Imagine a place where two pristine waterways meet in a deep, rugged canyon. Where cool, clear water rushes from ancient springs to provide the lifeblood for wildlife that come from miles around; where we are free to roam and discover the many wonders that these canyons offer and where signs of what visitors left thousands of years ago spark our imaginations; where an angler can teach her children the art of casting and where your grandchildren and their children will be able to explore the same paths that you walk today.

This is Whychus-Deschutes, and by protecting it as Wilderness, we will ensure that it stays this way, forever.
Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Proposal

The Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA), concerned citizens of Central Oregon and adjacent landowners propose a federal Wilderness designation for 18,973 acres of public land currently managed as the Steelhead Falls Wilderness Study Area/Inventoried Roadless Area. Some of the unique values that would be permanently protected with a wilderness designation for this area include:

**Recreation:** The Whychus-Deschutes has been recognized for generations as one of the best places in Central Oregon to hike, hunt, fish, camp and enjoy other low-impact recreation activities. Above all, it is a wonderful, quiet place for families to explore and experience nature together!

**Wildlife:** The Middle Deschutes River and Lower Whychus Creek are world-class trout fisheries, with populations of bull trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Lower Whychus Creek historically supported spawning populations of steelhead trout, and with the reintroduction of this species back into the Upper Deschutes Watershed, it is essential that this habitat be protected. The area also provides crucial winter range for mule deer and is home to a wide range of plants and animals.

**Cultural/Historical:** There are multiple significant cultural sites in the Whychus-Deschutes area, including Native American rock art, cave dwellings, fire pits and shell middens. The permanent protection of this area as wilderness will safeguard these irreplaceable cultural resources.

cover: The Wild & Scenic Deschutes River flows through the proposed Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness (top). Photo © Greg Burke. Desert Phlox (bottom). Photo © Mike Putnam
Wilderness: an American Idea

Wilderness is an indispensable part of American history. The United States was the first country in the world to define and designate wilderness areas through law. In 1964, Congress passed The Wilderness Act to secure wild places for present and future generations to enjoy and explore.

The Act defines wilderness as:

“... area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”

– The Wilderness Act of 1964

Wilderness Guidelines

Section 4d of the Wilderness Act lays out ground rules for wilderness areas in order to preserve the experience of visiting wild places. However, there are several exceptions to these rules that help protect peoples’ safety and allow traditional activities to continue. For example, although motorized vehicles are prohibited in wilderness, firefighters can use bulldozers, trucks, chainsaws or other motorized tools to put out a fire if it is threatening homes outside of the wilderness area.

Some of the many activities allowed in wilderness:

- “Primitive recreation” activities, such as fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, horseback riding, canoeing, kayaking and rafting
- Educational and scientific study
- The use of a wheelchair
- The use of motorized vehicles where necessary to ensure the health and safety of people and livestock, such as for fire suppression or in search and rescue operations
- Existing livestock grazing and the exercise of other “valid existing rights,” including water rights and mineral rights
- Fire suppression where necessary to protect human safety and property both within the wilderness area and outside its borders

Examples of activities that are not allowed:

- Recreational activities that require a motorized/mechanized vehicle, such as off-highway vehicles, motorbikes, mountain bikes, snowmobiles and motorboats
- The construction of new structures or roads
- Energy exploration and development
- The landing of aircraft (except during emergencies)
- Commercial enterprise (excluding guide services whose purpose is to help wilderness users enjoy legal recreational activities)
Visiting the Whychus-Deschutes Proposed Wilderness

**Scout Camp Trail**  
*(3-mile loop)*  
This challenging trail meanders toward the rim of the Deschutes River Canyon, then heads steeply down to the river. After a short scramble over some boulders along the river, the trail heads back up to the canyon rim alongside fascinating geologic formations.

**Alder Springs**  
*(1.5 miles to Whychus Creek or a 6-mile roundtrip hike to its confluence with the Deschutes River)*

This hike to a pristine desert oasis takes you down through thousands of years of geological formations to Whychus Creek and Alder Springs. Once you have reached the springs, you have the option to carefully ford the creek and continue on to the confluence of Whychus Creek with the Deschutes River. Late spring and early fall are the best times to visit the Alder Springs area, as the access road is closed from Nov. 1 – April 1.

**Steelhead Falls**  
*(0.3 miles one way)*

This short but sweet hike takes you into the heart of the proposed wilderness area to Steelhead Falls, a stunning waterfall in the Middle Deschutes River.

