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The Sportsmen's voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife.

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#### Letter on Recommended Wilderness in Revised Colville Forest Plan

The Colville National Forest recently issued a Revised Forest Plan to guide management activities on its 1.1 million acres of national forest in northeast

Washington. This plan follows years of study and stakeholder outreach, and includes recommendations for wilderness designation of Inventoried Roadless Areas, places of particular importance for Backcountry Hunters & Anglers members in Washington state.

The Colville National Forest offers exceptional opportunities for hunters, anglers and outdoor recreationists, offering chances at solitude and quiet pursuit of wildlife increasingly hard to find in the heavily-pressured and often crowded wild public lands elsewhere across the Pacific Northwest.

From pursuing iconic mule deer in the Bald Snow, Thirteenmile and Profanity Peak Inventoried Roadless Areas along the crest of the Kettle River Mountain Range, to chasing white-tailed deer in the Hoodoo and Jackknife Roadless Areas, to enjoying the sweeping vistas of the Abercrombie-Hooknose Roadless Area that draw visitors from around the region, these are places dear to sportsmen and women, and worthy of permanent protection.

With these wild places and the wildlife we pursue in mind, the Washington Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers feels that the proposed Colville Forest Plan revision falls short in its recommendations for wilderness protection of important Inventoried Roadless Areas.

Context is important here. The Colville National Forest contains more than 220,000 acres of wilderness- quality lands but less than three percent is currently designated Wilderness, the smallest amount of any national forest in the Pacific Northwest. Most notable is the absence of wilderness protections for wild country in the Kettle River Mountain Range.

The Forest's analysis of the Kettle Range's Inventoried Roadless Areas gave the Profanity Peak, Bald Snow, Hoodoo, and Thirteenmile areas high ratings in several key criteria. All provide outstanding opportunities for the backcountry hunting, wildlife viewing and other wilderness recreation that our members prize[mdash]activities that also strongly support local communities and economies, and will increasingly do so as visitation is expected to rise in this national forest over the coming years.

The Revised Forest Plan recommends wilderness for fewer than 62,000 acres across northeast Washington, primarily adjacent to the existing Salmo-Priest Wilderness Area and for the Abercrombie- Hooknose Roadless Area. In the Kettle River Mountain Range, only portions of Bald Snow Roadless Area were recommended for wilderness. This is certainly welcome, but falls short of what's appropriate for the people, wildlife and wild places of northeast Washington. It's also a substantial decline from the Forest's 2011 recommendation for more than 100,000 acres.

While we appreciate the hard work of the staff and leadership at the Colville National Forest, and the many stakeholders involved in the Forest Plan revision, we strongly encourage increased wilderness recommendations for Inventoried Roadless Areas in the final Colville Forest Plan.

We also strongly support the Forest managing Inventoried Roadless Areas in a manner that maintains their exceptional wilderness characteristics, including managing recommended wilderness consistent

with designated wilderness until more formal decisions are made in regards to the future of these areas important to sportsmen and women. We believe an appropriate balance can be reached to support local communities and economies and ensure continued non-motorized access to wilderness and roadless areas, including through consistent trail maintenance, while permanently protecting northeast Washington's wildest lands for future generations.

We look forward to engaging further as this process continues in support of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers mission to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting, through education and work on behalf of wild public lands and waters.

Sincerely,

Bart George, Co-Chair Washington State Chapter Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

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