



Oregon Natural Desert Association

Testimony of Brent Fenty, Executive Director

Submitted to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests

On

S. 3088, the Oregon Badlands Wilderness Act of 2008,

July 9, 2008

Chairman Wyden and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding S. 3088 on behalf of the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA). ONDA is a 1,200 member non-profit organization that has worked for over 20 years to protect, defend and restore Oregon's deserts. We are thankful for the support of Senator Wyden in developing legislation to permanently protect the Badlands as a federally-designated wilderness area.

ONDA greatly appreciates the efforts of Chairman Ron Wyden and his staff to develop legislation that preserves this special part of Oregon's High Desert. Central Oregonians are lucky to live in an area with such a varied and beautiful landscape and to be represented by a senator who recognizes the value of protecting our most special areas for future generations to enjoy.

Just 15 miles east of Bend, the Oregon Badlands is a gem in our region's iconic High Desert landscape. The area contains Native American pictographs, fascinating lava formations and some of the oldest trees in the state of Oregon. ONDA wholeheartedly supports the designation of the 29,847 acre Oregon Badlands as wilderness by S. 3088.

The Badlands was determined to be suitable for wilderness by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) more than 20 years ago and the area has been managed as a Wilderness Study Area (WSA) during that time. ONDA agrees that the Badlands deserves full protection as Wilderness and that such a designation is critical to addressing longstanding issues of vandalism and off-highway vehicle (OHV) abuse. With a wilderness designation, there will remain opportunities for many different user groups and this range of opportunities is part of the reason why the proposal has gained such strong support among Central Oregonians. Directly adjacent to the Badlands are the Millican Valley and Fort Rock Off-Highway Vehicle areas, with nearly 200,000 acres and 650 miles of trails designated for motorized recreation. Also adjacent to the proposal is Horse Ridge, a popular area for mountain bikers.

Central Oregonians have repeatedly voiced their support of the wilderness proposal, with 69% supporting Oregon Badlands wilderness in a 2005 poll. The Badlands has also recently received the endorsements of Oregon's Governor, Ted Kulongoski, as well as a number of Central Oregon's top employers and local elected officials. In addition, thousands of supporters have written to Oregon's Congressional delegation requesting that the Badlands be permanently protected as Wilderness.

ONDA supports the land exchanges between the BLM and local landowners Ray Clarno and the Central Oregon Irrigation District as outlined in Section 7 of the Act. The proposed exchanges will consolidate land ownership, improve public access, and facilitate and improve public and private land management. The exchanges add 91 acres of wilderness quality lands to the proposal while shortening the wilderness boundary by 2.3 miles. We also support the release of 42 acres of WSA lands from WSA status in order to exclude a man-made irrigation canal and pond from the proposed wilderness. Although it is not uncommon for wilderness bills to allow for maintenance and management of irrigation canals, this minor boundary adjustment will ensure that future maintenance and management of the COID canal along the northern boundary does not conflict with wilderness management.

Taking into account her longstanding training in the area, Senator Wyden has made accommodations in S. 3088 for Rachael Scdoris to continue training her sled dogs in the Oregon

Badlands. ONDA supports allowing Ms. Scdoris to continue her training in the Badlands as outlined in Section 5. The Scdoris family has lived on an inholding in the Badlands for decades, and Rachael has trained her dogs with a wheeled sled on the trails in the Badlands for her entire career. As a legally blind athlete, altering her training route would be uniquely detrimental to Rachael's ability to train safely and effectively. We expect that the area would be otherwise managed as Wilderness and that the corridor would be terminated upon voluntary relinquishment of training use by Ms. Scdoris.

Chairman Wyden, we thank you for introducing S. 3088. ONDA strongly supports the introduced legislation and we look forward to working with your staff and the Committee to finalize a bill that will consolidate land management and permanently protect the Badlands as wilderness.

That concludes my testimony. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.