



FROM TOP:
Malheur Refuge;
photo: Craig
Coonrad. Short-
eared owl at
Malheur; photo:
Brian O'Keefe.
Petroglyphs;
photo: U.S.
Fish & Wildlife
Service.



M A L H E U R R E F U G E S T A N D O F F

PUBLIC LANDS BRING US TOGETHER

By Brent Fenty
Executive Director

As broadcast in news headlines around the world, a handful of armed militants took over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County at the dawn of the New Year, staying for 41 days. We all watched with dismay as the misguided takeover unfolded against the backdrop of a natural wonder protected in 1908 by President Theodore Roosevelt. The refuge is a critical stopover for migrating birds along what's known as the Pacific Flyway, at times sheltering as much as 66 percent of birds using the flyway. It's renowned for its amazing birdwatching and cherished by thousands of Oregonians and other Americans.

ONDA is deeply appreciative of all of the efforts to bring the illegal takeover to an end. And if there is a silver lining to this situation, it is that it has spurred many to stand up on behalf of the public lands they love. It reminds us all that we cannot take our public lands for granted. And in the coming months and years, you can count on ONDA to be a strong voice for Oregon's high desert as we engage in a robust but civil discussion about the importance of these public lands.

Process of healing

The irony struck many that the handful of militants from around the country chose this place, a 187,757-acre expanse of wetlands and high desert at the base of Steens Mountain, to draw attention to their views on government. These militants selected a place where ranchers, tribal members, conservationists and others had worked collaboratively for years to pull together a strong, thoughtful management plan for our public lands.

Completed in 2013, this plan outlines restoration goals and conservation management for

Public lands, continued on Page 4

YOUR VIEW:

SPEAKING UP
FOR PUBLIC LANDS

Public lands remain the last and most important vestige of the American landscape. To have them compromised destroys the social contract under which they were created, especially in the fashion that we see currently. No individual or corporation can preserve our national heritage.

RON SAVITT, PORTLAND

Public lands are the entire capital wealth we own in common. They are all we have ever, or will ever, possess as a nation. Prudent management and cautious use must ensure their perpetual benefit to all Americans. And our world."

TYLER GROO, PAULINA

Your view, continued on Page 4

INSIDE DESERT RAMBLINGS: **Protect:** Public can participate in process to shape two BLM management plans. Page 2.
Defend: Greater sage-grouse conservation looms large in areas long important to ONDA. Page 3.
Restore: Independent stewards ramping up in 2016. Page 6.

PUBLIC CAN HELP SHAPE MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR OWYHEE, HART-SHELDON



Beatys Butte, seen in the distance, is a defining feature of the land between the Hart Mountain and Sheldon wildlife refuges. The Bureau of Land Management's work to amend its Resource Management Plans for the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region and the Owyhee Canyonlands will be critical for wildlife. It's also an important chance to have a voice. Photo: Brian Ouimette

By Jeremy Austin
Greater Hart-Sheldon Coordinator

This year the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is amending its Resource Management Plans (RMPs) in both the Owyhee Canyonlands and the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region. Both of the amendment processes will make important decisions that impact how these two eastern Oregon treasures are managed for the next several decades. At the heart of both plans is public participation, allowing for a voice in the management of one of our country's greatest assets, our public lands.

RMPs set the framework for where certain

land uses can take place on BLM lands. The plans do not make activity-level decisions like where a trail will be or what fences are needed, but instead provide a broader "landscape view" of the management of resources over a 15- to 20-year time period. The BLM's Vale District and Lakeview District amendment processes are already under way. These RMP amendments are addressing key issues regarding lands with wilderness characteristics, off-road vehicle use and livestock grazing.

There will be multiple opportunities for the public to provide comments. These opportunities are required steps in the process. They're also critical elements of develop-

ing plans that reflect the public's interests and are viable over the long-term. ONDA is working to engage the public in these planning processes and will be looking for people to submit comments, write letters and get involved to help shape the management of public lands in southeastern Oregon.

