

Write a letter for Columbia Highlands wilderness

Neatly hand-writing concise, courteous letters to both legislators is by far the most powerful way to communicate with them, short of a personal visit. **Using your own words, including a few facts, and writing from the heart will make all the difference for the future of wildlife and wilderness in the Columbia Highlands!** Your letter can be even shorter than the sample below; one page is best, on letterhead if you have it. Please send copies of your letters to us at Conservation Northwest, 35 W Main, Suite 220, Spokane, WA 99201. If you're writing your letter at an event, please don't seal your envelope so we can make copies. Thank you!

Address one letter each to:

Honorable Maria Cantwell
920 W. Riverside, Suite 697
Spokane, WA 99201

and to

Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
10 North Post Street, Suite 625
Spokane, WA 99201

Sample letter:

Today's date

Dear Senator Cantwell / Congresswoman McMorris Rodgers,

[Get right to the point and be precise about why you're writing. It's important to express your support for the **Columbia Highlands proposal** and the prompt designation of **new wilderness areas** in the Kettle Range and Selkirk Mountains, but try to rephrase in your own words.]

I'm very pleased to be writing you in support of the Columbia Highlands Initiative, and I urge you to introduce a bill this spring to designate new wilderness, national recreation, and national conservation areas on the Colville National Forest.

[Tell briefly who you are. Why do you think the Columbia Highlands proposal is such a good one? Be sure to include why new wilderness areas are important. How does this issue affect your community?]

I'm a constituent of yours, and I've lived and worked in Washington for ten years. As an avid outdoors enthusiast, I was elated to learn that the Columbia Highlands Initiative includes something for all users of the Colville National Forest, especially 215,000 acres of new wilderness areas on the Kettle Crest and the Selkirk Mountains! Wilderness is the only designation that will ensure these crucial wild areas remain unchanged for future generations.

This innovative proposal developed after years of intense collaboration by conservationists and timber industry leaders provides a durable, win-win solution for the forest, working lands, communities, all types of recreationists, local economies, and wildlife like caribou, grizzly bear, Canada lynx, great gray owl, cutthroat trout, and other rare flora and fauna.

With threats posed by development, illegal ORV use and climate change, it's clear that we cannot afford to lose another year without your championing a wilderness bill, at the risk of losing hard-won, broad-based support and more acres of our spectacular wild areas.

[Share your personal experience with the Columbia Highlands if you have it.]

Nothing is more important to me and my family than the time we get to spend in the wild, roadless portions of the Colville National Forest—teaching my grandchildren about nature near Salmo-Priest, exploring the Kettles on snowshoes, and camping with my friends on Abercrombie-Hooknose to glimpse wildlife that need intact habitat to survive. Only wilderness designation can adequately protect these incredibly special places.

[Mention related actions by the elected representative that you appreciate.]

I'd like to thank you and your staff for your attention and work on this issue. Thank you for your leadership, for recognizing the successes and ground-breaking work of the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, and for promising to support wilderness.

[Finish with a clear message. What action are you requesting to be taken and by when? Request a response if desired.] *I hope you seize this historic opportunity before any more of Washington's irreplaceable natural heritage is lost. Please move quickly to introduce legislation that will designate wilderness, improve forest management, and provide funds to keep working lands intact, as outlined in the Columbia Highlands proposal.*

Warm regards,

Signature

Print full name

Full mailing address [Include your address on the envelope, too!]

Phone number and/or email

Your phone call will make a difference, too!

Senator Cantwell and Rep. McMorris Rodgers need to keep hearing from us—constituents who care about preserving Washington's last wilderness frontier. Make your calls **upbeat and concise**, stating your **name and address**, and your **support for the Columbia Highlands proposal**. Urge her to **introduce a wilderness bill this spring**, and **thank her and her staff** for being involved and supporting this collaborative effort. A short message is best; leave a message if you need to. Share this request with your outdoorsy friends. Future generations and wildlife will thank you!

Senator Maria Cantwell's Spokane office: (509) 353-2507
Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers' Spokane office: (509) 353-2374

(See reverse for additional talking points, if you need them.)
(Additional talking points, if you need them. See sample letter on reverse side.)

1) We need a balance that includes wilderness and sustainable forestry on the Colville National Forest.

Wilderness protection for roadless areas, along with areas already identified for responsible forestry, would provide a balanced approach to managing the Colville National Forest: protecting wildlife habitat, providing recreation opportunities, and supporting jobs in the timber industry.

2) Less than 1% of Washington's wilderness legacy is found in Northeast Washington.

