

MOMENTUM BUILDS FOR A PROTECTED OWYHEE CANYONLANDS



A hiker explores the Owyhee Canyonlands along the Oregon Desert Trail. The effort to protect Oregon's Owyhee is moving fast and needs your help. Photo: Tim Neville

HOW TO HELP

Call Sen. Ron Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley.

- Ron Wyden: 503-326-7525 | Jeff Merkley: 503-326-3386
- Voicemail or human: Share your name, ZIP code and that you support a protected Owyhee
- Let us know how it went!
<http://wildowyhee.org/act/call-oregon-senators>

Write a letter to the editor.

- Contact corie@onda.org to get details!

Join our business supporter list.

- No business is too big or too small!
Contact corie@onda.org to sign on.

By Corie Harlan Owyhee Coordinator

The Owyhee Canyonlands has been called many things, from Oregon's Grand Canyon to Oregon's best kept secret to a northern slice of the Southwest.

We hope to soon add one more: forever protected.

We're working hard and fast to make that happen. The campaign to permanently protect Oregon's Owyhee has covered an astonishing amount of ground in the second half of 2015.

In the last six months, a proposal was released seeking legislation in Congress to protect 2.5 million acres of the Owyhee. KEEN's Live Monumental campaign cemented the Owyhee's place as a national treasure. More than 100 Oregon businesses large and small signed on to support safeguarding this amazing place. And more than 100 voices for conservation attended a town hall in Adrian, a stone's throw from the Owyhee, to ask that it be protected.

Now, with the train charging full-steam ahead, we need help more

Owyhee Canyonlands, continued on Page 3

INSIDE DESERT RAMBLINGS: **Protect:** Vigilance becomes watchword for sage-grouse after decision not to list. Page 4.
Defend: Three legal actions in 2015 help protect Steens Mountain. Page 5.
Restore: Stewardship efforts grow through collaboration with other groups. Page 6.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FORESIGHT

By Brent Fenty, Executive Director



Brent Fenty

Like many of you, when I need to clear my head I go outdoors. Recently I set off for a quick hike in the Oregon Badlands Wilderness just east of Bend and mused about ONDA's efforts to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands. And I thought about the fact that in the '80s, an area like the Badlands being developed seemed completely far-fetched.

It would have been easy 30 years ago, as advocates pushed for initial protections of the Badlands and Bend sat in the midst of an economic bust with downtown mostly boarded up, to dismiss the protection of such a place as unnecessary. Today, however, residential development has boomed to the west and off-road vehicle play areas and the expanded and paved Millican Road surround the area to the east.

Luckily, we can still enjoy this 30,000-acre wilderness area's thousand-year-old junipers, spring wildflowers and amazing geology. We can only do so because of the foresight of a number of people who started working on protecting this important area back when such development seemed inconceivable.

As we push ahead with Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands, we are at a similar crossroads. At a recent meeting in Adrian on the Idaho border, I heard supporters and opponents of permanently protecting the Owyhee both talk about their love of this undeniably wild place. However, many of the opponents repeated the claim that the area is fine the way it is and no protection is necessary. Some of this was clearly rooted in an antipathy toward government and therefore the concept of public lands. For instance, one recent letter in the local newspaper advocated for the transfer of public lands "back to the states for private ownership and development."

Other opponents were more focused on the notion that the area has remained wild for this long and that we should simply trust that it will remain wild for generations to come. As much as I wish that were true, experience in the Owyhee, the Badlands and around the West suggests otherwise. We know that miles of new motorized routes are being created every year by ATVs in Oregon's Owyhee. The local paper also recently noted that Alta Mesa, a company drilling for natural gas in many areas of Payette County, already has tens of thousands acres of mineral leases near the proposed wilderness. It is clear to me, and I hope to you, that we cannot take the beauty and wildness of our deserts for granted. It is increasingly obvious that there is no place on land or water where development cannot reach. Our natural treasures will only exist for future generations because we had the courage and foresight to fight for their protection today.

Such courage was on full display recently when more than a hundred conservation supporters showed up on a Thursday night in Adrian to advocate for permanent protection of the Owyhee. These folks included river guides, hunters, anglers, churches, veterans and lots of other people who simply love wildlands and wildlife.