The amazing vistas and wildlife of the Owyhee Canyonlands and the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region cannot speak for themselves. Help make the important decisions about how our public lands are managed by getting involved in these vital planning processes: email Jeremy Austin at jeremy@onda.org.



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SAGE-GROUSE IN SPOTLIGHT IN TWO IMPORTANT REGIONS

By Mac Lacy
Senior Attorney

Greater sage-grouse conservation takes center stage this year in Oregon's two most important strongholds for the imperiled bird. Last fall, the Bureau of Land Management unveiled a sweeping new plan to protect the grouse and its sagebrush habitats across the West. Specially protected Sagebrush Focal Areas encompass the two highest-priority landscapes in Oregon: the sprawling corridor that connects the Hart Mountain and Sheldon national wildlife refuges, and a vast area to the east spanning from the Pueblo Mountains to the southern Owyhee Canyonlands. BLM has proposed withdrawing these areas from future mining claims and has prioritized them for land health assessments and habitat restoration.

The new plan puts the spotlight on two areas where ONDA has concentrated its efforts for decades. If properly and effectively implemented by the BLM, the plan should amplify the importance of two significant court decisions in these key places for sage-grouse.

In 2006, a federal judge ruled BLM was wrong to authorize a grazing plan for the half-million-acre Beatys Butte region near Hart Mountain without studying potential effects on wilderness values. In an ensuing settlement, which remains in force, BLM agreed to (1) reevaluate impacts to wilderness values in a new environmental review, (2) collect and study information about pygmy rabbits, sage-grouse and rare plants, and (3) refrain from upgrading roads in the project area until it completes the new review. Under the new sage-grouse plan, BLM must also now in this same area identify nesting habitat and reestablish sagebrush cover, native grasses and forbs that are crucial to raising chicks.

Similarly, court rulings in 2010, 2011 and 2013 require BLM to reanalyze impacts to sage-grouse before issuing new grazing



TOP: Pronghorn antelope sprint across the land near Beatys Butte in the land between two wildlife refuges, Hart Mountain and Sheldon. This area provides critical habitat for many wildlife species. LEFT: Adequate protection for Greater sage-grouse, imperiled throughout the West, is a focus of ONDA's work. Photo: Michelle Alvarado, Wahoo Films

decisions for the half-million-acre Louse Canyon landscape. Key here will be the sage-grouse plan's measures for protecting vital springs and wet meadows, avoiding impacts to nesting habitat, and maintaining minimum grass heights. The plan also imposes special triggers in the event of local population declines. Combined with 112,000 acres of wilderness-quality lands the BLM identified following an earlier phase

in the litigation, this essential sage-grouse stronghold is finally garnering the attention it deserves.

Despite recent studies documenting the continued decline of sage-grouse populations in southeastern Oregon, we continue to urge land managers in these key areas to seize the opportunity to make significant and lasting changes to save the grouse.

YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK IN OREGON'S HIGH DESERT

Thanks to you ...

28 guided restoration trips are now open for registration at ONDA.org/volunteertrips.

2,074 individual donations in 2015 propel efforts to conserve millions of acres of your desert wildlands. Support this work at ONDA.org/donate.

8 expert lecturers are engaging and connecting new advocates to desert conservation. See what's next in the High Desert Speaker Series at ONDA.org/speakerseries.

6 new events in Portland in the last 6 months of 2015 inspired a dynamic, growing group of west-side supporters. Contact matt@onda.org to join in the fun.

150+ media articles published last year trumpet the conservation potential of Oregon's high desert to a nationwide audience. Check the best out at ONDA.org/pressroom.

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

MALHEUR STANDOFF: PUBLIC LANDS

YOUR VIEW: SPEAKING



A visitor watches birds at Malheur Refuge. Photo: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Continued from Page 1

the coming decades. ONDA volunteers and others have been actively working with refuge staff to implement this plan over the past several years to address the invasion of carp, treat invasive weeds, remove obsolete fences and build new fences.

