may view, copies of this document, selected supporting materials, and any online or mailed comments received about this proposal within Docket No. TTB–2026–0004 on the Federal e-rulemaking portal, *Regulations.gov*, at <https://www.regulations.gov>. A direct link to that docket is available on the TTB website at <https://www.ttb.gov/regulated-commodities/beverage-alcohol/wine/notices-of-proposed-rulemaking> under Notice No. 242. You may also reach the relevant docket through the *Regulations.gov* search page at <https://www.regulations.gov>. For instructions on how to use *Regulations.gov*, visit the site and click on the “FAQ” link at the bottom of the page.

All submitted comments and attachments are part of the rulemaking record and are subject to public disclosure. Do not enclose any material in your comments that you consider confidential or that is inappropriate for disclosure. TTB will post comments as submitted, and it will not redact any identifying or contact information from the body of a comment or attachment.

All posted comments will display the commenter’s name, organization (if any), city, and State, and, in the case of mailed comments, all address information, including email addresses. TTB may omit voluminous attachments or material that it considers unsuitable for posting.

You may also obtain copies of this proposed rule, all related petitions, maps and other supporting materials, and any electronic or mailed comments that TTB receives about this proposal at 20 cents per 8.5- x 11-inch page. Please note that TTB is unable to provide copies of USGS maps or any similarly-sized documents that may be included as part of the AVA petition. Contact TTB’s Regulations and Rulings Division by email using the web contact form at <https://www.ttb.gov/contact-rrd>, or by telephone at 202–453–1039, ext. 175, to request copies of comments or other materials.

Regulatory Flexibility Act

TTB certifies that this proposed regulation, if adopted, would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The proposed regulation imposes no new reporting, recordkeeping, or other administrative requirement. Any benefit derived from the use of a viticultural area name would be the result of a proprietor’s efforts and consumer acceptance of wines from that area.

Therefore, no regulatory flexibility analysis is required.

Executive Order 12866

It has been determined that this proposed rule is not a significant regulatory action as defined by Executive Order 12866, as amended. Therefore, it requires no regulatory assessment.

Drafting Information

Vonzella C. Johnson of the Regulations and Rulings Division drafted this notice of proposed rulemaking.

List of Subjects in 27 CFR Part 9

Wine.

Proposed Regulatory Amendment

For the reasons discussed in the preamble, TTB proposes to amend title 27, chapter I, part 9, Code of Federal Regulations, as follows:

PART 9—AMERICAN VITICULTURAL AREAS

■ 1. The authority citation for part 9 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 27 U.S.C. 205.

Subpart C—Approved American Viticultural Areas

■ 2. Subpart C is amended by adding § 9. ____ to read as follows:

§ 9. ____ Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley.

(a) *Name.* The name of the viticultural area described in this section is “Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley”. For purposes of part 4 of this chapter, “Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley” is a term of viticultural significance.

(b) *Approved maps.* The three United States Geological Survey (USGS) 1:24,000 scale topographic maps used to determine the boundary of the Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley viticultural area are titled:

(1) Walla Walla, Washington-Oregon, 1966;

(2) Buroker, Washington-Oregon, 1966; and

(3) Kooskooskie, Washington-Oregon, 1966; photorevised, 1983.

(c) *Boundary.* The Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley viticultural area is located in Walla Walla County, Washington. The boundary of the Mill Creek—Walla Walla Valley viticultural area is as described below:

(1) The beginning point is on the Buroker map at the benchmark at an elevation of 1,290 feet in the NW ¼, section 5, T7N, R37E.

(2) From the beginning point, proceed south-southeast in a straight line for 1.1

miles to the hilltop with an elevation of 1,602 feet.

(3) Proceed 2.75 miles southeast to the SW $\frac{1}{4}$, section 14, T7N, R37E to the hilltop with 2,041 feet elevation.

(4) Proceed northeast for 0.18 mile to the intersection of Meiner's Road with an unnamed ephemeral stream at a marked elevation point of 1,926 feet. Follow the stream east for 0.13 mile to its intersection with the 2,000-foot contour line.

(5) Continue following the contour line south and east, crossing onto the Kooskooskie map to the contour line's intersection with an ephemeral stream at the boundary between sections 24 and 25, T7N, R37E.

(6) Continue south to follow the stream for 0.08 miles to its intersection with Blue Creek Road at a marked elevation point of 1,888 feet.

(7) Proceed west on Blue Creek Road for 1.5 miles, crossing back onto the Buroker map to its intersection with Mill Creek Road at a marked elevation point of 1,695 feet in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$, section 26, T7N, R37E.

