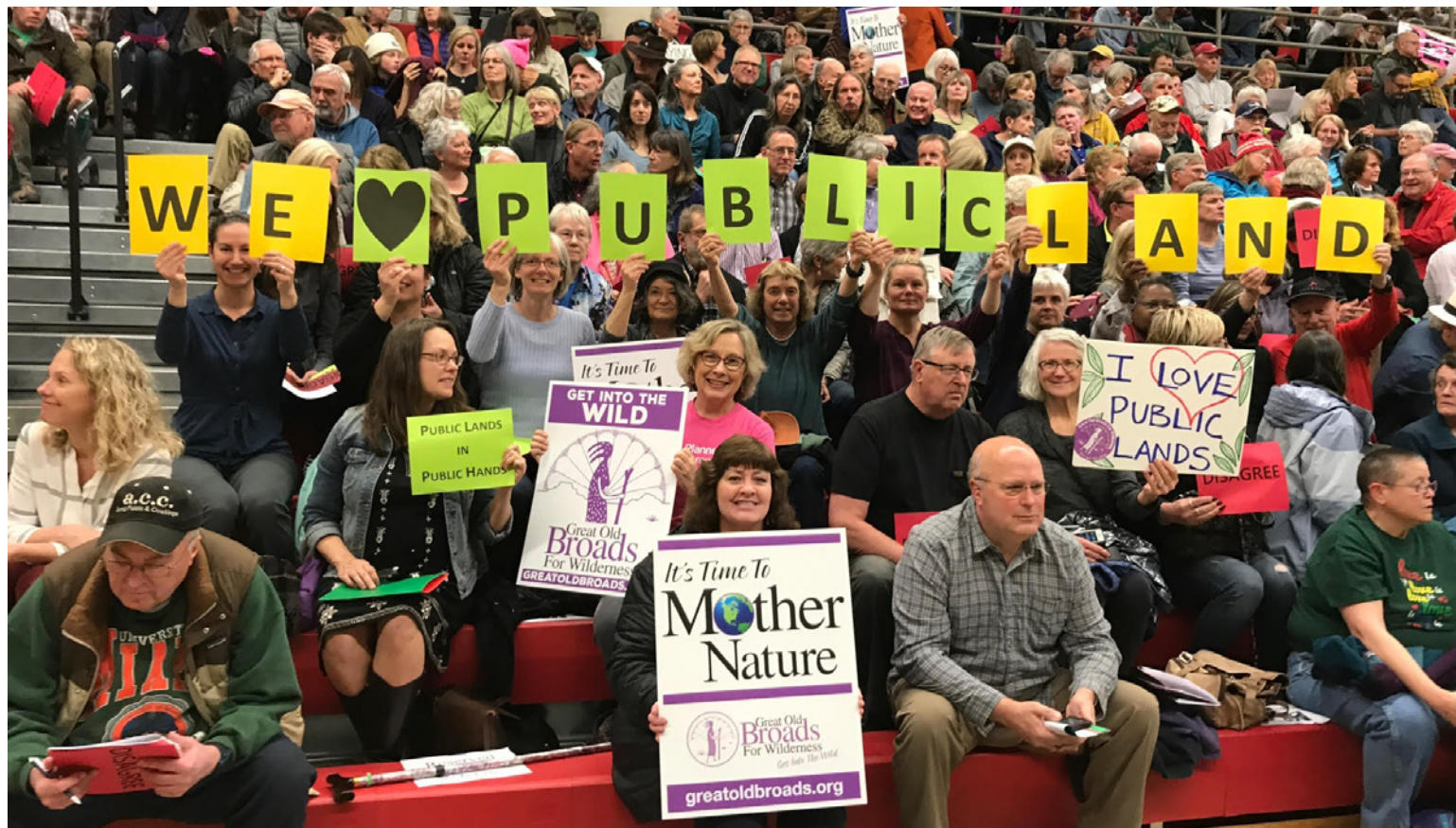




OREGON
NATURAL
DESERT
ASSOCIATION

DESERT RAMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION | SUMMER 2017 | VOLUME 30, NO. 2



Public lands supporters turn out for a town hall meeting with Greg Walden, congressional representative for eastern Oregon.