The takeover has been incredibly difficult on the Harney County community, the Burns Paiute Tribe and public servants. During the standoff, the Tribe raised important points about their long, proud history in the region, their connection to the land, and the past abuses against their people. This is a conversation that needs to continue, and we look forward to working closely with the Tribe on conservation, restoration and other efforts in the region.

The process of healing will continue for untold months and years. Our hope is that such a process will bring people together around lands that they love, even if they can't always agree what the management future of these lands should be. We will continue to approach potentially difficult discussions in a thoughtful, kind way and when necessary disagree without being disagreeable. Harney County Sheriff Dave Ward perhaps put it best when he said,

“We can’t continue to go on tearing each other apart, hating each other because of differences of opinion.”

Stepping up for public lands

The statements in this newsletter are but a small sample of the numerous comments we received throughout the course of the 41-day standoff that reflect the massive groundswell of support for public lands happening across the country. This sentiment is further demonstrated by the nearly 1,300 volunteers who have stepped forward to help restore the damage that has been done to the refuge (ONDA.org/VolunteerforMalheur). We’re coordinating with the refuge managers and the Burns Paiute Tribe and look forward to having these volunteers join forces with people from across the state and country to give back to the public lands we all love.

If you have not already signed up to volunteer or made your voice heard, there is another simple way to support the people of Harney County. Go visit your public lands and marvel at natural wonders like the Malheur Refuge and Steens Mountain. Frequent local businesses and have a conversation with others who may not always share similar views in order to better understand how we can work together to thoughtfully and responsibly manage our public lands. These amazing public lands belong to all of us. We hope that discussions can continue to bring Oregonians together, not drive a wedge between us.

Join efforts to restore Malheur Refuge
[ONDA.org/volunteerformalheur](https://onda.org/volunteerformalheur)



A slow drive down the Center Road from Diamond Valley to the Field Station, picnic at Refuge HQ under the old cottonwoods, a glimpse of the owl family there – my idea of The Best Day Ever. And it’s all ours!

URSULA K. LE GUIN, PORTLAND

I’ve been to the Malheur Refuge about a half dozen times and I hope to see it another half dozen before I die. It’s the most rejuvenating place I’ve ever been. Time seems to stand still as you move slowly from one habitat to another. It’s so quiet in the refuge, it’s contagious, and people begin speaking in softer tones. And the joy of seeing birds, lots of birds, mating, breeding, hunting, doing what they do in their lives, is the frosting on the cake. We must take such good care of this place.

CAROL FURRY, SEATTLE

Land is not just something to be “used” for profit. Public ownership protects our land from exploitation and, at the same time, provides managed, multiple uses that benefit all of us. The Malheur Refuge is a great example of that.

MICHAEL FUNKE, BEND

NG UP FOR PUBLIC LANDS

One of the pillars of democracy is the rule of law. The armed illegal occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge is a crude insult to our key values as a nation. Mr. Bundy and his vigilante militia group clearly do not really understand or respect our Constitution. If they have grievances and legal issues that they want to discuss then they should use legal, peaceful means. They should be tried in the appropriate court of law and sentenced according to the letter of the law. I certainly hope that the cooperative efforts between the farming and ranching community in Harney County with the ecologically minded community will continue.

PAUL KNIGHT, PORTLAND



As Americans, we own one of the most valuable assets on the planet – public land. We too often take it for granted. We shouldn't. It provides freedoms that most people on the planet can only dream of.

JIM HAMMETT, JOHN DAY

Visits to places such as Malheur on a regular basis help to clear my mind and bring me closer to our natural world. The appreciation I have for wildlife, wild lands and nature cannot be diminished by extreme agendas, guns and threats. And it never will be.

SANDY ZELASKO, VALLEY CENTER, CALIFORNIA



I am a hunter, birdwatcher and outdoor enthusiast. Without public lands I would have nowhere to pursue my passions and rejuvenate my soul. I am thankful daily that I am surrounded by land that belongs to me and every American.

