

Tips for Writing Public Comments

The ability for the public to submit comments on proposed government action is a cornerstone of American environmental law and policy, as well as an integral aspect of our democracy. Public comments help point out issues the agency may have missed in its analysis, give additional perspectives, and provide more information on a proposed government action. Comments are also critical to legal proceedings that may challenge the final agency decision.

Here are a few tips and suggestions for writing public comments. These general tips apply to state and federal public comment processes, so be sure to pay attention to the details of the particular issue in front of you.

Comments are public

Anything you submit to the agency as a public comment will be just that: public. All the documents the agency will use to craft its final decision, including public comments, must be available for public review. This transparency is important for accountability in the public process.

Follow directions

Send it to the right address and in the correct format. The Federal Register, agency announcement, or website will specify exactly how to submit your comments. While some processes have open deadlines for commenting, most don't. Check the date and time for submission (including relevant time zone) and get it in on time. If Wild Montana sets up an action page, be sure to submit your comment on time and we'll take care of the rest.

Know your stuff

Take a few moments to familiarize yourself with the process. Review the publicly available documents and statements from the agency, and blogs, emails, handouts, etc that Wild Montana may put together. It's important to understand the purpose of your comment and know what the agency is proposing or considering.

Less can be more

Don't make your comment longer than it needs to be. You don't need to repeat yourself. And be sure to stay on topic – don't bring things up that are not immediately relevant to the issue at hand.

Just be you

You don't have to be an expert, write a multi-page essay, or comment on the entirety of issues presented. Write a few thoughtful sentences about the places and issues that are important to you.

Write in your own words

Avoid copying and pasting large sections of text from an organization's website or emails. While it can be great to show that hundreds or even thousands of people share the same thought, copy-and-paste comments don't get counted as individual comments because they aren't raising unique, substantive issues. Use the information provided by Wild Montana as a starting point to amplify these important issues in your own sentences.

Make it personal


Explain who you are, why you care about the issue, and why you are commenting. If you have expertise in the issue, be sure to identify yourself as such. If you, your family, your business, or the things you care about will be particularly impacted (good or bad) by the decision, be sure to point that out.

Give it some detail

You are bringing your unique perspective to the process, so avoid blanket generalizations or black-and-white, all-or-nothing statements. If you can, back yourself up with sources and facts. Tell the agency something it may not already know so it can be added to the administrative record and add real value to the final decision.

Style matters

Believe it or not, real people read every single public comment. Don't sabotage the good information you have to give with too many misspelled words, incoherent grammar, or confusing punctuation that could make your comment hard to read and understand.



**Not sure where to start?
Have questions along the way? Ask!**
Reach out to the Wild Montana staff member listed on the action alert email or webpage. If you're not sure who to reach out to, send an email to hello@wildmontana.org.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Take this process seriously. These are important conversations, so be sure to treat them that way. You can vehemently disagree with the agency's proposal and still show respect to the real people who read and process public comments. Be polite but firm in your tone, and avoid abusive, condescending, or threatening language. Again, these comments are public, so don't say anything that you don't want other people to know you said.



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