Less than 3% of the 1.1 million acre Colville National Forest is designated wilderness (the Salmo-Priest Wilderness), representing less than 1% of all wilderness in the state. There are, however, 19 inventoried roadless areas that meet criteria under the Wilderness Act for possible future designation. Only 2.6% of the contiguous United States, an area about the size of South Dakota, is protected as wilderness. Wilderness provides the strongest protection for pristine public lands. Pressures on our natural resources are steadily growing as population is rapidly doubling and development spreads across the landscape. As wild, natural areas become increasingly rare, we must keep the ones we have intact today for the benefit of our health and the health of our children.

3) Wilderness ensures at least some of our public lands will be safeguarded for the future.

As our region's population increases and former farm and timber lands become more developed, our remaining backcountry lands become even more valuable as remnants of our once vast wilderness heritage. Wilderness is a place where we can connect with the past and where we can be reminded of how the American frontier helped to shape our values of freedom, self-reliance, and perseverance. These undeveloped, untamed lands provide an opportunity for us to experience the freedom, challenge, and solitude that helped shape our forefathers and our uniquely American culture. Over 100 years ago, much of northeast Washington was wilderness. Today, our remaining roadless areas are all the wilderness we have left. Just because an area is a designated "roadless area" has not kept them from being developed in the past and won't keep them from being developed in the future. Only Congressionally designated wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964 offers the security we need for these rare, ecologically significant landscapes.

4) Wilderness provides habitat security for wildlife and higher-quality hunting opportunities.

Many animals, including bears, lynx, wolves, wolverines, caribou, and other wildlife rely on the wild forests of the Columbia Highlands. They need wild lands as habitat to find refuge from increasing development and human pressures and as a crossroads for moving across larger landscapes. As climate change continues to alter our forest ecosystems, these wild areas will become even more important havens of safe passage for wildlife on the move. Wild forests also provide large, natural burned areas and meadows and wetlands free of noxious weeds. These are important feeding areas for deer, elk, moose, and other wildlife. Millions of birds use wilderness for nesting and wintering grounds and resting places when migrating. In wilderness, hunters also find what are becoming increasingly rare opportunities to get away from roads and traffic to pursue bigger bucks and bulls in more traditional ways in the backcountry.

5) Wilderness areas protect traditional recreational access.

Hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, horse packing, hunting, fishing, berry picking, camping, skiing, snowshoeing, and even wheelchairs are allowed in wilderness areas. More than 12 million people visit wilderness each year on their own or with a guide. Two-thirds of the Colville National Forest is open for motorized use and mountain biking. Motorized and mechanized vehicles like ATVs and mountain bikes are not allowed in wilderness areas. New trails should be developed to replace any biking or motorized trails that might be lost because of wilderness designation.

6) Cattle grazing and improvements for livestock are allowed in wilderness.

Existing grazing activity and/or range developments should not lower an area's eligibility for wilderness. Both the Wilderness Act and Forest Service manuals state clearly that grazing that occurred before an area was designated as wilderness "shall be permitted to continue subject to such reasonable regulations as are deemed necessary by the Secretary of Agriculture." The Forest Service policy follows the Congressional Grazing Guidelines, which state specifically state that the number of animals allowed to graze should remain at generally the same level as they were prior to wilderness designation. "The maintenance of supporting facilities" is also permissible in wilderness areas.

7) Designated wilderness areas stimulate economic development for neighboring communities.

Wilderness ensures that the scenic mountain backdrop of many small towns will be maintained as an asset to continue to attract tourists, retirees, and new businesses looking to relocate to these areas with a high quality of life and nearby recreation opportunities. An increase in the value of private property adjacent to wilderness areas is also well documented, as is having an official landscape designation like "Wilderness Area" on the map as an added draw for the region.

8) Wilderness helps maintain secure flows of clean water for fish and wildlife, drinking, irrigation, and ranching.

Healthy populations of fish and wildlife and many of our region's farms, ranches, and towns rely on the mountain backcountry as their source of water. The towns of Orient, Metaline Falls, and others get their drinking water from roadless areas and wilderness. Maintaining the integrity of these lands through wilderness protection is a cost-effective way to secure our fresh water supplies for the future.

For details on the Columbia Highlands Initiative, please visit
www.conservationnw.org/columbiahighlands

Contact us for other ways to get involved: (509) 747-1663, crystal@conservationnw.org or visit
www.conservationnw.org/getinvolved

Visit **Friends of the Columbia Highlands** at www.columbiahighlands.org and find **Columbia Highlands Wilderness** on Facebook.

Conservation Northwest protects and connects old growth forests and other wild areas from the Washington Coast to the BC Rockies, vital to a healthy future for us, our children, and wildlife.