CHRIS SCRANTON, MADRAS

We and our extended family from Portland spent Thanksgiving for 30 years on the Malheur Refuge. The adults, our kids and their friends who joined us have very special, and in some cases, life-changing memories of our time there.

RUTH BREMILLER, EUGENE



On a college field trip, I awoke uncharacteristically early and walked out into the marsh in the pre-dawn darkness. I stood in the morning chill listening to the sound of thousands of birds intensifying as the light slowly grew. The experience of watching the sun pop into view across the vast expanse of Malheur marsh that morning is something I have never forgotten. It is the moment I fell in love with Oregon's high desert and it changed my life.

BOB DENOUDEN, BEND



Protecting our public lands is not for the here and now but rather for future generations. Where would our nation be without the determination of previous generations to protect Yellowstone, Crater Lake, Yosemite and the Grand Canyon?

MARY POWELL, BEND

Dozens of you shared your reflections on why public lands matter. Read more at [ONDA.org/blog](https://onda.org/blog)

INDEPENDENT STEWARDS RAMPING UP IN 2016

By Michael O'Casey
Stewardship Associate

In 2015, ONDA began to develop a new concept called the Independent Stewards Program (ISP). It's a way for volunteers to get out on their own, apart from ONDA's group trips, and take a more self-directed approach to stewardship of the high desert. ONDA provides volunteers with training, field resources and specific assignments, and in exchange volunteers learn new skills, help attain important information and have an excuse to get out and explore.

After beta-testing the program last year, the ISP is ready to run at full steam in 2016. The nature of the work that ISP participants undertake will vary depending on each steward's talents and preferences. Examples of tasks that ISP participants may be asked to help with include hiking through desert wild lands and documenting ecological conditions; driving designated routes to ensure signage is intact; taking high-quality photos, documenting changes over time to significant sites such as springs or archeological sites; and identifying rangeland plant composition.

For this year, we have identified two focal projects for program participants to help with, wild lands monitoring and Greater sage-grouse habitat monitoring.

Wild lands monitoring

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for monitoring Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) throughout Oregon's high desert to ensure that the qualities being protected by these designations are being maintained or improved. ONDA has formed cooperative agreements with several BLM district offices to assist with this monitoring, and we will work with Independent Stewards to help get this important work accomplished.

Stewards can get involved with this project year-round whenever they have time to explore. Generally, this project will entail driving designated routes to ensure that signs are posted where appropriate or hiking in Wilderness and WSAs to document ecological conditions and any incompatible uses observed, taking photos and capturing GPS waypoints along the way. Once again, participants can tailor the trip to what they are most interested in.

Sage-grouse habitat monitoring

Greater sage-grouse had been a hot-topic species for the last several years while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided whether or not to list the bird as an endangered species. After private and public partnerships were created to help protect the bird's habitat, a decision was made to keep sage-grouse off the Endangered Species List.

The area in and around Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge has been identified as one of the best areas for sage-grouse in the West. ONDA is undertaking an effort to begin a long-term study of land health in the area with the help of Independent Stewards.

Stewards who are interested in this project will go out to monitor plant groups at specific sites near Hart Mountain to make sure that the area continues to be prime habitat for sage-grouse. This work will take place during May-June and then again in September-October.

As you think about the ways in which you plan to explore and give back to the high desert, we hope you will consider joining the Independent Stewards Program. For more information or to learn about upcoming training opportunities, please contact Michael O'Casey, michael@onda.org.



