

# Columbia Highlands: The Proposal

The Columbia Highlands Initiative builds upon years of community collaboration with a balanced proposal that continues the safe passage of wildlife between the Cascades and the Rockies. The proposal advances:

- 1) Recommendation to the US Congress for designation of a national conservation area, three national recreation areas, and several new wilderness areas in the Colville National Forest;
- 2) Recommendation to the US Forest Service for designation of distinct zones for forest restoration and quality, long-term forest management, as well as improvements to recreation infrastructure on the Colville National Forest;
- 3) Collaborative and privately funded work with local private property owners to keep several ranches in operation for cattle production and maintenance of essential wildlife habitat (*described in detail on Ranchland Conservation page*).

## Wilderness Areas (215,000 acres)

Wilderness designation gives the highest form of permanent protection to roadless areas that provide important wildlife habitat and primitive recreation opportunities such as hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, and hunting. Existing livestock grazing will be grandfathered in to continue. Proposed wilderness areas include:

**Kettle Range (Profanity, Hoodoo, and Twin Sisters\* Roadless Areas):** This proposed wilderness in the heart of the Kettle Range north of Highway 20 has popular hiking and horseback riding trails, including a 30-mile stretch of the Kettle Crest National Recreation Trail. Its undulating ridgeline of 6-7,000' peaks is dominated by moderate to steep mountains of forest, including biologically unique sagebrush and wildflower meadows, with distant vistas of the Cascade and Rocky Mountains. It provides the best wildlife habitat in the Kettle Range, especially for Canada lynx. It includes places like Hoodoo Canyon, which is treasured for its sheer cliffs, emerald-green lakes, quiet trails, and giant pines.



**San Poil (Bald Snow, Thirteenmile\*, and Cougar\* Roadless Areas):** The southern stretch of the Kettle Range contains dramatic summits--including Sherman Peak, Snow Peak, Bald Mountain, and White Mountain--and is named after the tribe whose home this has been for millennia. Some of this area was burned in the 1988 White Mountain Fire, which has created spectacular wildflower meadows, snags for nesting birds and other wildlife, and the next generation of young, healthy forest. The area contains productive wildlife habitat for animals such as Canada lynx, pine marten, and wolverine. The fire also created prime glade-like terrain for backcountry skiers and snowboarders.

**Mountain Caribou (Hall Mountain, Hungry Mountain, Grassy Top, and Harvey Creek Roadless Areas):** Rugged terrain and steep trails rise to summit vistas traversed by hikers, bighorn sheep, grizzly bear, and caribou in this proposed wilderness area south of the Salmo-Priest Wilderness. Trails along winding ridgelines connect to Grassy Top Mountain, the Salmo-Priest Wilderness, and the wildlands of the Idaho Panhandle. These areas, including Hall Mountain, form an impressive backdrop for boaters and campers on Sullivan Lake. Further south, the ecologically rich Bunchgrass Meadows feature a rare bog and endangered dragonfly

species. These wild areas provide habitat for one of Washington's two confirmed wolf packs, as well as lynx, wolverine, elk, mule deer, black bear, and moose.

**Salmo-Priest Additions:** This would add about 16,600 acres to the existing 40,000-acre Salmo-Priest Wilderness in the very northeastern corner of our state. The gently rolling, lower-elevation, mountainous terrain is cloaked in old-growth rainforest of red cedar, western hemlock, and western white pine and is home to grizzly bear, the endangered mountain caribou, wolverine, ptarmigan, bull trout, and west slope cutthroat trout.



**Abercrombie-Hooknose:** Abercrombie and Hooknose Mountains are accessible by three hiking and equestrian trails that sit in the middle of this roadless area. The rugged nature of Abercrombie Mountain, eastern Washington's second highest peak, has long been a favorite with hikers, horseback riders, and hunters in search of challenging trails and cross-country ridge routes. The steep, granite and quartzite cliffs of Hooknose Mountain provide habitat for mule deer, lynx, cougar, black bear, and many species of birds. Grizzly bears have also been documented in the area.



**Quartzite:** Quartzite Mountain Roadless Area is the southernmost unlogged drainage in the Colville National Forest. Its old-growth cedar and hemlock forest and the adjacent private Betts Meadow preserve have attracted nature enthusiasts and photographers for years. With its close proximity to Spokane and 49 Degrees North Ski Area, Quartzite Mountain is a popular draw. It is home to more than 20 rare plant species, an abundance of elk, and features habitat for wolverines, Canada lynx, and pine marten.

**\*Delayed Wilderness Areas (Cougar, Thirteenmile, and Twin Sisters Roadless Areas):** These areas of about 33,000 combined acres would be designated by Congress as Potential Wilderness, thus providing the Forest Service up to 10 years to address restoration needs and relocate motorized trails, at which time they will be normal and permanent wilderness.



### **Kettle Range National Conservation Area (145,700 acres)**

Once established by Congress, this will provide strong protection of important habitat on the east flank of the Kettle Range. Included are four inventoried roadless areas (36,000 acres) for which the emphasis will be wildlife habitat and primitive and semi-primitive recreation, prohibiting new roads and new motorized recreation trails. Existing motorized trails will remain open. The remainder (109,700 acres) will be managed to restore old-growth forest conditions and enhanced recreational access where appropriate. Livestock grazing will be grandfathered in.

### **National Recreation Areas (70,500 acres)**

Once established by Congress, the Swan Lake, Gibraltar Mountain, and Tiger-Quartzite National Recreation Areas will be managed with an emphasis on recreation—both semi-primitive and more developed—such as hunting, fishing, horseback riding, skiing, snowshoeing, and mountain biking. Motorized access on designated routes will be allowed and could be expanded. Livestock grazing will be grandfathered in.



### **Forest Restoration Areas (279,000 acres)**

These areas are a mix of roaded and non-roaded forests that are recommended by the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition for restoration by the Forest Service. They would be managed to restore old forest conditions, improve wildlife habitat, and boost water quality for fish. Existing livestock grazing and recreational uses will continue and could be expanded.



### **Active Forestry Areas (347,000 acres)**

These areas are recommended by the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition for active timber management by the Forest Service using improved forestry practices. Much of this landscape already has infrastructure in place to support commercial forestry. In areas close to communities, an emphasis of forestry activities will be to reduce wildfire risk. Existing livestock grazing and recreation uses will continue and could be expanded.

Photos: Wapaloosie Mountain by James Johnston, Bald Mountain by Craig Romano  
Bunchgrass Meadows by Eric Zamora, Abercrombie-Hooknose by Eric Zamora, Jackknife  
by Eric Zamora, Taylor Ridge by Derrick Knowles, ponderosa pines by James Johnston