A RISING TIDE FOR

PUBLIC LANDS

NEW PUBLIC LAND LEADERS
CAMPAIGN WILL EMPLOY
GRASSROOT ACTIVISM
TO DEFEND PUBLIC LANDS

By Gena Goodman-Campbell
Public Lands Coordinator

While our public lands have faced serious threats in the past, all of us who love Oregon's high desert today find ourselves in a new and uncertain landscape. Both the threats to our public lands and the groundswell of people energized to speak up for our lands are unique to this moment in history.

To meet the challenges ahead and channel the increased engagement of public land supporters, the Oregon Natural Desert Association has launched a new public lands defense campaign and a new program: Public Land Leaders. The simple idea behind the Public Land Leaders program is to empower our supporters to talk with their friends and networks about the importance of Oregon's public lands and encourage others

PUBLIC LANDS, continued on Page 3

ARE YOU READY TO STEP UP FOR YOUR LAND?

Become a Public Land Leader in your community. Get your friends together to talk about public lands and take action. The food and drinks are on us! Find out more at:

**ONDA.org/
publiclandleaders**

INSIDE DESERT RAMBLINGS: **Protect:** Interior Department sage-grouse review prompts concern. Page 4.
Defend: Decade-long Steens industrial power battle ends with victory. Page 5.
Restore: With more than 50 participants, Independent Stewards program marches on. Page 6.

GIVING VOICE TO OUR PUBLIC LANDS

By Brent Fenty
Executive Director

My connection to ONDA began in 1997 when a friend, Craig Lacy, urged me to get involved with a great conservation organization working on the John Day River and Steens Mountain. These were places I had spent a good chunk of my life hunting, fishing and hiking. I sent in a check for \$25.

After that initial donation, I realized that there was so much more to learn about conservation and restoration in eastern Oregon. I also met an amazing group of people that had deep connections to Oregon's high desert and a passion for conserving wild places. Today, some 20 years later, ONDA is a second family to me.

The enduring commitment of ONDA supporters has accomplished so much. I'm proud to say that Steens Mountain remains a wild place and a natural icon of Oregon's high desert. Without ONDA supporters, Steens Mountain would house a destination resort; have hundreds of wind turbines, and endless roads crisscrossing the landscape.



With current national leadership committed to development at all costs, all those who care about Oregon's wild places – you, me and ONDA's community of supporters – will need to work even harder to ... ensure our public lands remain intact.

— BRENT FENTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Hart Mountain is one of the largest fence-free and livestock-free areas in the West and boasts some of the largest sage grouse and pronghorn antelope populations in the United States. Without ONDA supporters, the area would still have more cows than pronghorn, would be home to dewatered, eroded streams, and contain over 250 miles of barbed-wire fence.

While these and so many other successes should be celebrated, now is no time to rest on our laurels.

America's identity is unfortunately steeped in the notion that development defines success. This idea has always made work to preserve even a small portion of our public lands a difficult task. With current national leadership committed to development at all costs, all those who care about Oregon's wild places – you, me and ONDA's community of supporters – will need to work even harder to preserve our gains and ensure our public lands remain intact.

Over the past year, ONDA has closely followed efforts at the state and federal level to “release” your public lands from federal management. Proponents claim that these lands are poorly managed and would be better managed by the state. Let's be clear: this contention is nothing more than an effort to strip you of your lands to benefit the few at the expense of the many. States lack the financial resources and know-how to manage our federal lands. In fact, the vast majority of lands given to states over the past century, including right here in Oregon, have been sold off to private interests.

What is often unsaid by critics of public lands management is that the agencies responsible for managing your lands are grossly underfunded. Budgets have declined for decades. Under the Trump Administration, public land management budgets are being cut back even more severely. How can critics berate land managers while not giving them the resources they need to do their job?