Thanks to their voices and the decades of work that have led us to this point, we have the momentum to finally give Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands the protection it deserves; protection that will ensure that its spectacular river canyons and red-rock formations continue to be home to one of the largest herds of California bighorn sheep in the country, a critical population of Greater sage-grouse, rare plants that occur nowhere else in the world, and one of the last places in the lower 48 where you can see an unobscured view of the Milky Way. But we can't do it without your help. Call Sen. Wyden's office, offer a little extra financial support this season for conservation, or share the WildOwyhee.org petition with friends. The Owyhee cannot speak for itself; it needs your help and support.



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

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OWYHEE CANYONLANDS

Continued from Page 1

than ever. The voices of support must sound loud and clear to urge Oregon's senators to back Owyhee protection.

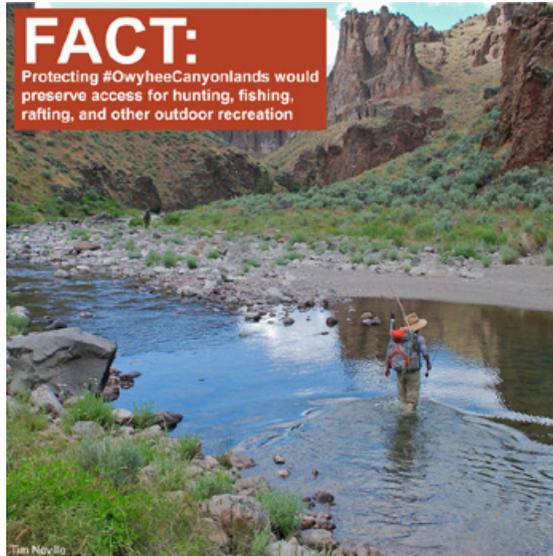
Decades in the making

The discussion about protecting the Owyhee region has gone on for decades. In fact, U.S. Rep. Greg Walden created a wilderness discussion draft in 2000 for Oregon's side. And in 2009, protection for the Idaho side of the Owyhee passed through Congress.

Fast-forward through the years to late July: The Owyhee Coalition, a group of regional and national organizations, including ONDA, put forth the Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal, an effort to safeguard the most scenic and ecologically significant areas of the Owyhee. It would create a 2.5-million-acre national conservation area containing 2 million acres of wilderness and more than 50 miles of wild and scenic rivers.

This proposal seeking legislation differs from KEEN's Live Monumental approach, which is advocating for five new national monuments across the nation, including for Oregon's Owyhee. At the end of the day, the Owyhee Canyonlands deserve protection. There are a variety of legislative and administrative options, including a national monument designation, which would permanently protect this place – and they all should be on the table.

In the meantime, the Owyhee Coalition has worked diligently to share the word about what protection would mean for the Owyhee and for the communities that neighbor these public lands. It's important to note that safeguarding this area also preserves Malheur County's way of life. As has occurred many times across the West when lands are protected, grazing would continue, and major legal roads and routes would remain open to safeguard hunting, fishing, rafting and camping. Tools necessary for firefighting and search and rescue operations are allowed. And research shows that permanent protection in any form would provide a boost to the local economy.



Left: The Owyhee Coalition has been working to share facts about protected public land.

Below: ONDA staff and volunteers gather signatures to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands in Bend in August on a stop of the KEEN Live Monumental tour, which advocated for protection of public lands.

Photo: Richard Ellsburly



The time is now

Thousands of Oregonians support the protection of eastern Oregon's wildlands, and especially the protection of the incredible beauty that is the Owyhee Canyonlands. It is more important NOW than ever to share your support for a forever-protected Owyhee.

To ensure this important area gets the protection it deserves, there are additional

ways for you to show your support during this critical time. Take five minutes to call both Senator Wyden and Senator Merkley to demonstrate that Oregonians want the Owyhee to remain intact and protected, forever.

Thank you for being a continued voice for the protection of the Owyhee Canyonlands. As a supporter of conservation, you are a key part of the Owyhee effort.



