

## FINDING WILDERNESS

A LONG-AWAITED CLOSER LOOK REVEALS  
200,000 MORE ACRES OF POTENTIAL WILDERNESS, SO FAR

**By Jeremy Austin**  
Greater Hart-Sheldon Coordinator

Ask three friends “what is wilderness?” and you’ll probably get three different answers.

But, for the land managers and conservation groups who care for public lands, there are specific criteria – related to size, naturalness, and opportunities for solitude and recreation, as well as other ecological and cultural values – that must be met before lands can even be considered for wilderness designation.

Wilderness inventories are a key tool in Oregon Natural Desert Association’s conservation toolkit. By documenting where lands with the potential to be designated as wilderness exist, we ensure these areas are recognized for their conservation values and we preserve

the option to manage those lands in a way that retains their wilderness character.

More than 20 years ago ONDA was instrumental in developing a consistent methodology for inventorying Bureau of Land Management wildlands. The agency then incorporated ONDA’s methods and since that time ONDA’s expert staff and dedicated volunteers have followed those protocols and compiled detailed narratives, geo-tagged thousands of photos and created state of the art Geographic Information System (GIS) map products for hundreds of eastern Oregon wild places.

ONDA’s inventory work over the past ten years has focused on the Vale District in the Owyhee Canyonlands and the Lakeview District in the Greater Hart-Sheldon

*After years of concerted effort by ONDA volunteers and staff, the BLM’s Lakeview District recently recognized 200,000 acres of wilderness-quality lands. Millions more acres are still in review as the district finishes its wilderness inventory. Juniper Mountain, as seen from the air. Photo: Jim Davis*

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**RAMBLINGS:** **Defend:** ONDA saves Steens Mountain from a proliferation of roads. Page 5.  
**Restore:** Collaborating to keep salmon alive in the Upper John Day River Basin. Page 6.



# JOB PERKS: INCREDIBLE PEOPLE

By Brent Fenty, Executive Director

As I trust you've learned by now, I'm soon shifting out of my role as ONDA's executive director in order to head up our newest initiative, the Oregon Desert Land Trust.

Any transition can't help but prompt a bit of a reflection, and I've found myself reminiscing about all the wonderful people I've met through nearly two decades of desert conservation with ONDA.

With so many dedicated members and volunteers, there's no shortage of memories from restoration trips, public lands monitoring trips, floating rivers, and events such as Annual Meetings and Desert Conferences playing in my mind.



Brent Fenty

I've also thought a lot about early colleagues who inspired and educated me about public lands conservation. For instance, watching ONDA's first staff attorney Stephanie Parent wax eloquent about ONDA's legal efforts, I felt like I learned more about public lands law at a single board meeting than I had in four years of university studies.

Staff have led the charge during key moments in the organization's history. Bill Marlett, our first executive director, was a mentor in so many ways. Bill, more than anyone, helped me understand that working for ONDA is more lifestyle than career. Being part of this family has been a joy and I have admired the contributions of various people who have made ONDA and conservation their life's work. People like Gilly Lyons, who navigates difficult politics with a smile, laugh and quick wit that disarms even the most vocal critic, and Jefferson Jacobs, who packs watermelons

several miles deep into Steens Mountain Wilderness to keep volunteers happily plugging along on fence removal efforts.

Since our founding in 1987, more than 50 staff have called ONDA home, whether on contract for a few months or a few decades (Craig Miller!). Many have continued helping people and the environment throughout their post-ONDA careers, both within the conservation field, and outside of it. Nick Dobric, who served as ONDA's Hart-Sheldon Coordinator, is currently the Wyoming Field Representative for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. Wilderness Inventory intern Laurel Hickok is now Dr. Laurel Hartwell, respected gastroenterologist.

One of the best perks of becoming ONDA's executive director over a decade ago was the opportunity to hire amazing people and help them do great work in a landscape we all love. Today, I have the pleasure to lead a team of talented and passionate people who I can count on as employees and have come to regard as friends. It is one of things I will miss most as I step out of the executive director role.

We often sing the praises of ONDA's awesome members and volunteers, but we haven't spent much time shining a light on the staff who, thanks to your generous support, work day in and day out for the desert.

Well, it's time to change that. Look to our blog for an ongoing series of Q&As with past and present staff. As we catch up with our former colleagues, we'll hear their memories, learn what they are up to now, and see what wisdom they have to offer from their now outside perspective. In posts about our current staff members, we'll dive into what drives them to work in the conservation field and we'll share a few fun facts you probably don't know.

I think you'll enjoy getting to know this remarkable team as much as I have.

