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Cantwell, Inslee Continue Fight to Protect Roadless Areas on Public Lands

*Conflicting legal decisions highlight the need for
federal legislation*

WASHINGTON, DC – Two Washington state lawmakers are ratcheting up the fight to preserve 58 million acres of pristine areas in national forests from road building, logging and other development.

U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and U.S. Rep. Jay Inslee (D-Wash.) today filed legislation in the Senate and House respectively that would codify into law the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The Clinton-era regulation aimed to protect roadless areas, which provide clean drinking water to over 60 million Americans and habitat to over 1,600 threatened, endangered or sensitive plant and animal species.

The roadless rule, which garnered over 4 million supportive public comments when it was established, was weakened during the Bush Administration and has an uncertain future. Conflicting court decisions and injunctions have been issued for and against the rule by courts in California and Wyoming.

“Our last remaining roadless areas are a cherished legacy that must be protected under law for generations to come, not left a victim to the back-and-forth of court opinions,” said Cantwell, a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which has jurisdiction over public lands and forests. **“It would be shortsighted and reckless to permit logging, road-building and mining to degrade these untouched lands. This act is not just good environmental policy, but it is also smart fiscal policy – it prevents the government from wasting millions of taxpayer dollars and allows the Forest Service to shift focus to its maintenance backlog. With so few genuinely pristine places left in our country, it is time we permanently hand these wild forests over to the American people, not special interests.”**

“Americans have been unequivocal in their support of the roadless rule,” added Inslee, who has served on the House Resources Committee since 1999. **“It should be crystal clear in federal law too.”**

These bills are a balanced policy that would protect remaining pristine national forests. It allows for continued forest management to promote forest health, preserves public access to existing roaded areas, and would ensure continued opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, and other forms of outdoor recreation.

The legislation has 25 co-sponsors in the Senate and 152 bipartisan co-sponsors in the House. It has been endorsed by a range of renowned environmental groups, including the League of Conservation Voters, Center for Biological Diversity, Natural Resources Defense Council, Trout Unlimited, Audubon Society, Pew Environment Group, Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society, among others. President Barack Obama and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack even are on record supporting the roadless rule as part of the administration’s broad vision for managing national forests.

Cantwell and Inslee long have championed the protection of America’s remaining roadless areas. In fact, during her first week as a U.S. Senator, Cantwell raised implementation of the roadless rule as a primary concern during the nomination hearing of President George W. Bush’s pick for attorney general, John Ashcroft. And Inslee first introduced the National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act in June 2002, and has filed it in each subsequent session of Congress.

National forests cover 9.2 million acres of Cantwell and Inslee’s home state of Washington – about one-fifth of the state’s total land mass. There are two million acres of inventoried roadless areas in The Evergreen State, including sites like Kettle River Range, Dark Divide and Lena Lake.

Maps of inventoried roadless areas by state: http://fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7_0_A/7_0_RU4?ss=119930&navtype=SubNavigation&cid=null&navid=151150110000000&pnavid=151150000000000&position=SubNavigation&ttype=main&pname=Roadless-%20State%20Maps

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