



# **U.S. SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL WASHINGTON**

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## **Senators Cantwell and Warner introduce Roadless Area Conservation legislation in Senate**

**WASHINGTON, DC** - U.S. Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and John Warner (R-VA) today introduced the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2003 in the United States Senate. The legislation, which codifies the existing roadless rule finalized in 2001, is a reasoned approach to forest management that balances the conservation of forest lands for future generations with economic activities. Also today, Representatives Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) and Jay Inslee (D-WA) introduced complementary legislation in the United States House of Representatives.

"Our remaining roadless areas are a precious national legacy that requires enlightened stewardship," Cantwell said. "The Roadless Area Conservation Act successfully strikes a balance between preserving roadless areas and providing for limited economic activities. The legislation is fiscally prudent – it allows the U.S. Forest Service to concentrate its efforts on addressing the \$8.4 billion shortfall needed to maintain existing roads instead of constructing new roads that will add to the maintenance burden in the future."

Senator Warner today stated that "this bill strikes a responsible balance on an issue of importance to most Americans. It preserves key undisturbed areas of our national forest system, while respecting existing rights and allowing for the construction of roads in limited situations such as fire, flood or other catastrophic events. As Americans, one of our highest obligations is protecting our nation's beauty for future generations, and this bill applies common-sense to achieve that goal."

The Roadless Area Conservation Act protects the remaining pristine national forests that make up only 31 percent of America's national forests. It is a balanced policy that allows for continued forest management to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire and to promote forest health, while also preserving these relatively limited acres of public forest lands as a legacy for our children. This legislation neither limits public access to existing roaded areas nor reduces recreational opportunities on forest lands. In fact, the bill would preserve important forest lands to ensure continued opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking and other forms of outdoor recreation.

The Roadless Area Conservation Act codifies the roadless rule which was developed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) during the Clinton Administration. The rule was finalized in 2001 following several years of deliberation, 600 public meetings in local communities nationwide, and 1.6 million public comments. There were 60,000 comments alone from Washington state alone. Ninety-six percent of those comments favored strong protection for National Forest roadless areas. Currently, National Forests contain over 383,000 miles of roads, many of which are in great disrepair. The legislation would focus road construction efforts on maintaining existing roads rather than building new ones.

The Senators first introduced the legislation in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress. Last fall, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the roadless rule and ordered a lower federal court to lift an injunction of the rule. In its ruling, the Ninth Circuit upheld the USFS rulemaking process.

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