Photo: Elisa Davis

ONDA FIELD TRIPS 2016

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

March 17-20	Hart Mountain Lek Monitoring #1
April 7-10	Hart Mountain Lek Monitoring #2
April 15-17	Annual General Meeting
April 21-24	Steens Mountain WSA Monitoring
April 24-29	Owyhee Wild and Scenic River Float
Apr 28-May 1	Backcountry Fence Pull: Pine Creek Conservation Area
May 14-15	Alder Springs Clean-Up and Trail Maintenance
May 16-20	Inflatable Kayak Float and Fence Mapping on Owyhee River
May 19-22	Pine Creek Backcountry Fence Pull: Eastern Boundary
May 25-29	Owyhee Canyonlands Monitoring
June 3-5	Spring Riparian Planting on South Fork Crooked River
June 9-12	Hampton Butte Wilderness Inventory
June 9-12	Great Old Broads For Wilderness at Hart Mountain
June 17-19	Silvies Valley Ranch Riparian Planting
June 23-26	Devils Garden Fence Pull and Monitoring Trip
July 7-10	Hart Mountain Juniper Cut
Aug. 11-14	Beaver Dam Installation at Malheur National Forest
Aug. 17-21	Steens Backcountry Fence Mapping
Sept. 1-4	Backcountry Fence Pull Cottonwood Canyon State Park
Sept. 22-25	Blacktop Butte Fence Pull Pine Creek Conservation Area
Sept. 28	Clarno Nursery Fall Willow Harvest
Sep29-Oct 2	Malheur Refuge Fence Project
Oct. 6-9	Fall Riparian Planting on South Fork Crooked River
Oct. 13-16	Riparian Fence Pull and Build, South Fork Crooked River
Oct. 20-23	Malheur National Forest Riparian Planting
Nov. 17-20	Hart Mountain Mule Deer Survey

View the trip list and descriptions and register at:
ONDA.org/volunteertrips

ANNOUNCEMENTS

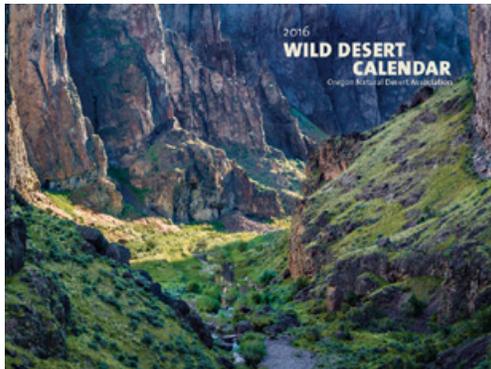
Desert Conference

Desert Conference will return to Bend this fall! Stay tuned for more information about this biannual event featuring amazing speakers by getting ONDA's email newsletter, Sagenet, at ONDA.org/email-signup

Speaker Series

ONDA's High Desert Speaker Series continues! Learn more: ONDA.org/SpeakerSeries

- MARCH 28 MONDAY** Portland
Dr. Tom Connolly
Ancient Artifacts of the High Desert
- APRIL 25 MONDAY** Portland
Ben Gordon
Hidden Wonders of John Day Country
- APRIL 26 TUESDAY** Bend
Gena Goodman-Campbell
Central Oregon Desert Treasures



Call for photos: Wild Desert Calendar

Use your creativity and talent to support conservation! ONDA invites you to submit shots of Oregon's high desert for consideration for our iconic Wild Desert Calendar. Find tips for getting a great photo and submission guidelines online: ONDA.org/2017CallForPhotos



ONDA is now on Twitter!
Follow @TheOregonDesert
To tweet, use #ONDA



Welcome, Michael O'Casey

An old face has returned to ONDA! Michael O'Casey joined the staff in January as ONDA's stewardship associate. He will lead our Independent Stewards Program (see page 6) as well as guided stewardship trips. After earning a degree in wildlife biology, Michael began working for ONDA as stewardship assistant in 2012. In 2014, he and his wife left Bend to teach in Ecuador, bike more than 4,000 miles in South America and work as wilderness rangers in Wyoming. Then, the duo was drawn back to his native state of Oregon. Contact Michael at michael@onda.org to learn more about our restoration efforts in the high desert.



Farewell, Elisa Davis

In February, we bid farewell to Membership and Engagement Coordinator Elisa Davis. She left ONDA to join her husband in Reno, Nevada, and take a job for the University of Reno-Nevada. During her time at ONDA, Elisa launched the popular High Desert Speaker Series in Bend and became a familiar face to our volunteers. Many thanks to Elisa for hard work on behalf of Oregon's high desert!