Photo: Greg Burke

The Owyhee Coalition, a group of regional and national organizations, including ONDA, put forth the Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal ... It would create a 2.5-million-acre national conservation area containing 2 million acres of wilderness and more than 50 miles of wild and scenic rivers.

SAGE-GROUSE: CONTINUED VIGILANCE THE BEST WAY FORWARD

By Dan Morse
Conservation Director

In late September, the Obama administration announced that it would not list the Greater sage-grouse as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. If you've been following the sage-grouse issue closely, as ONDA has, the not warranted for listing decision was fairly unsurprising. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell made clear that she based her decision on the collaborative conservation planning efforts of the last several years and her view of the resulting benefits for the sage-grouse. The secretary also indicated that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would review the status of the species in five years to ensure meaningful progress toward protecting the bird.

The secretary's decision not to list the species based on newly created plans is unprecedented and perhaps inconsistent with the Endangered Species Act. ESA decisions are supposed to be based on the actual status of a species and actions being taken on the ground to prevent its further decline – not the potential that plans might work in the future. Nevertheless, the politics of the sage-grouse issue always made a listing decision unlikely. And while politics should not be one of the factors, in this case it was seemingly unavoidable. Now, how things will unfold for the sage-grouse and management of its habitat rests squarely on how well plans are implemented and whether commitments to conservation are followed through.

In some ways, the collaboration has resulted in good things for sage-grouse. Specifically, the collaboration has led to the development of the BLM's new plans for sage-grouse across the West, including here in Oregon. For Oregon, the BLM plan applies to millions of acres sage-grouse habitat. It has provisions that could be beneficial to the species and help curb some impacts to their habitat. But the benefits of the BLM plan hinge on how well the agency implements it over time. The



A Greater sage-grouse is seen at a lek on the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge.

The future of the species will be determined by how plans to preserve it are implemented. Photo: Michelle Alvarado

BLM's track record is oftentimes spotty on this sort of implementation, so ONDA will be watchdogging how the agency carries out the plan and will expand our monitoring efforts to ensure that sage-grouse habitat is protected as it is supposed to be.

Another part of the recent collaborative efforts is the development of the state of Oregon sage-grouse plan. Oregon's plan for state and private lands, and its newly completed administrative rules for the Oregon Department of Wildlife and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, are intended to complement the BLM plan. Like the BLM plan there are some potentially beneficial aspects of the state plan like limits on disturbance, while other provisions are absent or lack real teeth. ONDA will also monitor implementation of the state plan and pressure the state and counties if they begin to fall short of real benefit for sage-grouse.

The bottom line for sage-grouse in Oregon and across the West is that without a listing, the only means currently available for protecting the species and its habitat is implementing the BLM and state plans as thoroughly as possible. It is unclear how well the BLM and states will go about that, but our goal is to urge rigorous implementation of these plans that truly helps protect sage-grouse.

Ultimately the worst-case scenario would be continued inaction because the species was not listed and a failure to enact the BLM and state plans. Such a scenario would allow the continued loss of habitat and declining sage-grouse populations, and we'd likely be right back to considering if the sage-grouse is endangered. Instead, ONDA is hopeful the new plans can work as designed: that they will begin to stabilize and increase sage-grouse populations, and that the sagebrush steppe ecosystem will thrive.

WILD UPDATES

Learn more about the **Greater Hart-Sheldon Region** in a new short ONDA film, "Sagebrush Sisters." The film highlights passage for wildlife between two refuges and will be part of the 2016 Wild & Scenic Film Festival. Information is online at ONDA.org/HartFilm.

ONDA is optimistic that 2016 will result in a wilderness designation for **Sutton Mountain**. Senator Jeff Merkley introduced the Sutton Mountain and Painted Hills Area Preservation and Economic Enhancement Act of 2015 on May 7 to permanently protect 58,000 acres in the John Day River Basin. The measure presently remains before Congress.



Sagebrush Sisters, a new ONDA film.

