



3.3 WRITING A LETTER

Writing a letter is an efficient and effective way of delivering your message to influence legislators or agency administrators. Letters can carry a lot of weight, particularly when from organizations and constituents within a legislator's district or if they involve several, diverse organizations.

For sample letters, see the [Appendix](#).

Consider writing a letter:

- *When the issue is not particularly urgent* – letters can take some time to write, approve, send, and read. Letters sent through regular mail to government offices are often delayed for security purposes. Therefore, letters may not be the best approach for an urgent issue.
- *When you want to educate the policymaker* – letters provide a written record that can be referred to frequently as a resource document on the issue, particularly when you include wildlife science in support of your issue.
- *When you are presenting complex material* – letters allow your thoughts to be logically and clearly organized. They can also be re-read and referred to in order for the policymaker to learn about the issue and understand the topic more clearly.
- *To thank a legislator for supporting your issue* – legislators need to know when they are doing something you like and who their friends are on certain issues. Writing a supportive letter encourages them to keep on track and reminds them that you are involved and watching what is going on with the issues.
- *As a follow-up to a visit* – use the letter to thank them for their time in meeting with you and to re-emphasize your main points

Outline of a Typical Letter

An effective letter will flow logically and concisely explain the issue and provide information that supports the action you believe the policy maker should take to address the issue.

First Paragraph should state the purpose of the letter. Clearly indicate the issue on which you are writing; if the issue relates to a specific piece of legislation or regulation then include the specific bill number or docket number, respectively. Briefly highlight your concerns or position on the issue and what action you hope they will take.

Second Paragraph should introduce your organization. Explain that you are a Section or Chapter of The Wildlife Society, and you represent X number of wildlife professionals in Y region. State the mission of the organization, and as a result of your mission why you are interested in this issue. This paragraph shows the policymaker your credentials and helps bolster your opinion on the matter.

Next Paragraphs explain the scientific-based concerns you have regarding the proposed or ongoing legislation or agency actions. Keep these statements clear and concise and ensure they support your central idea – the action you want taken.

Closing Paragraph should restate your concerns, and draw a bigger picture of the effects of the action. Restate the action you hope they will take about the issue.

Sign-off of the letter can be done by your subunit's President, the Executive Board, the CAC Chair, or generally the Chapter/Section as a whole. Who you choose may depend on your subunit's operations manual and/or the specific issue being addressed.

Tips for letter writing

- *Include the official letterhead of your subunit.* This provides an official and professional look and feel to your letter.
- *Short letters are ideal.* Say what you need to say, but be as brief as possible; longer letters that are repetitive are less likely to get read or be impactful. If possible, keep the letter to one page of text.
- *Focus on one issue in the letter.* If you have other issues you are concerned about, write another letter. Letters that involve more than one issue may become convoluted and lose their impact.
- *Use a sincere and respectful tone.* You can be stern, but don't be disrespectful. You may not like the person in charge, but at least have some respect for their position.
- *Express your appreciation for their consideration.* Policymakers are often very busy, and may get inundated with people trying to influence their decision in multiple ways. Express your thanks that they took the time to read your letter.
- *Provide your contact information.* Policymakers or their staff may be interested in obtaining more information from you regarding the issue; make it easy for them to do this by ensuring your contact information is included somewhere on the letter – either in the letterhead or in your signature.
- *Be as specific as you can be.* If you desire a change in the language of the bill or regulation, provide specifics on the changes you would like to see happen. This makes it easier for the policymaker to address your specific concerns.

Sign-on Letters

You may consider circulating your letter around to other wildlife and natural resource organizations for them to sign-on. Allowing other organizations to sign-on to your letter helps bolster a broader network of support behind your issue. Letters that have multiple, well-known organizations supporting them carry a large amount of influence.

You may also be asked to sign-on to another organization's letter. Consider doing so if the

policy issue and advocated position are within the support of your subunit. This activity helps build and reinforce valuable partnerships.

Sending Letters via mail, email, or fax

You can choose to send your letter to policymakers via several methods – regular mail, email, or facsimile. Each method has its pros and cons; you may consider using multiple methods with the same letter to ensure the letter reaches its intended target effectively.

Regular mail

Pros: tangible, personal letter is delivered to the policymaker

Cons: slow process; letter may be delayed by security measures

Email

Pros: quick, effective delivery

Cons: impersonal; lost in heavy email traffic; may not be printed and filed

Facsimile

Pros: quick delivery to the office

Cons: may not be picked up by the right people; fax machine may be in another office; multiple pages may become separated

Submit Letters to TWS Staff

Letters that are written and submitted to policymakers on behalf of your subunit should also be sent to TWS Government Affairs & Partnership staff. This allows staff to be aware of and assist with policy activities, ensure consistency among TWS policy actions, and maintain a database of policy actions that can be used to inform and support future activities.

Submit letters and other policy actions to:

Keith Norris, AWB®
Assistant Director of Government Affairs & Partnerships
The Wildlife Society
5410 Grosvenor Lane
Suite 200
Bethesda, MD 20814
keith.norris@wildlife.org