WILD UPDATES

Owyhee Canyonlands

Thousands of Oregonians from every corner of the state and every walk of life are working to protect the **Owyhee Canyonlands**. Efforts continue for safeguarding the Owyhee's roiling rivers, craggy canyons and rolling hills. And there is no time to wait: Remoteness is not enough to protect the Owyhee, and oil and gas development is sprouting up nearby. Join thousands of Oregonians, businesses, veterans and engaged citizens who love Oregon and support protection of the Owyhee Canyonlands today by **signing the petition at WildOwyhee.org**.



Sutton Mountain. Photo: Jim Davis

Sutton Mountain

Legislation to designate **Sutton Mountain** as wilderness continues to make its way through Congress. Ever since U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley introduced the Sutton Mountain and Painted Hills Area Preservation and Economic Enhancement Act in May 2015, he has been working to ready the bill for a Senate vote. That requires it to first go through markup and be voted on by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. **The bill will remain in play** until the end of the legislative session in December, after which it will have to be reintroduced into the next Congress if it has not been signed into law. **ONDA remains hopeful** that Sutton Mountain Wilderness will become a reality in 2016 and thanks Senator Merkley for his work to ensure that this happens.



LEGACY GIVING

Deepen your commitment to Oregon's high desert with a simple, impactful legacy gift.

ONDA.org/legacy

Photo: © Marc Adamus



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

ONDA DESERT OUTING: **GERRY MOUNTAIN**



Gerry Mountain. Photo: Gena Goodman-Campbell

In an article about Gerry Mountain, the late, great Jim Witty wrote, “I’ve decided I use the phrase, ‘middle of nowhere’ a bit too liberally.” If you’re looking for a day of desert solitude this spring, look no farther than the juniper woodlands of Gerry Mountain, which is part of ONDA’s Hidden Springs Wilderness Proposal. With easy access off a county road and no real trails to speak of, the 27,000-acre Gerry Mountain Wilderness Study Area is ripe for backcountry exploration.

DRIVE TIME

1.5 hours from Bend

WHEN

Year-round, but spring and fall are best. Both Van Lake Road and Price-Twelve Mile Road are well-maintained gravel roads that are passable by any vehicle as long as they are dry. These roads can become muddy and impassable after heavy rain or snow.

DISTANCE

1-10 miles, depending on your route

DIFFICULTY

Off-trail travel over rocky, uneven terrain. Difficulty depends on your route and varies between easy hiking through flat, open sagebrush to steep climbing over rocky terrain.



Be sure to bring a good map, compass/GPS and the ability to use them to navigate cross-country. ONDA’s map can be used with the smartphone app **Avenza PDF Maps**, which allows you to view geo-referenced PDF maps on your smartphone while using your phone’s GPS to show where you are on the map.

Download a map of Gerry Mountain:
ONDA.org/gerrymtn

Get **Avenza PDF Map** app for your smartphone:

Apple/iOS: **App Store**

Android: **Google play**

Search for Avenza PDF Map

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

- Take Highway 20 east from Bend for just over 50 miles.
- Between mileposts 51 and 52, turn north (left) on Van Lake Road (if you reach the small town of Hampton, you’ve gone too far).
- After about 10.5 miles turn east (right) onto Price-Twelve Mile Road.
- After about 8.5 miles on Price-Twelve Mile Road, look for a dirt road heading north (left) into the Gerry Mountain WSA. Pull off here and park.

GERRY MOUNTAIN HIKING

Gerry Mountain is open country dotted with old-growth juniper and rock outcroppings; perfect for choose-your-own-adventure-style hiking. If you’d like to climb to the top of Gerry Mountain (about 8 miles round-trip, depending on your route) begin your hike by following the dirt road northwest for around a mile before leaving the road and heading uphill in a north-westerly direction. If you’re looking for a more leisurely hike, head cross-country to the north-east to explore a small, unnamed dry canyon.



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