The first post in our series of Q&As with ONDA staff, present and past, features Senior Staff Attorney Mac Lacy. Read it at [ONDA.org/blog](http://ONDA.org/blog).

## 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](http://ONDA.org/legacy)

Photo: © Chad Case

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# FINDING WILDERNESS

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Region. We've found roughly 1.5 million acres in each of these BLM districts that meet the statutory definition of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics.

During the same time frame, as a result of ONDA's policy advocacy and legal work, the BLM's Vale and Lakeview Districts completed their own inventory of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics. Here's what they found:

- **Vale District: roughly 1.2 million acres**
- **Lakeview District: fewer than 90,000 acres**

How is it that in two similar BLM districts, Vale came up with a figure close to ONDA's inventory for the same area, while, 60 miles away, Lakeview identified just five percent of the acres that ONDA had documented?

In 2019, the Lakeview District will make important decisions about how to manage unprotected wilderness values on public lands in their district during a Resource Management Plan amendment process. An accurate inventory of the places with wilderness values will once again lay the foundation for a strong plan.

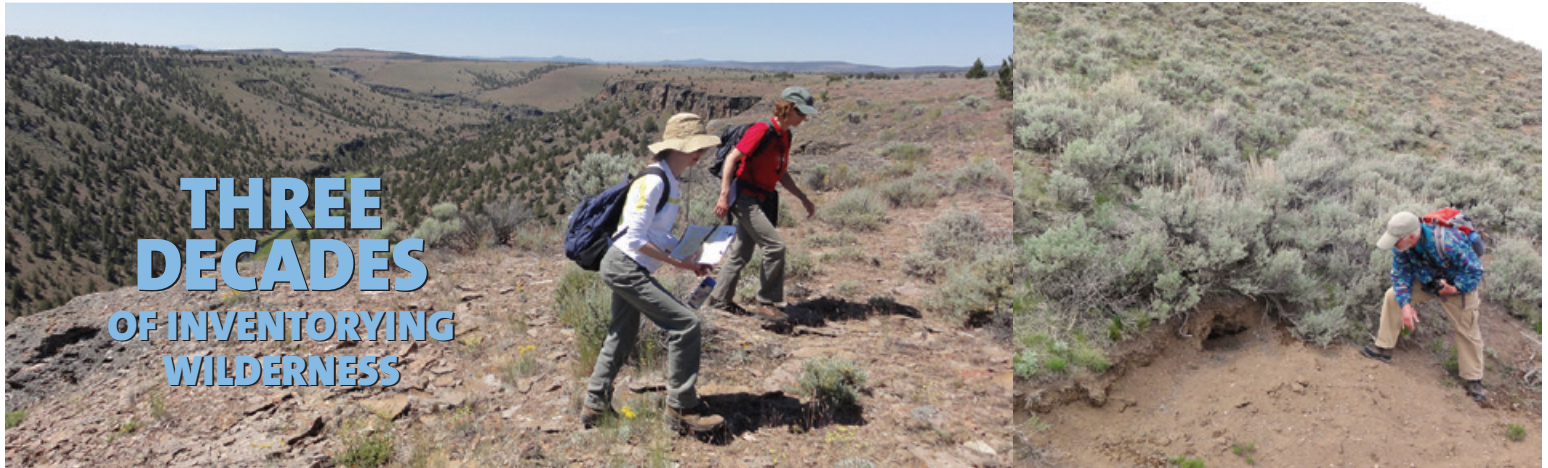
Citing the discrepancy in acreage findings between Vale BLM and Lakeview BLM, and between ONDA and Lakeview's inventories, ONDA pushed for action, leading to an independent review to determine how consistently the BLM's national wilderness inventory procedures had been applied.

"We wanted a hard look at whether the two inventories were correct and consis-

tent, and felt an independent review could achieve that," said Dan Morse, ONDA's conservation director.

Following this review, the Lakeview District began to address inconsistencies, incorporate suggested changes, and, ultimately the district will finalize a near complete overhaul of their inventory. To date, Lakeview has released new reports for 13 inventory units and found wilderness characteristics present in 10 of those units.

This is a small subset of the 100-plus units yet to be released, but already the number of acres recognized as having wilderness values has increased by nearly 200,000 acres. We see this as a promising sign that the final inventory will provide a clearer picture of where wilderness values exist on public lands in the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region.



ONDA volunteers monitor the South Fork Wilderness Study Area in 2014. RIGHT: John Howard studies Bald Mountain in the Lakeview BLM District as part of an ONDA wilderness inventory in 2013.

When Craig Miller, a longtime wilderness advocate, saw the discrepancy between Vale and Lakeview inventories, he was reminded of another time that desert activists took issue with a BLM wilderness inventory.