You should have no doubt that budget cuts, mismanagement arguments and any effort to “release” your lands to the state are all part of a long-standing and coordinated effort to undermine the very existence of public lands. If we want public lands to be around for our children and grandchildren, each of us must do more.

I hope I can count on you to give voice to your public lands. To help you step up your efforts, ONDA has created a new Public Land Leaders program (see page 1). This program is designed to empower you to share your passion for public lands, support conservation over development, and inspire others to do the same.

Over the past 30 years, you and ONDA's community of supporters have kept the lands, waters and wild-life of Oregon's high desert healthy and vital. Although progress may seem difficult at times like these, together we will continue to move forward, one small step at a time, much like the water that drop by drop has carved the river canyons throughout Oregon's high desert. And, at ONDA's 60-year anniversary, others will look back and marvel at what we've accomplished.



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STAFF

Jeremy Austin
Hart-Sheldon Coordinator
Barksdale Brown
General Manager
Allison Crotty
Development Director
Brent Fenty
Executive Director
Lisa Foster
Development Coordinator
Gena Goodman-Campbell
Public Lands Coordinator
Ben Gordon
Stewardship Director
John Day Coordinator
Corinne Handelman
Outreach Coordinator
Corie Harlan
Owyhee Coordinator
Jefferson Jacobs
Stewardship Coordinator
Lindsay Jones
Membership Coordinator
Mac Lacy
Senior Attorney
Dan Morse
Conservation Director
Michael O'Casey
Stewardship Coordinator
Renee Patrick
Oregon Desert Trail Coordinator
Lace Thornberg
Communications Manager

AT LARGE

Craig Miller
GIS Specialist
Bill Marlett
Senior Conservation Advisor

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OFFICES

50 SW Bond Street, Suite #4
Bend, OR 97702
541.330.2638
FAX: 541.389.5056

917 SW Oak Street, Suites 419 & 300
Portland, OR 97205
503.525.0193 (legal)
503.703.1006 (outreach)

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PUBLIC LANDS

Continued from Page 1

to take action. We believe that these types of conversations amongst friends, families, and neighbors are crucial to defending our public lands and to ensuring a more vibrant and resilient future for Oregon's high desert.

The Public Land Leaders program was envisioned over the course of several strategy discussions after last year's election. In addition to the threats wild places and wildlife will surely face in 2017 and beyond, we continue to face challenges posed by the 2016 Malheur Wildlife Refuge occupation and the associated anti-public lands movement. As we surveyed these daunting challenges, we realized that we will need to engage an even broader array of public lands advocates to stand up for Oregon's high desert.

Over 30 years, ONDA has grown into a powerful grassroots organization with over 10,000 members and supporters. Even with this growing strength and reach, we know that we are not engaging all of the people across Oregon who love our public lands and are deeply connected to places like Steens Mountain, the Owyhee Canyonlands and the John Day River basin.

To grow these connections, ONDA aims to empower supporters like YOU to spread the word about the importance



Senator Ron Wyden meets with ONDA members and public lands supporters at a town hall meeting in Sisters recently. Photo © Gary Miller, Sisters Country Photography

of public lands. As ONDA crafted the Public Land Leaders program to meet this need, we also acted quickly to channel the groundswell of energy from our supporters into an effective response to the threats already unfolding.

Responding to threats to public lands

We have already faced several serious threats to public lands in 2017, and people across Oregon have responded unequivocally in defense of our land. ONDA supporters have sent more than 3,000 messages to our elected leaders so far this year. You spoke out in response to dangerous proposals such as giving away or selling American public lands and stripping protections

from National Monuments like Cascade-Siskiyou in southern Oregon.

ONDA has also banded together with several other organizations to host events and to form the Oregon Public Lands Alliance. We started with a training on how to speak up for public lands at town hall meetings. Dozens of public lands advocates attended town hall meetings hosted by Oregon's Congressional Delegation, driving home the message that Oregonians love our public lands and want them to stay in public hands.