LEGAL ACTIONS SERVE TO PROTECT STEENS MOUNTAIN

By Mac Lacy
Senior Attorney

Steens Mountain remains untrammelled by human development thanks to important legal successes in 2015. Continued efforts in three legal actions have limited road network expansions, off-road driving in wilderness, and industrial development on the iconic mountain.

Moving toward a well-balanced travel network

In June, a federal judge ordered the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) not to allow motorists to drive on about 36 miles of primitive routes on Steens Mountain. Because most of the routes do not exist on the ground, the court agreed with ONDA that motorists searching for them would create new paths through the sagebrush, introducing weeds and carving up roadless areas. While the BLM has since moved to close some of the routes permanently, none are necessary for anything more than occasional agency or specially permitted use.

This latest ruling ensures that some of the most vulnerable places on the mountain remain off-limits to vehicles, at least until the court makes its final ruling on our claims. The court order builds upon a still in-force injunction ONDA won in 2012 that prevents upgrades on another 90 miles of primitive routes. Ultimately, ONDA hopes to see the BLM revise its travel plan and give up the idea of designating “roads” that have not been used for decades and have all but disappeared on the landscape.

Since the June ruling, ONDA’s position has been further bolstered by some of the travel planning provisions the BLM adopted in its Greater sage-grouse land use plan amendment. For example, the amendment requires BLM to decommission low-volume, unnecessary roads in sensitive areas and to not upgrade primitive roads within 4 miles of sage-grouse breeding areas (leks). The amendment also reaffirms BLM’s obligation to apply “minimization criteria” on a route-by-route basis when it writes travel plans. The criteria protect soils, vegetation, wildlife, air, water and cultural resources.

Preserving wilderness values

In August, another federal judge agreed



ONDA’s work for Steens Mountain continued throughout 2015.

Photo: Greg Burke

with ONDA that the Steens Act does not allow the BLM to drive off-road to remove native juniper trees within Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) on Steens Mountain. The agency is still free to carry out ecological restoration projects throughout this congressionally protected area, but must use a lighter touch in WSAs than on other lands.

Expanding juniper stands are just one of many threats to the survival of the Greater sage-grouse. The birds avoid things like trees, fences and powerlines that provide perches for predators. The BLM also lists climate change, invasion by non-native plants, and improper livestock grazing as causing loss and fragmentation of critical sagebrush habitats in Oregon, including on Steens Mountain.

And the science continues to evolve. For example, scientists today understand that sage-grouse will abandon ancestral breeding sites even up to 34 miles away from burned areas. To the BLM’s credit – and in response to an earlier phase of this lawsuit – the agency dropped part of its original plan to set landscape-scale fires on Steens Mountain. Since 2012, the agency has used less destructive means to remove junipers

from hundreds to thousands of acres of land each year across the West.

This important court ruling has the effect of both protecting about 80,000 acres of fragile WSAs on Steens and encouraging carefully targeted juniper projects instead of blunt instrument approaches.

Keeping industrial facilities off the mountain

Finally, ONDA is proud of its continued success – for the ninth year running – in the battle to keep an industrial-scale wind facility and 46-mile transmission line off of Steens Mountain. Through ongoing litigation in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, complemented by a direct formal petition to the Secretary of the Interior asking her to withdraw her predecessor’s approval of the project, ONDA continues to press hard for the secretary to acknowledge that Steens Mountain is not the place for this industrial development.

ONDA is represented on the Steens travel management and wind energy cases by its longtime senior attorney, Mac Lacy, and Portland-based public interest attorney Dave Becker. Laird Lucus of the Boise-based Advocates for the West also serves as co-counsel in the Steens wind case.



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COLLABORATIONS HELP IN THE HIGH DESERT



Volunteers from a Bend-based nonprofit organization, the Heart of Oregon Corps, pose for a photo after a day of cutting juniper trees on the South Fork of the Crooked River. Working with organizations like Heart of Oregon Corps allows ONDA to do more for the high desert. Photo courtesy Heart of Oregon Corps

By Jefferson Jacobs
Wilderness Stewardship Coordinator

One could say restoring the high desert ecosystem is a lot like building a house. Each part of the effort requires specialized techniques, knowledgeable specialists and attention to detail to get to the bigger-picture goal. To this end, the stewardship program has worked extra hard in recent years to expand our partnerships with other organizations, individuals and agencies.

