



FINDING COMMON GROUND ON WHYCHUS-DESCHUTES

OUR COLLABORATIVE EFFORT TO PROTECT CENTRAL OREGON'S WILD BACKYARD

ABOVE: Scout Camp on the Deschutes River. ONDA hopes collaboration will pay off with protection of the Whychus-Deschutes proposed wilderness.

Photo: Greg Burke

By Gena Goodman-Campbell
Public Lands Coordinator

With lava flows and rolling grasslands punctuated by rocky-topped buttes and sheer river canyons, Central Oregon's high desert is a unique and varied place. Here, public lands often border residential areas or working farms and ranches. Dialogue and cooperation are essential to avoid conflict.

A wild place under pressure

The Middle Deschutes River and Lower Whychus Creek flow through rugged canyons chock-full of wildlife before coming together in a crash of water in one of the most

geologically spectacular places you'll find in Oregon.

It's a truly wild and powerful place sandwiched between agricultural land and Crooked River Ranch – Oregon's largest subdivision. These outside pressures make it even more critical to protect Whychus-Deschutes, and more complex.

Working toward a win-win

Our efforts to permanently protect Whychus-Deschutes emphasize collaboration.

At the encouragement of Senator Ron Wyden, ONDA and stakeholders at Crooked River Ranch got together in early 2015 to work together on a collaborative proposal for the future of the Whychus-Deschutes. The goal? To find

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INSIDE DESERT **Protect:** "Fuel breaks" intended to limit wildfire could create unintended problems. Page 3.
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Restore: ONDA's volunteer-powered stewardship efforts enter their fourth decade. Page 6.

CELEBRATING WILD RIVERS

"An unspoiled river is a very rare thing in this Nation today. Their flow and vitality have been harnessed by dams and too often they have been turned into open sewers by communities and by industries. It makes us all very fearful that all rivers will go this way unless somebody acts now..."

— PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON, 1968

By Brent Fenty, Executive Director



Brent Fenty

Stop for a moment to conjure up your best memories in the great outdoors. I'm guessing there is some body of water in these scenes? From splashing in puddles to rafting a forceful river, water is often our point of entry into the wild places we love.

With the arrival of Spring, many of us play amateur meteorologist and try to predict if the snowpack will hold and what that means for our plans to float, fish or hike along one of our favorite streams this summer.

Beyond their recreational value, streams and rivers also provide critical habitat for fish and wildlife, particularly in arid environments like Oregon's high desert. Although waterways represent less than one percent of the total habitat area, over 95 percent of the species found in this region rely on rivers and streams at some point in their lives.

Despite the clear importance of wild rivers for habitat and recreation, rivers were on a quick path to disaster in the mid-1900s. During this era, rivers were more famous for being damned (e.g. the Columbia) or even catching fire (e.g. the Cuyahoga) than for being preserved for hiking, fishing or boating. Thankfully, in 1968, a new law helped change this trajectory: the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Passed with bipartisan support, the intent of the law was to permanently "preserve rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations."

Passionate advocates like you have successfully protected a number of rivers throughout Oregon's high desert, including the John Day, Owyhee, Malheur and Donner und Blitzen, under this law. Unfortunately, these rivers remain the exception rather than the rule. Less than one quarter of one percent of our nation's rivers are protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.¹ And, with less than one percent of Oregon's high desert protected as Wilderness, there is clearly much more to do to protect the larger watersheds that these rivers lie within.

This year, as we mark the 50th Anniversary of this win for wild rivers, we can celebrate protected rivers by appreciating the adventures and habitat they offer. We can also honor the tradition of river protection by engaging in efforts to protect places like Whychus-Deschutes or the Owyhee. There's still work to be done!

1. rivers.gov

On April 10, our High Desert Speaker Series will highlight one person's quest to paddle all of the Wild and Scenic Rivers in Oregon. Learn more at [ONDA.org/speakerseries](https://www.onda.org/speakerseries) and watch for opportunities to protect wild rivers throughout 2018.