In April, several groups organized the Public Lands Summit in Bend. While the summit was filled with a wealth of information about our public lands, the real value emerged

from discussions held during the second half of the afternoon. In small groups, all were encouraged to brainstorm how we can reach out to others in our communities to grow support for keeping public lands in public ownership.

The actions and strategies that emerged from these discussions varied, but nearly all of them revolved around a central theme that was summed up succinctly by one participant: "Reach out to diverse groups, public lands are nonpartisan." In other words, public lands are our common ground.

Channeling the power of people

ONDA has always known that our power lies in the many – the 10,000 people and counting who love Oregon's high desert and are willing to take action on its behalf. People who care about public lands are far from homogenous, but we all agree that public lands are a big part of what makes Oregon special. When we raise our voices together for public lands in spite of our differences, it sends a powerful message to those who seek to take away the places we cherish: This land is our land. And we won't rest until it is protected forever.

More at: ONDA.org/yourland

YOUR LEGACY IN OREGON'S HIGH DESERT

Legacy giving: a simple and impactful way to support causes that have great meaning in your life

ONDA.org/legacy

Photo: © Chad Case

WILL SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION BE DISMANTLED?

By Dan Morse
Conservation Director

Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke in June announced a review of conservation plans for Greater sage-grouse. The plans were finalized in 2015 after many years of effort. The publicly stated purpose of this review is to ensure cooperation with states and to consider implications for job creation and economic growth. The actual purpose may be more concerning. The review could lead to a significant rollback of conservation measures and allow for unfettered energy and mineral development.

Sage-grouse are an important indicator species for the health of the entire sagebrush steppe ecosystem. Unfortunately, quality habitat for the species has been greatly reduced over many decades, leading to the steep population declines that nearly caused sage-grouse to be listed under the Endangered Species Act.

ONDA has invested in sage-grouse conservation for decades. Our goals are to ensure the survival of the bird, support the recovery of sage-grouse populations, and protect and restore important habitat. Over the last several years, ONDA worked closely with an array of stakeholders to help develop the Bureau of Land Management and State of Oregon sage-grouse conservation plans. While imperfect, the plans do contain important mechanisms to protect the grouse and its high desert habitat.

Efforts to review, revise or undo these plans are premature at best. At worst, this action will dismantle carefully crafted plans and agreements that work in concert to



ONDA's goal is to protect habitat and ensure survival of the sage-grouse. Photo © Barb Rumer

achieve real gains for sage-grouse.

To demonstrate our support for the sage-grouse plans and concerns about efforts to water down protections, ONDA filed to intervene in a lawsuit initiated by Harney Soil and Water Conservation District against the BLM challenging the agency's sage-grouse plan for Oregon. Filed in a Washington D.C. court, the lawsuit seeks to throw out the BLM plan before it's even given a chance to work.

ONDA is intervening in the litigation to support the continued implementation of the BLM's sage-grouse conservation plan.

ONDA supports carrying out the Oregon plan in a complete and robust manner. ONDA opposes efforts to derail well-thought-out plans and stop important conservation actions. Doing so would leave the sage-grouse vulnerable to further habitat loss and steeper population declines.

This is but one of many critical actions ONDA is taking to stand up for sage-grouse and Oregon's high desert public lands. We look forward to continued work with our members, supporters and partners to ensure a positive future for sage-grouse in Oregon.

WILD UPDATES

THE OWYHEE CANYONLANDS CAMPAIGN CHARGES AHEAD

Efforts to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands continue to gain attention. Recently, the outdoor brands Osprey, Ibex and Keen in partnership with ONDA and the Owyhee Coalition produced *Wild Owyhee*, a new film highlighting the conservation values, people and recreation opportunities of the Owyhee Canyonlands. The story of the Owyhee as a superlative laden landscape deserving of thoughtful management is told by an inspiring group of people including a lifetime resident of southeast Oregon, a veteran helping others and a collection of world class adventurers and athletes.