ONDA continues to work on growing the number collaborators and the depth of the relationships to more effectively restore the ecological health of eastern Oregon. By cooperating with others who have complementary specialties, skills or other resources that can help fill in the gaps, we can do more for the high desert collectively.

In these symbiotic relationships we help others grow, as well. For example, ONDA staff provides career mentoring and natural history interpretation to at-risk youth in the nonprofit Heart of Oregon Corps. In exchange, the organization provides trained chainsaw crews to remove juniper as part of ONDA riparian restoration projects and fence-building crews to maintain and retrofit boundary fences where appropriate on public lands.

In other cases we work with agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service on restoration projects that fulfill both ONDA and Forest Service objectives for fish habitat restoration. ONDA provides volunteer labor to get the field work done. The resulting effect triples the size and impact of the restoration project and serves to unify both organizations toward the same goals.

Another example of where partnerships can enhance stewardship outcomes can be seen in our cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Land Management's Prineville District. Now in our second year, ONDA is using volunteer group trips, our Independent Stewards and interns to monitor public lands managed by the Prineville BLM. This partnership allows the BLM and ONDA to work cooperatively to intervene in issues that may diminish the quality of wildlife habitat or wilderness character. These are the issues that if left undocumented for years could have become larger problems. Instead, we have been able to document many small issues that have been resolved with simple proactive conversations and quick cooperative actions. Examples include ATV trespass and lack of boundary signage. The result is marvelously constructive collaboration.

As ONDA continues down this path of formalizing partnership agreements with other organizations, individuals and agencies, we are confident that together we can do more for the high desert than would be possible on our own.



Ben Gordon

Stewardship Director

ONDA is pleased to announce that one of its own, Ben Gordon, has accepted a brand new position as Stewardship Director. Ben joined the ONDA team as its John Day Basin Program Coordinator in 2012, in which he developed the Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven and Sutton Mountain wilderness campaigns, lead volunteer restoration trips and represented ONDA on important John Day policy issues. Ben will continue to oversee ONDA's John Day Basin program. He will use his knowledge of campaigns and advocacy to strengthen the important bond between ONDA's stewardship and conservation work. He looks forward to working beside each of you in the years ahead.

STEWARDSHIP IN 2015: 419 volunteers participated. **6,772** volunteer hours worked. **14,025** trees planted.

186,000 acres of public land monitored. **10.75** miles of fence removed or wildlife retrofitted. **15** beaver dams constructed.

MEMBERS

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Terry Butler. Photo: Elsa Davis

Terry Butler joined ONDA in 2010. He splits his time between Portland and Prineville, which serves as a great base camp for desert explorations.

What is it about ONDA that inspired you to become a member?

I'd visited Sutton Mountain and the South Fork of the Crooked River and wanted to learn more about the area. ONDA's very informative web pages were my top search results! I was so excited to discover an organization focused on protecting Oregon's desert landscape and was inspired by ONDA's emphasis on this clear, compelling vision.

What's your favorite place in Oregon's high desert? Why?

One place that really speaks to me is Sutton Mountain. I love the openness of the landscape, the grandeur of the view from the top, the feel of grasslands and the incredible solitude. I know that other people visit Sutton Mountain, but I never see them.

What would you say to existing and future supporters about ONDA's community?

I have been on four restoration trips and have met a wonderful range of people. I've had so many engaging conversations with other volunteers on really varied topics. Everyone I've met has been very committed, willing to work hard and passionate about ONDA's mission.

What would you like to see ONDA accomplish in the year ahead? 5 years from now?

Sutton Mountain permanently protected as wilderness. I like that ONDA works collaboratively with other groups and hope to see this approach successfully protect the Hart-Sheldon wildlife corridor. And, of course, more restoration trips!