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[ONDA.org/legacy](https://www.onda.org/legacy)

Photo: © Chad Case

RISKY BUSINESS

HOW A TECHNIQUE INTENDED TO PREVENT WILDFIRES COULD MAKE PROBLEMS WORSE

By Dan Morse
Conservation Director

For decades, the dual threats of cheatgrass and wildfire have plagued Oregon's high desert and the entire Great Basin. And now there's climate change. Wildfire, cheatgrass, and a hotter, drier climate are a recipe for unpredictable, larger and more intense wildfires that can have lasting impacts in an already fragile ecosystem. Beginning this spring, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is considering addressing this situation with the widespread application of a technique known as "fuel breaks." But how best to address this difficult situation is a complicated matter and fuel breaks may do more harm than good.

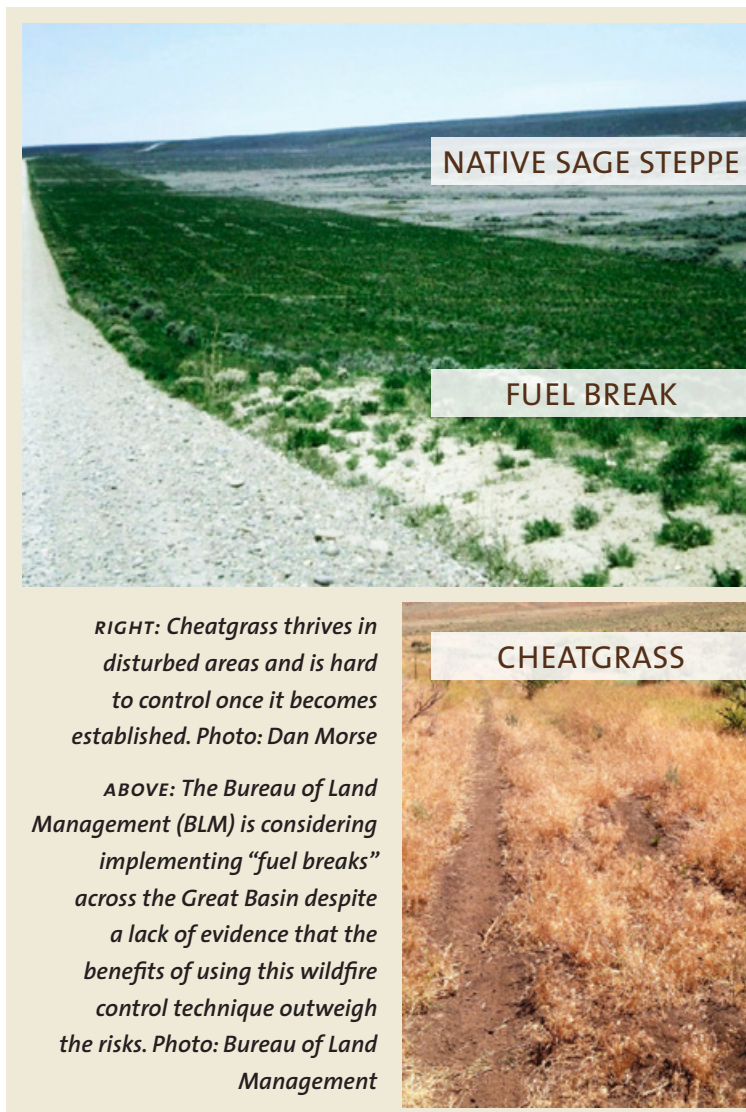
A problem with deep roots

Native to the Eurasian steppe, cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) came to North America in soils carried over on ships and has altered natural fire conditions in much of the Great Basin because its unique characteristics and life cycle differ from most native grasses. The plant's abundant seeds germinate in fall or early winter and established plants grow rapidly in early spring. Its life cycle is complete by early summer, while native bunchgrasses are still green and not yet reproductively mature. Dry, dead cheatgrass burns readily, and becomes a layer of "fuel" in the landscape. Cheatgrass seeds can survive fire and establish readily in the postfire environment. With each fire, cheatgrass becomes more dominant.