The Owyhee campaign will also move forward with a series of listening sessions to

be held in communities across Oregon in late 2017 and early 2018. ONDA and the Owyhee Coalition will host gatherings to collect ideas about how to address the most pressing issues and best protect the Owyhee Canyonlands. All ideas for how to conserve and enhance the many values of this region will be welcome and encouraged. The Owyhee campaign is also engaging with our elected officials, residents of the Owyhee region and Native American Tribes to understand what issues they find to be most important and approaches to consider.

ONDA and the Owyhee Coalition applaud and appreciate the strong state and nationwide public support for protecting the Owyhee.



View the new film, *WildOwyhee*
ONDA.org/WildOwyhee

Thank you! Your enduring advocacy will sustain the Owyhee's rich wildlife, intriguing canyons and wild expanses.

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS STEENS MOUNTAIN

Final ruling upholds protection for Steens Mountain sage-grouse

By Mac Lacy
Senior Attorney

An industrial-scale energy project proposed for Steens Mountain is finally dead after a federal court ruling capped off ONDA's successful, decade-long legal battle to protect the mountain. The project would have permanently destroyed a unique high desert wilderness and habitat essential to the survival of the Greater sage-grouse. The sage-grouse is in danger of extinction and a small but important population lives on the Steens.

In 2011, the U.S. Department of the Interior approved a plan to erect dozens of 415-foot tall wind turbines and a 46-mile long, high-capacity transmission line on Steens Mountain. The project site was a half-million acre area designated by Congress 17 years ago for special management to protect its "long-term ecological integrity" for generations to come.

ONDA, joined by the Audubon Society of Portland, fought the project for years. The groups argued that while it is imperative to eliminate dependence on coal-fired power plants, this project was sited in the wrong place from the start. In a 2009 report, ONDA flagged Steens Mountain as unsuitable for utility-scale wind development due to environmental and social conflicts. Among other things, the windswept escarpment where the turbines would be built provides habitat for sage-grouse over the long winter months when sagebrush – the bird's exclusive food source over the winter – is covered by snow across much of the rest of this high-elevation landscape. Sage-grouse also avoid turbines and power lines because they instinctively perceive these tall structures as predator perches.

When Interior and an out-of-state developer nevertheless pressed forward with the project, ONDA challenged that decision in court. In 2016, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit agreed with ONDA that the Bureau of Land Management had failed to consider the project's effects on crucial



Steens Mountain from the Alvord Desert. Photo © Greg Burke

Besides keeping Steens Mountain wild, this victory also underscores the significance of the Judicial Branch at a time when threats to our environment are at an all-time high from an Administration and Congress hostile to conservation.

winter habitat. Both the developer and the agency had failed to survey the project site to see whether the birds or suitable habitat were present during winter.

By the time a federal district judge on remand vacated Interior's project decision earlier this year, it had become clear that, in fact, there is no need to build new electricity generation facilities in the region today. The Northwest Power and Conservation Council, established by Congress in 1980, determined last year that, despite expected population growth, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington can secure all of their energy needs for the next 20 years from conservation – i.e., energy efficiency – alone. Of the new projects that are built, there will be increasing emphasis on cost-effective solar photo-voltaic projects and on resources such as geothermal and wave energy, which have more consistent output

compared to the sun and wind. And utilities in neighboring California and Nevada have for the most part filled out the generation capacity required to meet their state renewable portfolio standards for the next five to ten years.

Besides keeping Steens Mountain wild, this victory also underscores the significance of the Judicial Branch at a time when threats to our environment are at an all-time high from an Administration and Congress often hostile to conservation. Member support in the face of adversity will bring more conservation successes to Oregon's high desert. Thank you for championing your public lands.

ONDA is represented on this case by senior attorney Mac Lacy, assisted by Portland-based public interest attorney Dave Becker and Boise-based attorney Laird Lucas.



www.facebook.com/OregonNaturalDesertAssociation/



[@TheOregonDesert](https://twitter.com/TheOregonDesert)



[@TheOregonDesert](https://www.instagram.com/TheOregonDesert)



ONDA is a member of EarthShare of Oregon, which brings support to environmental endeavors in local communities, across Oregon and around the world.

