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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

Dear Forest Supervisor Rodney Smoldon,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Colville National Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan Revision. As a respected outdoor writer and guidebook author, I have introduced countless Washingtonians to Northeastern Washington's Kettle River Range and Selkirk Range-collectively referred to as the Columbia Highlands.

This area contains incredible biological diversity as a land bridge between the Cascades and Rockies-and wonderful backcountry recreation opportunities. Yet, only 3% of the Forest is protected as federal wilderness. This is one of the smallest percentages of wilderness within any national forest. And it is not because there aren't any viable wilderness candidates-but because of past political posturing from special interest groups that have kept these areas from being protected.

I implore you to recommend the following wild roadless areas on the Colville National Forest as wilderness: Profanity, Bald Snow, Hoodoo, Abercrombie-Hooknose, Salmo-Priest Adjacent, Thirteenmile, and Quartzite.

The wild roadless areas of the Kettle Crest are of paramount importance and must be protected as wilderness. I oppose the proposed Special Interest Area designation because it is toothless and too weak, and request wilderness recommendations for all deserving roadless areas on the Kettle Crest, including at least the Profanity, Bald Snow, Hoodoo, and Thirteenmile roadless areas.

I most like Alternative P for its goals to restore ecological resilience, reduce damaging roads, and increase use of fire as a restoration tool. But Alternative P falls far short in protecting large old trees, watershed health, and wilderness quality lands, and in other areas. As part of the Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan revision, I urge you to adopt Alternative P after adding explicit safeguards for large old trees, improving aquatic habitat protections and habitat connectivity, and adding the wilderness recommendations noted above.

I would like to leave with you the Preface from my Award winning(Washington Reads Award)2007 book Columbia Highlands: Exploring Washington's Last Frontier (Braided River imprint-Mountaineers Books).

Preface

The Columbia Highlands

A timeless treasure in a growing state

Beyond the craggy and glacial-covered Cascades, and north of the arid Columbia Plateau lies Washington's Columbia Highlands. Spanning from the Okanogan River to the Idaho border, this isolated region contains the wildest lands remaining in eastern Washington. Rising to heights exceeding 7,000-feet, the Highlands' Selkirk and Kettle River Mountains are impressive and imposing landmarks.

But it's not the lofty peaks, the highest in eastern Washington that attract me here. It's the region's pure wildness and remoteness that I find so alluring. A far cry from sprawling and crowded Puget Sound; time moves slowly here. Vestiges of the past are prevalent-yet, so little of this land has been exploited and manipulated. Hundreds of miles of trails traverse these mountains, yet rarely do I encounter a fellow human soul when I take to them. The Columbia Highlands are a land of incredible biological diversity; where east meets west in the Evergreen

State. A transition zone between the wet Cascades and the drier Rocky Mountains, the Highlands act as a land bridge for wildlife populations from these greater ecosystems. Moose and lynx, species more associated with the Rockies, thrive here. Flora too mingles in this ecological conversion zone. Sagebrush creeps skyward on south slopes, while north facing ravines shade dense stands of moisture loving fir and cedar.

Sufficient snowfall buries the Columbia Highlands from November to April, while blistering heat and sporadic fires scorch them in summer. Come late spring, wildflowers explode into bloom, painting alpine meadows in a full spectrum of dazzling colors. By early autumn when the last of the harebells parade their purples, unbroken stands of western larch cast the hillsides in a golden hue.

Deer are profuse in the region's open pine forests and rangelands. This land is a refuge for grizzly, wolves, and wolverines. Black bear and cougar roam freely within this wild country, and woodland caribou hang on to their last stomping grounds south of the Canadian border.

To the Colville Nation these mountains are sacred-a sanctuary for young warriors engaging in vision quests. And I too, have felt spirits in these mountains; in winds whistling through silver snags and in thunderous clouds swirling over high peaks aimed toward the heavens.

While under no threat of over-use from hikers, hunters, and equestrians-the Columbia Highlands are slowly being besieged by off-road vehicles and incompatible developments, and neglected through mismanagement. Mostly within National Forest, but only a tiny portion is protected. Each passing year sees another road punched farther into the backcountry- another ATV assaulting the area's tranquility.

But a monumental change is occurring in this land that has defied time. A community of citizens from loggers to conservationists-business owners to backpackers-is coming together to protect and wisely manage the Columbia Highlands. For their timeless beauty to remain-an everlasting legacy of preservation and sustainability must be enacted. Ironically though, time is running out-we must act now.

Thank you again for accepting public comments on this important issue. I appreciate your time and thoughtful review.

Sincerely,  
Craig

Craig Romano  
author and co-author of 16 books

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