The abusive livestock grazing practices of the late 19th century that left behind a devastated and vulnerable ecosystem, which made the situation worse. Cheatgrass took over in areas where native vegetation had been decimated and began a persistent march across the landscape.

The best laid plans

Given the daunting spread of cheatgrass and perceptions of



RIGHT: Cheatgrass thrives in disturbed areas and is hard to control once it becomes established. Photo: Dan Morse

ABOVE: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is considering implementing "fuel breaks" across the Great Basin despite a lack of evidence that the benefits of using this wildfire control technique outweigh the risks. Photo: Bureau of Land Management



Cheatgrass – non-native plant that has altered fire conditions in the Great Basin

increased fire size and frequency, land managers face difficult choices about how to balance ecosystem restoration with wildfire prevention and suppression.

Despite good intentions, fire suppression efforts often leave fire lines, fire roads and staging areas heavily disturbed and invaded by cheatgrass.

The arid high desert limits the success of native seed planting and native grasses and shrubs require a long time to become established. Historically, land managers have used poor substitutes by planting other non-native species, like crested wheatgrass and forage kochia, displacing native vegetation and preventing natural processes from restoring important habitat.

Because wildfires and suppression efforts often lead to more cheatgrass and re-seeding with native plants is costly, difficult and time-consuming, building "fuel breaks" has resurfaced as a theoretical way of reducing the impacts of fire. Fuel break construction in the high desert varies, but in most cases it

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RISKY BUSINESS: WILDFIRE CONTROL APPROACH POSES QUESTIONS

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means cutting a swath through intact habitat by digging up or mowing grasses, removing woody species like sagebrush, and replacing the remaining vegetation with species somewhat more resistant to fire.

More questions than answers

One of the hurdles in preventing wildfires is that no one knows exactly when and where a fire will start and how it might spread. If you can't know where a fire will start, how can you know where to put a fuel break? You might try putting fuel breaks in areas likely to burn. But it is clear that extreme weather like high temperatures and winds can be more influential on wildfire spread in the high desert than what grasses and shrubs are available as fuels. High winds and temperatures fan flames that spread quickly and jump great distances. As evidenced when the Eagle Creek Fire jumped the Columbia River in 2017 due to high winds, almost nothing can stop such a fire.

What we don't know about the effectiveness about fuel breaks is compounded

by what we don't know of the risks.

Sage-grouse and other species need large areas of connected habitat, not small areas of good habitat with degraded habitat in between. Fuel breaks fragment the landscape, cutting wildlife habitat into smaller pieces. Even a modestly-sized fuel break leads to large areas of disturbance. Other risks of fuel breaks include decreased wildlife forage, worsening cheatgrass infestations, and negative impacts on cultural resources and wilderness values.

We understand the urge to "do something" and building fuel breaks is something that land managers "can do." Unfortunately, there is little scientific evidence to suggest that fuel breaks are effective or that an extensive system of fuel breaks would result in fewer, smaller fires.

Finding a better solution

Breaking the cycle of invasive species and fire may be the greatest challenge in high desert land management. Creative, comprehensive solutions are desperately needed. Such solutions will need to include new ideas for restoring natural processes,

improving fire prevention, detection, and suppression and bolstering post-fire restoration.

Solutions must also include systemic changes to land use in the high desert, including new tactics to prevent disturbance and limit cheatgrass infestation. We need to consider changes to grazing management, such as long-term grazing closures following fires and creating reserves of livestock forage to be able to move livestock off of those burned areas.

As BLM begins a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) process to examine the possible impacts of fuel breaks across the Great Basin it is important to consider whether the creation of fuel breaks will only make things worse. ONDA has weighed in on this project, hoping to prevent the negative impacts and we encouraged members and volunteers to voice their own concerns and thoughts.

