



PRESS RELEASE

CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE COLVILLE RESERVATION

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Colville Tribes Applauds Final Passage of Bill that Protects Methow (mətxʷu) Headwaters

Nespelem, WA—The Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation today welcomed the final passage by Congress of S.47, the “Natural Resources Management Act,” a large public lands bill that includes new protections in the Methow Valley from mining activity in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. The U.S. House of Representatives approved the bill yesterday by a 363-62 margin, sending it to the President for his signature.

“This Act will provide protection of Methow, or mətxʷu, ancestral homelands and prevent development of large-scale mining that would desecrate our sacred sites, gathering areas, fish habitat and threaten the health of local communities,” Rodney Cawston, Chairman of the Colville Tribes, said today. “Our Tribes and mətxʷu tribal members have long been involved in projects to restore and protect critical habitat, gathering places and sacred sites in the Methow with federal, state, and local partners. We are very pleased that protections will be in place for these very important lands and waters, all of which are within the traditional territories of the Confederated Tribes.”

The Natural Resources Management Act withdraws 340,000 acres of federal land in the Okanogan –Wenatchee National Forest in the Methow from mineral exploration, disposal and mineral leasing.

Senator Maria Cantwell was instrumental in developing and ensuring passage of the legislation. S.47 is substantively identical to the legislation that Senator Cantwell negotiated last year when she served as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, which has primary jurisdiction over the bill. Although the legislation did not pass before the 115th Congress ended, there was a commitment by Senate leadership to ensure that the bill got an early vote in the 116th Congress.

“This valley has a very rich history and many of the present day members of the mətxʷu, frequent these lands to gather traditional foods, basket materials and visit their ancestral graves,” Cawston said. “Our mətxʷu members are well aware of the histories of these areas, including their knowledge of the traditional place names. One such place is called “‘Swr’am’ or ‘torch light fishing place,’ on the Methow River.”

Cawston said the CCT Fish and Wildlife Department continues to restore habitat in the Methow Sub-basin to benefit Chinook salmon, summer steelhead, bull trout and Pacific Lamprey.

“It is important to the Tribes to protect the Methow River and we are very appreciative of Congress’ support of the Colville Tribes’ request to protect our ancestral homelands,” he said.

Chairman Cawston added that the Tribes is appreciative that the “Mountain to Sound Greenway National Heritage” is included in the legislation. It will establish a National Heritage Area in King and Kittitas Counties that extends from the Seattle area east to Ellensburg along the I-90 corridor. The Colville Tribes and other Washington tribes are identified as necessary partners in the planning process for the Mountain to Sound Greenway.

“The Colville Tribes exercises its sovereignty in all areas where our ancestors once lived and dwelled,” Cawston said. “The Mountain to Sound Greenway National Heritage will provide a very exciting opportunity for us to tell our stories and share our histories with Washingtonians and all travelers to this region who want to know more about the historic significance tribes had in this area. It is a place where our natural foods have grown for centuries and the source of rich oral histories and traditions. We welcome the opportunity to reconnect to our old ancestral lands and routes in a modern but respectful way.”

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About the Colville Tribes:

Today, more than 9,535 descendants of 12 aboriginal tribes of Indians are enrolled in the Confederated Tribes of the Colville. The tribes, commonly known by English and French names, are: the Colville, the Nespelem, the San Poil, the Arrow Lakes, the Palus, the Wenatchi (Wenatchee), the Chelan, the Entiat, the Methow, the southern Okanogan, the Moses Columbia and the Nez Perce of Chief Joseph’s Bands.