In the 1970s and 80s, under the newly established guidance of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the BLM set out to inventory wilderness values on its lands. When the final inventory for Oregon was released to the public, some of Oregon's best wilderness quality lands – millions of acres in the high desert – weren't listed.

A group of Central Oregonians, including Craig, who'd spent countless hours in the high desert knew there was cause for alarm, but they'd need proof to make their case. So they grabbed their boots, picked up some maps and headed out to conduct a wilderness inventory of their own.

With that decision and one that followed soon after to form "Oregon Natural Desert Association," this small group of activists launched into a multi-decade effort to document the wilderness values on 13 million acres of public lands in Oregon's high desert. They scaled Juniper Mountain, circumnavigated

Beatty's Butte, camped at Cow Lakes and bushwhacked through Louse Canyon, spending literally thousands of hours inventorying unprotected wild lands.

Braving sun, dirt and mud to map the wilderness in eastern Oregon's high desert, ONDA staff, members and volunteers identified serious inconsistencies in the BLM's inventories. By providing an accurate account of these otherwise undocumented wild places, their work sets the stage for preserving some of the most incredible unprotected wildlands in the lower 48 – places that embody the very meaning of Wilderness in the west.



## PROTECTING OREGON'S WILD OWYHEE

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD DURING PLANNING PROCESS TO KEEP THREATS AT BAY

By Corie Harlan  
Owyhee Coordinator

Sweating profusely with an obscenely overstuffed bag swaying behind me, four words rang through my mind: *never underestimate the Owyhee.*

Apparently, it'd been a bit too long since I'd overnighted in Owyhee country, as I hadn't thought twice about including my comfy chair while packing for this 'short' and 'quick' backpacking trip, just a 4-mile out-and-back segment from Birch Creek to Greeley Hot Spring.

On the ground, it was clear that I'd failed to account for 'the Owyhee factor.'

As I picked my way through one giant boulder field after another, I had ample time to contemplate just how fortunate Americans are to have a legacy like our public lands.

With striking geology, abundant wildlife, profound solitude and the darkest night skies, Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands embodies the best of our heritage. Home to hundreds of sacred Native American sites, the Owyhee is part of a rich living tribal culture. It also sustains a way of life for local communities and forms an integral part of Malheur County's economy.

Its sheer wildness leaves an indelible mark on anyone who spends time here.

Hiker Logan Boyles recently completed the Oregon Desert Trail. His most memorable moment of the 750-mile journey? Hiking into the pinnacle canyon after gaining the ridge at Juniper Gulch.

"I sat down to rest where the canyon flattens and widens a bit. After I finished filtering water and digging through my pack, I stood up, looked around, and saw I was surrounded on all sides by beautiful and ominous rock formations and pinnacles. It was so breathtaking that I teared up."

It is a precarious time for our beloved Owyhee. The current



*The BLM's planning process for southeastern Oregon is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve and protect the Owyhee's land, water and wildlife. Take part!*

administration is looking to undermine bedrock environmental laws and streamline industrial development on public lands. Natural gas exploration is increasing in Malheur County.<sup>1</sup> The permitting process for a large, industrial gold mine in Vale – Oregon's first in decades – continues to move forward,<sup>2</sup> while much of the nearby Canyonlands is known to have significant mining potential for gold, silver and uranium.<sup>3</sup> Just an hour away, Boise is one of the fastest growing places in the entire U.S.<sup>4</sup>

With these threats amassing on the Owyhee's border, protecting this corner of southeast Oregon takes on new urgency.

Steadfast in our commitment to the Owyhee, ONDA is building on five decades of effort to protect the area and working across the state and with the local community to make the need to permanently protect this place – and the broad public support for strong conservation management – abundantly clear to Senators Wyden and Merkley.

As you can imagine, a divisive political climate makes advancing

If you've never submitted comments before, don't miss this chance to get involved in the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan Amendment process.

Email [corie@onda.org](mailto:corie@onda.org) or visit [onda.org/resource-management-plans](http://onda.org/resource-management-plans)

ing legislative solutions quite challenging. However, there is still important work to be done for this wild place.

Right now, ONDA and conservation advocates are deeply engaged in a process that will create the blueprint for how nearly five million acres in southeastern Oregon – including awe-inspiring places like Leslie Gulch, Three Forks and Birch Creek – are managed.

Until the Owyhee has the conservation measures it so richly deserves, the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan Amendment process presents the best opportunity to protect the natural qualities we value. The Bureau of Land Management must seek public input on this plan. So it's time for people who love the Owyhee Canyonlands to weigh in. As concerned public lands advocates, we can safeguard sage-grouse habitat, decide where off-road vehicles should and should not travel, and preserve wild desert places to camp, hike and bird.