Thanks to those of you who sent comments to BLM about this project by their March 1 deadline. We'll keep you posted on future opportunities to weigh in.

COMMON GROUND: COLLABORATIVE EFFORT IN CENTRAL OREGON

Continued from Page 1

common ground while addressing concerns about wildfire and conservation.

Nearly a year of discussions yielded the outline of a win-win solution. This compromise would package Wilderness protection for Whychus-Deschutes with the removal of Wilderness Study Area (WSA) status for some lands bordering private property to facilitate enhanced fire prevention and suppression. While releasing public lands from WSA status is a significant step that deserves careful scrutiny, ONDA believes that in this case the conservation benefits of permanent wilderness designation for the broader area outweigh the potential drawbacks.

Unfortunately, Representative Greg Walden rejected this collaborative approach when he introduced his Crooked River Ranch Fire Protection Act (HR 2075) in 2016.

HR 2075 would remove WSA protection from 832 acres of public land without any corresponding protection for Whychus-Deschutes.

Walden's bill now awaits a vote on the House floor after passing out of the House

Natural Resources Committee in July 2017. His approach undermines local collaboration and ignores the concerns of the many people who use and enjoy Whychus-Deschutes, including neighboring landowners who see the threats to this area every day.

Last fall, landowners near Alder Springs reported a startling increase in motorized vehicles trespassing on private land and driving on closed roads. Increasing use and a lack of enforcement are putting even more pressure on this landscape and the wildlife that depend on it. Wilderness designation for Whychus-Deschutes would force land managers to come up with a plan to deal with these threats and do a better job of enforcing the rules.

Together with ONDA and a diverse coalition of stakeholders, many neighboring landowners are encouraging Senators Wyden and Jeff Merkley to pursue a collaborative approach to preserving Whychus-Deschutes wilderness while also protecting local residents and visitors from the threat of wildfire. We believe a win-win solution for Whychus-Deschutes is possible and it's the way conservation ought to be done in Central Oregon.



Thanks to member support, ONDA is working to protect the Deschutes Canyon – one of the most geologically spectacular places in Oregon. Photo: Gena Goodman-Campbell

ONDA CHALLENGES NEW RULES THAT CUT OREGONIANS OUT OF ENERGY SITING DECISIONS

By Mac Lacy
Senior Attorney

ONDA has joined a coalition of nine conservation organizations, led by Friends of the Columbia Gorge, in an Oregon Supreme Court appeal challenging rules recently adopted by the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council ("EFSC") that dramatically curtail transparency and public participation in permitting decisions for large power plants in Oregon.

EFSC is a state agency that reviews and decides whether to approve applications for siting large energy projects throughout the State of Oregon. It has broad power to approve large energy projects with a single decision, preempting other state and local agencies. When EFSC approves an energy project, it issues a "site certificate" allowing the project to be built. The law allows site certificate holders to seek amendments to the certificates, for example to increase the capacity of an approved energy project or to modify the siting or exterior boundaries of an approved project. For several years, EFSC has discussed whether to revise its rules in order to increase opportunities for public participation in the site certificate amendment process.

Last fall, EFSC finally adopted these new rules changing the procedures for amending permits for large power plants. In adopting the new rules, EFSC disregarded extensive public comments calling for more transparency and public participation opportunities. Instead, the new rules hide agency decisions to expand power plants from the public, unlawfully delegate important decisions to Oregon Department of Energy staff, and illegally modify judicial review procedures for challenging EFSC decisions.

EFSC and the Oregon Department of Energy claimed that the new rules will increase public participation. Yet, the actual language of the rules does the exact opposite, creating a curtain of secrecy around agency decisions and cutting Oregon's communities out of the decision-making processes for large power plants.

According to an analysis by coalition attorneys, the new rules include a number of hurdles designed to block citizens from



ONDA and eight other groups asked the Oregon Supreme Court to void new Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council rules. The new rules hide from the public agency decisions to expand power plants and delegate decisions to Oregon Department of Energy staff.