INDEPENDENT STEWARDS TACKLE WILDLANDS MONITORING

By Michael O'Casey
Stewardship Coordinator

ONDA's Independent Stewards Program is in high gear. Now with over 50 trained stewards, the program offers a way for volunteers to take a self-directed approach to high desert stewardship, apart from ONDA's slate of hosted group trips.

ONDA provides interested volunteers with resources and specific conservation-critical assignments. Participants learn new skills, collect important information, and give their high desert adventures an elevated purpose. This year, steward efforts are fueling ONDA's Wild Lands Monitoring Project, devoting vital labor to preserving the wild qualities of eastern Oregon public lands.

About the Wild Lands Monitoring Project

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for monitoring public land designated as Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas to ensure that the qualities being protected by these designations are maintained or improved. ONDA has formed cooperative agreements with several BLM district offices to assist with this monitoring. Independent Stewards help ONDA get this important work accomplished.

Diverse Opportunities

There is no shortage of places to explore and monitor. Eastern Oregon has over 85 Wilderness Study Areas covering 2.6 million acres. Stewards can get involved with this project year-round and tailor an experience



An ONDA Independent Steward at work in the Owyhee. Photo © Sage Brown

Volunteers learn about the importance of public lands, what to look for in the field, and how to use new tools to navigate in the field and document findings.

to meet his or her time and interests. Assignments often entail driving routes to ensure appropriate signs are posted or hiking to document ecological conditions and any incompatible uses observed, taking photos and capturing GPS waypoints along the way.

Training Provided

ONDA offers at least one overnight steward training each spring near Hampton Butte in Central Oregon. Volunteers learn about the importance of public lands, what to look for in the field, and how to use new tools to navigate in the field and document findings.

Along with learning new skills, the training allows participants to connect with other volunteers and enjoy a night camping among the juniper and sage.

Program Successes

Stewards have focused work this year in the Prineville BLM District and in the Owyhee Canyonlands. Volunteers have also hiked to the ridge tops in Sutton Mountain, Dry Creek Buttes, Gerry Mountain, and Spring Basin. Others have explored the canyons along the South Fork Crooked, Deschutes and White rivers.

Stewards have monitored more than 400,000 acres of desert wildlands and contributed over 2,000 hours of service. And, ONDA trained 24 new stewards this year. Thank you stewards!



GET INVOLVED!

Consider volunteering as an Independent Steward as a new way to support conservation. More information at [ONDA.org/IndependentStewards](https://onda.org/IndependentStewards) or contact Michael O'Casey at michael@onda.org.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



ONDA member Mary Kwart. Photo © Bob Brewer

Mary Kwart hiked the 750-mile Oregon Desert Trail in sections in 2016. She moved to Oregon in 2008 and became an ONDA member in 2016.

What inspired you to become an ONDA member?

I was happy to know that Oregon had an organization that was looking out for it. I was interested in hiking lesser-known trails including the Oregon Desert Trail (ODT) and that prompted me to become an ONDA member.

How did you hear about the Oregon Desert Trail?

I completed the Pacific Crest Trail in 2010. I love springtime in the desert, and I was inspired to hike long-distance trails in the southwest. When I found something closer to home, I decided to hike the complete ODT in sections in 2016.

What is your favorite place along the Oregon Desert Trail and why?

The Pueblo Mountains were my favorite because you didn't see anybody out there and it's close to a cute town. I loved following the cairns marking the ODT along the top of the Pueblos and winding through the basins with aspens.

How did you draw the connection between recreation and conservation?

When I was young and started backpacking, I found the outdoors to be a refuge. I felt empowered to be a woman out there on my own. I developed an emotional connection to places and wanted to protect them. Other recreational enthusiasts should go out and visit their local public lands and speak to their representatives. Public lands belong to us all. One person's voice can make a big difference!

Are you a proud, dynamic member like Mary? Support ONDA's mission and grow our community with a gift membership to a friend or loved one. [ONDA.org/donate](https://onda.org/donate)

YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK IN OREGON'S HIGH DESERT

Thanks to you...