For driving directions to these trailheads or to sign up for a guided hike in the Whychus-Deschutes Proposed Wilderness, please visit:  

www.onda.org

“... wilderness areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.”

– The Wilderness Act of 1964
**Proposed Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Area**

18,973 acres

- **Proposed Wilderness area**
- **Public land**
- **Trailhead**

Scale (in miles)

0 .5 1 2 3

**Map Features:**
- Whychus Creek
- Deschutes River
- Jefferson County
- Deschutes County
- Alder Springs
- Steelhead Falls
- Scenic roads and trails

**Legend:**
- Proposed Wilderness area
- Public land
- Trailhead

**Route Points:**
- Squaw Creek Road
- Lower Bridge Road
- Shad Road
- McKenzie Canyon Road
- Wilt Road
- Peninsula Road
- Steelhead Falls
- Alder Springs
- Scout Camp

**Location Details:**
- Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Proposal
- Trailhead: Geneva Road
- Proposed Wilderness Area: 18,973 acres
- Public Land
- Jefferson County
- Deschutes County
- Scale (in miles)

**Map Annotations:**
- Whychus Creek
- Deschutes River
- Holocene Road
- Peninsula Road
- Shad Road
- McKenzie Canyon Road
- Wilt Road
- NFD 6360
- Alder Springs
- Steelhead Falls
- Scout Camp

**Scale:**
- 0 .5 1 2 3

**Map Orientation:**
- North (N)
Leave No Trace Principles

Wilderness lands are among the most prized places in our country, and visiting wild lands is a special privilege shared by all. Abide by the following principles to ensure that Whychus-Deschutes stays wild:

**Plan Ahead and Prepare** – Know the rules of the area you’re visiting. Research current conditions and weather in the area and always travel prepared for emergencies or inclement weather.

**Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces** – Minimize your impact by sticking to established trails and campsites or durable surfaces such as rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow. Avoid walking off trail through sensitive riparian areas or on steep slopes. Make your camp at least 200 feet from creeks, lakes and rivers, and leave your site as you found it.

**Respect Wildlife** – Observe wildlife from a distance to allow them peace in their natural environment. Do not follow or approach them and never feed wild animals.

**Dispose of Waste Properly** – Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Always pack out toilet paper and hygiene products.

**Leave What You Find** – Leave rocks, plants, animals and historical artifacts as you find them. Examine, but do not touch, cultural or historical artifacts such as structures and rock art.

**Minimize Campfire Impacts** – Know the current regulations on campfires for the area and follow the rules. When fires are allowed keep them small and in control at all times. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand. Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.

**Be Considerate of Other Visitors** – Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience by being courteous and yielding to other visitors on the trail. Let nature’s sounds prevail by avoiding loud voices and noises. Avoid cliffs and steep areas and be conscious of hikers below you on the trail who may be hurt by any debris that you knock loose.

“...wilderness areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.”

– The Wilderness Act of 1964

Steelhead Falls in winter Photo © Brian Ouimette
“In a time when we need to do as much as we can to enhance the area and help attract new businesses and workers to our region, a Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness is one thing that can add to our competitive economic advantage. It makes me proud to be involved in an effort to protect an area that is special to so many people. I encourage everyone to educate themselves about wilderness and find out more about what you can do to help designate this unique wilderness getaway in our backyards.”

– Robert Windlinx Jr., adjacent landowner

“When my family heard that the Whychus-Deschutes Proposed Wilderness would preserve land next to our property, we were thrilled. Protecting this area as wilderness will ensure that our grandchildren and their children will always see the eagles soar over the canyon and be able to take their fishing rods down to the Deschutes to catch bull trout. Why wouldn’t we want to protect what we love forever?”

– Lotte Hermannsson, adjacent landowner
Only Congress can permanently protect Whychus-Deschutes as wilderness for future generations.

Contact your elected officials today and urge them to support this proposal!

Senator Ron Wyden
911 NE 11th Avenue, Suite 630
Portland, OR 97232
(503) 326-7525
www.wyden.senate.gov/contact

Senator Jeff Merkley
121 SW Salmon, Suite 1250
Portland, OR 97204
(503) 326-3386
www.merkley.senate.gov/contact/

Representative Greg Walden
1051 NW Bond Street
Bend, OR 97701
(541) 389-4408
www.walden.house.gov

ONDA is a 1,500-member, grassroots organization committed to protecting, defending, and restoring the health of Oregon’s native deserts for present and future generations.

For more information about ONDA and our work, please visit: www.ONDA.org