Photo: BLM, with wind turbine simulation by ONDA.

challenging proposed power plant expansions. Similarly, the rules unlawfully allow Oregon Department of Energy staff to decide on a case-by-case basis which applications get public hearings and which applications may be formally contested before EFSC. In the appeal filed in the Oregon Supreme Court, ONDA and the other petitioners ask the Court to declare the entire rulemaking package void.

Oregonians, including ONDA and its members, are increasingly engaging in the effort to clean up our energy system, but EFSC's new rules for site certificate amendments will frustrate this public involvement. With few exceptions, the rules favor developers of new energy projects by allowing new power plants and pipelines to be permitted as "amendments" and by curtailing public review opportunities.

For example, for years, Portland General Electric has been attempting to misuse the site certificate amendment process to nearly triple the size of its fracked gas power plant, the Carty Generating Station, near

Boardman. The new EFSC rules could allow pollution-causing projects like the proposed Carty expansion to sail through the Department of Energy behind a veil of secrecy and further harm already poor air quality in the Columbia River Gorge.

The coalition includes lead petitioner Friends of the Columbia Gorge and ONDA, as well as the Northwest Environmental Defense Center, Oregon Wild, Hood River Valley Residents Committee, Columbia Riverkeeper, WildLands Defense, Greater Hells Canyon Council, and Oregon Coast Alliance.

Appeals like this bypass the Oregon Court of Appeals and go straight to the Oregon Supreme Court, which will hear the appeal on an expedited basis. The group will file its opening brief this spring.

ONDA and the other petitioners are represented on this case by Gary Kahn of Reeves, Kahn, Hennessy & Elkins, Nathan Baker and Steve McCoy of Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Peter Broderick of Northwest Environmental Defense Center, and ONDA senior attorney Mac Lacy.

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PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE OF ONDA'S STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

By Ben Gordon
Stewardship Director

One could rightly say that ONDA's stewardship program came from humble beginnings.

The year was 1988 and a group of middle school students, led by an ONDA volunteer, joined staff from the Prineville Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to conduct a wildlife study. What were they counting in the wild areas that are now the Oregon Badlands Wilderness? It was not owls, nor mule deer, but kangaroo rats. This initial foray into stewardship may not have been glamorous, but it was illuminating. The importance of getting people out on the ground and steering ONDA toward restoration and stewardship of the high desert had become clear. Now ONDA leadership had to figure out how to do this in a holistic and meaningful way.

In 1993 ONDA led its first barbed wire fence removal project on Hart Mountain, and the vision for high desert restoration began to crystalize. Volunteers found the physical nature of the work, the chance to see results in real time, and the beautiful remote setting to be instantly gratifying and highly rewarding. ONDA volunteers would spend the next 20 years removing 250 miles of fence from Hart Mountain. During that time they also launched long-term fence removal projects on Malheur Wildlife



In 2017, 550 people volunteered for a restoration project. To fully appreciate ONDA's stewardship program today, it is helpful to understand its history. Photo: Jim Remington

Refuge (1998) and Steens Mountain (2005).

Word got out. ONDA was leading interesting volunteer projects in some of eastern Oregon's most remote and wild backcountry locales and people wanted in.

By 2003, a core group of 75 volunteers had formed and they began looking for additional projects to take on. ONDA pursued full-scale restoration work on the Pine Creek Conservation Area, a property the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs owned and managed for wildlife habitat, which included barbed wire fence removal as

well as riparian restoration. They also launched the Wilderness Research and Volunteer Program, an effort to document the wilderness values of millions of acres of eastern Oregon including the Owyhee Canyonlands.

By 2008, it was obvious that ONDA's volunteers, now 200 strong, were hungry for more work than the organization had capacity to lead. ONDA hired Jefferson Jacobs to serve as Stewardship Program Coordinator, full-time.