500,000 acres of public land on Steens Mountain designated by Congress 17 years ago for special ecological protection is free from industrial development after a federal court ruling capped off ONDA's successful, decade-long legal battle to protect the mountain.

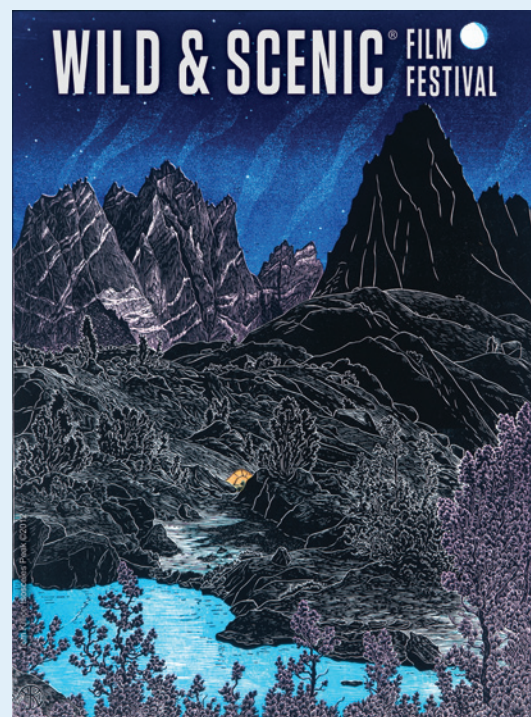
6 events sharpened the advocacy skills of 750 Oregonians this year. Get all the information you need to stand up for public lands at [ONDA.org/yourland](https://onda.org/yourland).

3,000 messages to our elected leaders so far this year in response to dangerous proposals such as giving away or selling American public lands or stripping protections from Oregon's public lands are holding the line on conservation. Speak up at [ONDA.org/takeaction](https://onda.org/takeaction).

Dozens of restoration trips, parties, presentations and meaningful ways to connect with other passionate conservation advocates are on tap for this fall. Get involved at [ONDA.org/events](https://onda.org/events).

...and so much more, all made possible because of you!

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Wild & Scenic Film Festival

Come see where epic adventure and environmental advocacy meet at the 10th annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival on Friday, September 29th at the Tower Theatre in Bend.

Matinee: 4:30 p.m., \$14

Evening: 8 p.m., \$16

Student? Under 18?

Special price: \$10 at either screening.

For tickets, visit [ONDA.org/wsff](https://onda.org/wsff)

Wild Desert Calendar Release Party

Save the Date for ONDA's party celebrating the release of the 2018 Wild Desert calendar:

- **Friday, November 3, 5-9 p.m.**
- **Deschutes Brewery Downtown Public House**, upstairs

Farewell, Heidi Hagemeyer



Heidi Hagemeyer

In May, Communications Coordinator Heidi Hagemeyer rode off into the sunset to take a new position at local dog gear company, Ruff Wear. From films and social media to strategic planning and defining ONDA's editorial voice, Heidi's many critical contributions advanced key conservation efforts. Thank you, Heidi, for your hard work on behalf of Oregon's high desert!



Oregon Natural Desert Association
50 SW Bond Street, Suite #4
Bend, Oregon 97702

YOUR HIGH DESERT ECLIPSE VIEWING TIPS

Eastern Oregon's expansive high desert public land offers some of the best total solar eclipse viewing opportunities. Follow these tips as you prepare for the August 21st event.

Plan ahead: The eclipse will inspire an unprecedented level of interest in visiting eastern Oregon's public lands. Your detailed preparations will ensure a successful trip.

