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Cantwell, Inslee, Warner, Reintroduce Legislation to Protect 60 Million Acres of Roadless Forest

Roadless rule has unprecedented public backing; bipartisan plan would support recreation, protect wild forest lands from commercial exploitation

WASHINGTON, DC – Thursday, U.S. Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and John Warner (R-VA), along with U.S. Representative Jay Inslee (D-WA), reintroduced legislation to protect 58.5 million acres of roadless national forests, including two million acres in Washington state. The bipartisan measure would protect the nation's few remaining non-wilderness roadless forests from commercial development by reinstating the Clinton-era roadless rule.

“Roadless areas make up more than 20 percent of our National Forests in Washington state,” said Cantwell, a member of the Senate Natural Resources Committee. **“It’s irresponsible and shortsighted to let logging, road-building, and mining degrade these untouched lands. With so few truly wild and pristine places left in our country, its time to strike a responsible balance and make the roadless rule law.”**

“These pristine forests are national treasures that should belong to all Americans, not special interests,” said Inslee, who has served on the House Natural Resources Committee since 1999. **“That’s why it doesn’t surprise me that over 90 percent of public comments have been in support of the roadless rule.”**

Warner said, **“This bill will preserve some of the most pristine forests of the Southern Appalachians for future generations, and will save taxpayers money as well.”**

The Bush Administration is continuing its multi-year push to overturn the existing Clinton-era roadless rule, which protects roadless forest land not set aside as wilderness from environmentally damaging development. By conserving pristine forest lands for future generations—while allowing hazardous fuels reduction, forest stewardship projects, and limited economic activities—the bipartisan Cantwell-Inslee Roadless Area Conservation Act takes a balanced, reasoned approach to forest management in inventoried roadless areas.

The bill also helps address the serious fiscal challenge presented by the more than \$8.6 billion maintenance and reconstruction backlog on the 386,000 miles of existing U.S. Forest Service roads. More roads, in addition to degrading sensitive lands, would only add to this backlog. Inslee’s bill has over 140 House cosponsors.

House co-sponsor U.S. Representative Christopher Shays (R-CT) said, **“By protecting these areas, we can ensure these pristine forests provide sources of public drinking water, undisturbed habitats for fish and wildlife, and barriers against invasive plant and animal species. This legislation represents a balance between environmental and economic concerns. We simply will not have a world to live in if we continue our neglectful ways.”**

The Roadless Area Conservation Act is endorsed by The Wildlife Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, American Lands Alliance, Sierra Club, U.S. Public Interest Research Groups, Defenders of Wildlife, Earthjustice, Audubon Society, National Environmental Trust and Heritage Forests Campaign, among others.

Robert Vandermark, Director of the Heritage Forests Campaign, said, **“We applaud these members for their leadership in protecting our last wild forests. With the administration determined to undermine the Roadless Area Conservation Rule and placing our last pristine forests at risk, Congressional action to stop these efforts could not be more timely.”**

Bill LaBorde, program director at Environment Washington, added, **“As thousands of Washington families prepare to spend their Memorial Day Weekends in National Forests, we want to thank Representative Inslee and Senator Cantwell for leading the way in protecting these pristine and untouched forests for future generations.”**

Cantwell is the primary Senate champion of efforts to preserve America’s remaining roadless areas, and has made the protection of these lands a top priority since taking office. Her first week on the job, Cantwell secured a promise from John Ashcroft during his Attorney General nomination hearing to protect the Clinton Administration’s roadless rule. Unfortunately, in May 2005, the Bush Administration broke this promise and repealed the entire 2001 rule—an action currently tied-up in court.

Inslee has led the charge in the House since June 2002, when he first introduced the National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act. He has filed it every Congress since. In July 2003, Inslee introduced an amendment to the Interior Department spending bill that would have preserved the roadless rule through fiscal year 2004. The Inslee amendment received 185 votes, 20 of which were cast by Republicans.

The 2001 Roadless Rule has received unprecedented public support, including over 4.2 million public comments submitted to the Forest Service in support of a strong plan to protect remaining pristine forest lands.

Access state-specific roadless area information on the U.S. Forest Service website at: <http://roadless.fs.fed.us/>

For a copy of the Roadless Area Conservation Act visit: <http://cantwell.senate.gov/news/Roadless.pdf>

http://www.house.gov/inslee/issues/environment/roadless_rule_reintroduction_2007.html

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