With staff guidance, the stewardship program could ramp up the number and types of projects it undertook. That trajectory has sustained a meteoric rise in volunteer hours ever since.

Today four dedicated staff manage ONDA's stewardship program. They plan dozens of projects annually, each one designed to best utilize the 550 volunteers who now offer their time, talent and energy to improving the high desert.

Over the past 30 years, ONDA has learned a lot about project design to ensure the greatest benefit for the desert is achieved on each trip. ONDA's stewardship program has honed its scope of work to four emphases: riparian

restoration, uplands improvement, trail maintenance, and wildlife and wild lands monitoring. We've built a reputation for completing important projects. Our partnerships with the Burns Paiute Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and district offices of the Forest Service, BLM, National Parks Service and Oregon State Parks have created exciting opportunities to share resources and skills to make real improvements on the ground.

As the program has matured, our efforts have been noticed and honored. In 2011, the Governor's Office recognized ONDA with an Outstanding Volunteer Program award. Most recently, in February 2018, ONDA accepted a Conservation Award from Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society.

With a solid foundation and a committed base of volunteers and members fueling future progress, there's no doubt that the stewardship projects of the next 30 years will greatly improve high desert lands and waters.



A clear vision of how to restore Oregon's high desert, committed land management partners, a tireless volunteer corps, and the generous support of donors have brought measurable results. Photo: Sage Brown

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[ONDA.org/volunteer](https://onda.org/volunteer)

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Michelle Smith hiking through flowers. Photo: Sam Beebe

MEET SAM BEEBE AND MICHELLE SMITH

COUPLE GIVES THE CLASSIC AMERICAN ROAD TRIP A PUBLIC LANDS TWIST



ONDA members Sam Beebe and Michelle Smith traveled across thousands of miles of public lands last year.

Inspired by a desire to see public lands across the West, Portland residents **Michelle Smith** and **Sam Beebe** embarked on a nearly five-month and 16,000-mile road trip last year. Their goal was to better understand the history of protections on the landscapes they visited.

During their planning process, they were disappointed to see the Trump administration's announcement that it was reviewing 27 National Monuments. Spurred by the current political climate, they decided to include visits to 21 National Monuments across the West. Service became a key component of their entire road trip.

As Sam said, "Volunteering takes you places you wouldn't otherwise go, and allows you to develop deeper connections to place and people."

Michelle and Sam started their road trip with an ONDA stewardship trip to restore sage-grouse habitat.

"Hart Mountain had already been on our radar to visit, and having our first stop include volunteer service with ONDA felt like a natural place to kick things off," explained Michelle.

Sam, almost at a loss for words, chimed in to say, "It's hard to describe the value of public lands since they draw us in so naturally."

Michelle and Sam were inspired to share stories from the road and posted frequently on their blog, www.publiclandstour.us, and they both see hope for the future of public lands.

Michelle said, "I'm excited by the potential of public lands, like those in the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region, to provide long-term connectivity. Our trip showed us the bigger picture of public lands, that they're more than isolated pockets of land."

You can read more about their adventure at ONDA.org/blog. To get to know other ONDA members, click on the "Voices" buttons found throughout ONDA.org.

YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK IN OREGON'S HIGH DESERT

Thanks to you...

19 miles of stream restored by 438 field volunteers last year alone. Learn more about ONDA's efforts improve fish and wildlife habitat at ONDA.org/restore.

4 listening sessions held across the state gathered public input on how to best protect the Owyhee Canyonlands. Management planning for the region is underway right now. Speak out for the region's vibrant public lands, waterways and wildlife at ONDA.org/takeaction.

1 award earned. ONDA was nominated by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and is the latest recipient of the Oregon chapter of The Wildlife Society 2018 Conservation Award for demonstrating ongoing, positive wildlife conservation efforts.

30 years of Oregon desert conservation and countless achievements celebrated in 2017. See the milestones you made possible at ONDA.org/accomplishments.