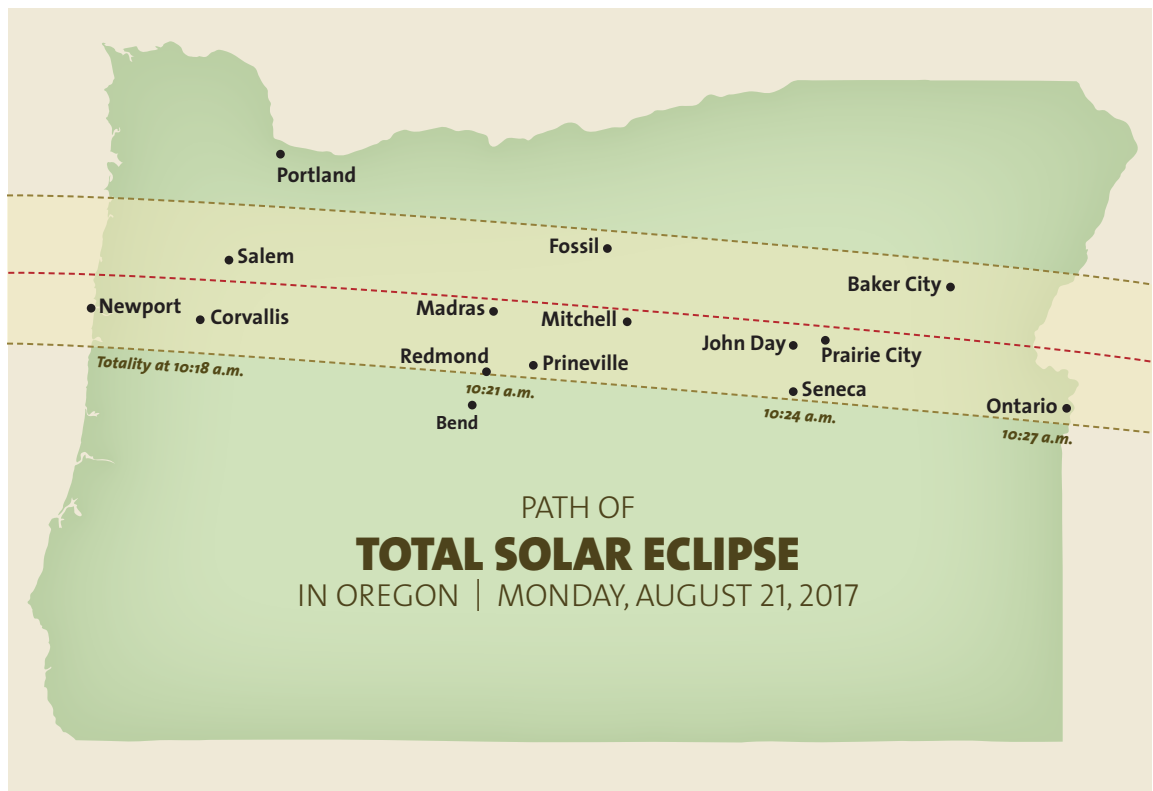
Know where you are going: Contact the agency that manages the land from where you plan to view the eclipse. Respect private land. This map can help you distinguish public and private land: oregon-huntingmap.com.

Driving on Public Land: Only drive on designated routes. Off-road driving damages the landscape and is prohibited in most places.

Lodging/Camping: Most lodging and camping has been booked for months. Have several contingency plans in case your first choice location is not available.

Plan for large crowds and heavy traffic: Allow yourself lots of time and patience will be mandatory.

Be Fire Aware: August is peak fire danger season in the high desert. Conditions will be hot and dry. Fires start easily and move fast. Carry a fire extinguisher, shovel and extra water in your vehicle to



prevent a wildfire caused by your vehicle, cooking or other activities.

Emergency Preparedness: Eastern Oregon has limited emergency infrastructure. Cell phone service is spotty at best. Bring ample food, water, cooler ice, extra gasoline, flat tire repair tools, and first aid supplies. Have an emergency plan that includes letting someone know your travel schedule and planned locations.

HELPFUL PLANNING RESOURCES

Bureau of Land Management

www.blm.gov/solareclipse

National Park Service

www.nps.gov/joda/planyourvisit/eclipse.htm

State of Oregon

www.oregon.gov/oem/hazardsprep/Pages/2017-Total-Solar-Eclipse.aspx

Eastern Oregon Visitors Association

www.visiteasternoregon.com/

Photo: M. Druckmüller/NASA