Are you a proud, dynamic member like Terry? Support ONDA's mission and grow our community with a gift membership to a friend or loved one. ONDA.org/donate

Welcome Renee Patrick



Renee Patrick

Renee Patrick joined ONDA in December as its Oregon Desert Trail Coordinator. She offers more than 13 years of long-distance hiking experience, from backpacking over 10,000 miles, including the triple crown (Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest Trail and Continental Divide Trail), to leading trail crews, guiding wilderness therapy trips and acting as the Continental Divide Trail's first Trail Ambassador. When not sleeping on the ground and covering 30 miles a day on the trail, she can be found packrafting, skiing, biking or hiking around Central Oregon. Her love of the high desert

translates into a desire to get outside as much as possible and to inspire others to do the same. Get in touch at renee@onda.org.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DEC
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FRI

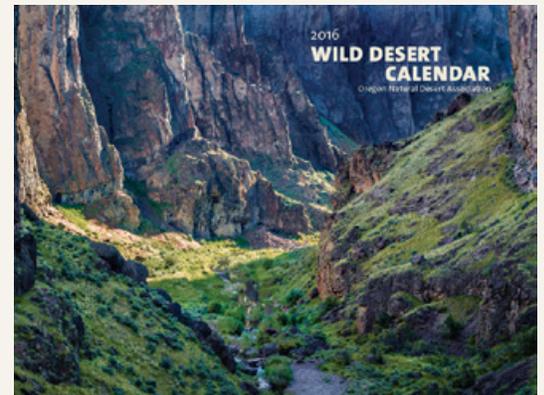
Portland 2016 Wild Desert Calendar Debut

Base Camp Brewing
930 SE Oak St.
Bevs & revelry from 5-7 p.m.
Contact: 503-703-1006

DEC
4
FRI

Bend Year-End Celebration

ONDA's Bend Office
50 SW Bond St. Suite 4
Across from Strictly Organic
Music, food and bevs and more
from 5:30-8:30 p.m.
Contact: 541-330-2638



Need the perfect holiday gift?

Try the 2016 Wild Desert Calendar!

Order at: ONDA.org/Calendar

SAVE THE DATE

JAN
19
TUE

High Desert Lecture Series

The High Desert Lecture Series kicks off again in January! The "Sagebrush Sisters" – the three women who hiked across the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region – will kick off the season, appearing Jan. 19 in Bend and Feb. 3 in Portland. For more information, visit ONDA.org/HighDesertSeries.