718 new members joined you in support of critical Oregon conservation needs. Strengthened by this new wave of advocates, ONDA is a formidable force standing for the land now and always. Step up your commitment and ensure the sustainability of these efforts. Learn how at ONDA.org/legacy.

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

ONDA SPRING CALENDAR

For event details and the complete list of events that ONDA is hosting or participating in, check our events calendar online at:

www.onda.org/events

March 26	Conservation Advocacy from the Beltway to Business with KEEN's Erin Gaines Portland
March 27	A Conversation with Warm Springs Tribal Elder Bruce Jim Bend
April 4	Desert Hiking Tips and Trips Bend
April 10	Oregon Desert Trail Presentation Medford
April 10	Celebrating 50 Years of Wild & Scenic Rivers with Zach Collier Bend
April 12	Discover the Oregon Desert Trail Mt. Shasta, CA
April 20–22	ONDA's Annual General Meeting Fossil
April 23	Notes from the Field with Ben Gordon, Michael O'Casey and Sage Brown Portland



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ONDA DESERT OUTING: **PAINTED CANYON LOOP**

If you love adventure and solitude, get ready to experience one of the best hikes in the northern Owyhee Canyonlands. On the 8.5-mile Painted Canyon Loop (also known as the Carlton Canyon-Painted Canyon Loop) you'll see stunning geologic spires, 300-foot canyon walls, old-growth sagebrush over 12-feet tall, and – true to its name – a landscape washed in vibrant red, purple, gold and green hues.

This advanced hike requires travel on rough roads to the 'trailhead,' as well as some route-finding and navigation on the hike itself. A four-wheel drive, high-clearance vehicle is required. The vertical elevation loss and gain on this hike is significant: 1,870 feet.

This is one of the most scenic Owyhee hikes. Plan to spend five to six hours on this hike. Pack your food, water and clothing accordingly. Be ready to scramble over rock formations and dry waterfalls as you take in a stunning array of rock formations: hoodoos, spires, amphitheaters, rhyolite tuff, caves, and soaring towers – all dipped in the colors of a painter's palette. In the spring, you'll also find a stunning array of wildflowers throughout the loop.

Trip Details

Drive time from Bend: 6–7 hours

When to hike: Late spring and fall

Hiking Distance: 8.5 miles

Difficulty: Route- and way-finding; map/compass/GPS recommended

Driving directions from Bend

Take Highway 20 east to Burns. Then take Highway 78 south to Burns Junction, where you'll take the Highway 95 exit towards Jordan Valley. Twenty-seven miles north of Jordan Valley, turn left at Succor Creek sign. Follow signs to Leslie Gulch. Once you pass Leslie Gulch on your left, turn left at next junction on to McIntyre Spring Road. Follow the McIntyre Springs Road, keeping the Three Fingers Butte formation on your left until another junction



Though the terrain is challenging, the Painted Canyon Loop offers a memorable experience in the Owyhee Canyonlands. Photo: Corie Harlan

at 5.25 miles. Turn right. Continue for another mile and turn left at the next junction. Stay on that road another mile and keep left at another fork. After 11 miles, turn left for the final quarter mile to a large cow trough. This is the 'trailhead' where you park your vehicle.

Notes and advice

The road to the Painted Canyon Trailhead is beted for four-wheel drive vehicles. This advanced-level hike requires some route-finding and topographic navigation. There is no water on this hike.

The Owyhee is home to rattlesnakes. Wear closed-toe footwear and watch where you step. If you hear a rattle, freeze and locate the snake

with your eyes. The rattle is a warning. Step quickly in the opposite direction. If needed, use a walking stick or hiking poles to usher the snake away.

For more detailed notes and advice specifically about this hike, see:

[ONDA.org/hike/painted-canyon-loop](https://onda.org/hike/painted-canyon-loop)

If you are looking for other suggestions in this area, be sure to check our all new Visitor's Guide to the Owyhee Canyonlands:

[ONDA.org/VisitOwyhee](https://onda.org/VisitOwyhee)



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