(8) Continue 4.1 miles northwest on Mill Creek Road to its intersection with the boundary between sections 17 and 18, T7N, R37E at a marked elevation point of 1,405 feet near the old Kibler railway stop.

(9) Continue south on the boundary between sections 17 and 18, T7N, R37E for 500 feet to where the boundary intersects with Titus Creek. Proceed west to follow Titus Creek to its intersection with the 1,340-foot contour line near the center of section 18, T7N, R37E.

(10) Continue west and north to follow the 1,340-foot contour line to its intersection with Mill Creek Road.

(11) Continue west-northwest on Mill Creek Road for 0.24 miles to the intersection with the 1,300-foot contour line.

(12) Proceed west-northwest in a straight line for 0.87 miles, crossing onto the Walla Walla map to where the Northern Pacific railway line intersects with the 1,270-foot contour line in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$, section 13, T7N, R36E.

(13) Follow the Northern Pacific railway line north and east for 3.5 miles, crossing onto the Buroker map, to the beginning point.

Signed: August 11, 2026.

Mary G. Ryan,
Administrator.

Approved: August 12, 2026.

Kevin M. Salinger,
Acting Assistant Secretary of the Treasury
(Tax Policy).

[FR Doc. 2026-16669 Filed 8-13-26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4810-31-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau

27 CFR Part 9

[Docket No. TTB-2026-0006; Notice No. 244]

RIN 1513-AD14

Proposed Establishment of the Rancho Santa Fe Viticultural Area

AGENCY: Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, Treasury.

ACTION: Notice of proposed rulemaking.

SUMMARY: The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) proposes to establish the 15,827-acre "Rancho Santa Fe" American viticultural area (AVA) in San Diego County, California. The proposed AVA is located entirely within the existing South Coast AVA. TTB designates viticultural areas to allow vintners to better describe the origin of their wines and to allow consumers to better identify wines they may purchase. TTB invites comments on these proposals.

DATES: TTB must receive your comments on or before October 13, 2026.

ADDRESSES: You may electronically submit comments to TTB on this proposal, and view copies of this document, its supporting materials, and any comments TTB receives on it within Docket No. TTB-2026-0006 as posted on *Regulations.gov* (<https://www.regulations.gov>), the Federal e-rulemaking portal. Alternatively, you may submit comments via postal mail to the Director, Regulations and Ruling Division, Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, 1310 G Street NW, Box 12, Washington, DC 20005. Please see the "Public Participation" section of this document for further information on the comments requested on this proposal and on the submission, confidentiality, and public disclosure of comments.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Karen A. Thornton, Regulations and Rulings Division, Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, 1310 G Street NW, Box 12, Washington, DC 20005; phone 202-453-1039, ext. 175.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In accordance with 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(4), a summary of this rule may be found at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/TTB-2026-0006>.

Background on Viticultural Areas

TTB Authority

Section 105(e) of the Federal Alcohol Administration Act (FAA Act), 27 U.S.C. 205(e), authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury to prescribe regulations for the labeling of wine, distilled spirits, and malt beverages. The FAA Act provides that these regulations should, among other things, prohibit consumer deception and the use of misleading statements on labels and ensure that labels provide the consumer with adequate information as to the identity and quality of the product. The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) administers the FAA Act provisions pursuant to section 1111(d) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, as codified at 6 U.S.C. 531(d). In addition, the Secretary has delegated certain administrative and enforcement authorities to TTB through Treasury Order 120-01.

Part 4 of the TTB regulations (27 CFR part 4) authorizes TTB to establish definitive viticultural areas and regulate the use of their names as appellations of origin on wine labels and in wine advertisements. Part 9 of the TTB regulations (27 CFR part 9) sets forth standards for the preparation and submission of petitions for the establishment or modification of American viticultural areas (AVAs) and lists the approved AVAs.

Definition

Section 4.25(e)(1)(i) of the TTB regulations (27 CFR 4.25(e)(1)(i)) defines a viticultural area for American wine as a delimited grape-growing region having distinguishing features as described in part 9 of the regulations and, once approved, a name and a delineated boundary codified in part 9 of the regulations. These designations allow vintners and consumers to attribute a given quality, reputation, or other characteristic of a wine made from grapes grown in an area to the wine's geographic origin. The establishment of AVAs allows vintners to describe more accurately the origin of their wines to consumers and helps consumers to identify wines they may purchase. Establishment of an AVA is neither an approval nor an endorsement by TTB of the wine produced in that area.

Requirements

Section 4.25(e)(2) of the TTB regulations (27 CFR 4.25(e)(2)) outlines the procedure for proposing an AVA and allows any interested party to petition TTB to establish a grape-growing region as an AVA. Section 9.12 of the TTB regulations (27 CFR 9.12)