FEB
3
WED

APRIL
15-17
FRI-SUN

Annual General Meeting 2016

Stay tuned for more information at ONDA.org/Events

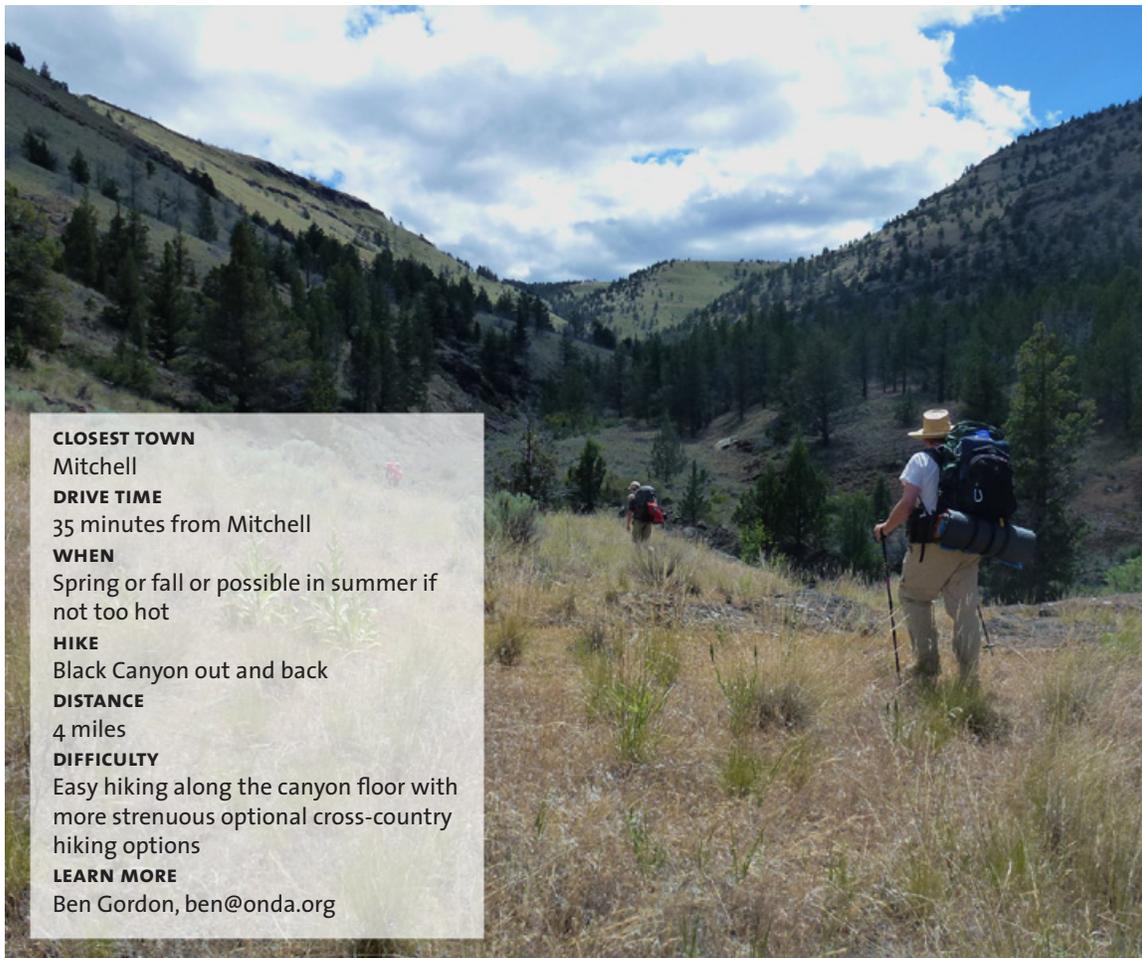


ONDA is a member of EarthShare of Oregon, which brings support to environmental endeavors in local communities, across Oregon and around the world.



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

ONDA DESERT OUTING: **BLACK CANYON HIKE AT SUTTON MOUNTAIN**



CLOSEST TOWN

Mitchell

DRIVE TIME

35 minutes from Mitchell

WHEN

Spring or fall or possible in summer if not too hot

HIKE

Black Canyon out and back

DISTANCE

4 miles

DIFFICULTY

Easy hiking along the canyon floor with more strenuous optional cross-country hiking options

LEARN MORE

Ben Gordon, ben@onda.org

Black Canyon. Photo: Bob DenOuden

BLACK CANYON HIKE

Black Canyon offers hikers of all levels the chance to experience the serenity of Oregon's high desert.

Look for waterfalls, small offshoots from the main canyon and a steep grassy hill scrambling that leads to the summit of Sutton Mountain.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS FROM BEND

Head north 17.3 miles on Highway 97 to Redmond. Continue east to Ochoco Highway 126 and then drive 20.1 miles to Prineville. Continue 47.1 miles to Mitchell and head north on Service Creek/Mitchell Highway 207 for 9.7 miles. Turn left on Girds Creek Road/Twick-enham Road and continue to Black Canyon Trailhead.

Please note that the trailhead is very discrete. Look for a small parking area on the west side of the road.

YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK IN OREGON'S HIGH DESERT

Thanks to you ...

More than 11,000 Owyhee Canyonlands campaign supporters made their voices heard by signing the petition to protect this incredible landscape. Advocate to protect more than 2 million acres of your public land at the campaign website, WildOwyhee.org.

1 new film, "Sagebrush Sisters," highlights the conservation potential of the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region as told through the journey of three hikers and stalwart ONDA supporters. Events to meet the hikers and hear about their adventure are coming to Bend and Portland to kick off our speaker series in 2016. Learn about the film at ONDA.org/HartFilm.

2,756 committed supporters are now active ONDA members, helping grow our voice across Oregon and make desert conservation a state and national priority.

15 volunteer stewards trained in the pilot phase of ONDA's burgeoning Independent Stewards effort. Find out how you can give your desert adventure a purpose in 2016 at ONDA.org/IndependentStewards.

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