Spend time enjoying the public lands that belong to you and humble you. Let these landscapes bring you to tears. But don't let them leave you speechless. Add your voice.

1. Argus Observer, April 27, 2018: "Exploratory drilling gets green light in Malheur Co."
2. Argus Observer, May 24, 2018: "Gold mine expected to rake in 'exceptional cash flows'"
3. Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, September, 2016: "Metallic and Industrial Mineral Resource Potential of Southern and Eastern Oregon" [http://www.oregongeology.org/pubs/ofr/O-16-06\\_Report.pdf](http://www.oregongeology.org/pubs/ofr/O-16-06_Report.pdf)
4. Idaho Statesman, March 1, 2018: "Boise is fastest-growing area in the U.S."

## PREVENTING ROADS TO NOWHERE

### ROADLESS AREAS ON STEENS, PROTECTED THANKS TO YOU

By Mac Lacy  
Senior Attorney

Critical wildlife habitat and irreplaceable wilderness values on Steens Mountain in southeastern Oregon have been protected from motorized disruption following an important ruling by the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in June.

The appellate court granted ONDA's motion asking it to restore a long-standing driving and maintenance injunction while the case is on appeal. The Supreme Court has described injunctions like this as "an extraordinary remedy never awarded as of right."<sup>1</sup> **Due to the strength of ONDA's legal claims and the likelihood of irreparable harm to the environment without an injunction, ONDA was able to secure this seldom-sought and rarely-granted relief.**

First issued in 2011, the injunction had kept about 121 miles of overgrown or nonexistent routes from being upgraded or established. But it was dissolved earlier this year when the district court decided that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had followed the law when it issued its travel management plan for the mountain's half-million acre protected area.

Steens Mountain is an ecologically critical landscape. Much of the mountain is wilderness and its many, large roadless areas are essential for the survival of Greater sage-grouse, which requires vast, uninterrupted



*This photo shows the location of one of BLM's purported 'roads' on Steens Mountain. Thanks to you, ONDA's legal team can ensure that hard-fought protections are upheld and any attempt to diminish Steens Mountain is countered.*

expanses of healthy sagebrush plant communities for its survival.

Issued in 2007 and then amended in 2015 during the litigation, the BLM travel plan established motorized use on 521 miles of routes on Steens Mountain. Citing surveys showing that hundreds of miles of the seldom-used routes have disappeared into the sagebrush, ONDA has argued that BLM's decision allowing motorized exploration in these areas violates federal laws prohibiting off-road travel and creation of new roads on the mountain.

The indiscriminate use of motorized vehicles on our public lands is a serious threat to Steens Mountain. Given the fragility of this arid environment, it takes decades or longer

to recover from weed infestations and other damage when new roads fragment unbroke sagebrush steppe. This injunction limits motorized use and maintenance on 121 miles of routes, while still leaving several hundred miles of roads available for public recreation and administrative uses. This ruling ensures that vulnerable places on the mountain remain protected until the Ninth Circuit decides the merits of our claims.

1. Winter v. NRDC, 555 U.S. 7, 24 (2008).

*ONDA is represented on this case by senior attorney Mac Lacy, assisted by Tom Buchele of the Portland-based Earthrise Law Center and Portland-based public interest attorney Dave Becker.*

## YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK IN OREGON'S HIGH DESERT

By Renee Patrick  
Oregon Desert Trail Coordinator

*"Hey, look at this cool rock!"*

*"I want to come back and camp here."*

*"Look, I can see the mountains!"*

Enthusiastic observations like these poured out of my hiking companions – a group of girls from the Academy at Sisters – like snowmelt coursing through a spring-time creek.

The Academy's mission is to empower young women to lead healthy lives. Outdoor recreation and community service are two elements of their overall approach. They reached out to ONDA to see how we could work together. We put together a plan: I'd present about the Oregon Desert Trail at the school in February and lead the girls on a hike in the Oregon Badlands Wilderness in



*Hikers from the Academy at Sisters.*

May, and they'd come out to maintain trails in late July.

On our hike we talked about the Oregon Desert Trail, how wilderness areas are man-

aged and why the Badlands Wilderness is so important in a region with an exploding population, but, mostly, we simply absorbed the sights and the sounds of the Badlands.

I often think about how critical natural, undisturbed habitat is for plants and animals, but on this day with these girls I was reminded how much we humans also need wild places to be healthy, happy and whole.

Decades of work have gone into keeping this wild place available to us, starting with asking our legislators to protect this wilderness, to monitoring its species, to establishing the Oregon Desert Trail, right up to taking care of these hiking trail miles. The smiles on their faces made every minute worth it.

Thank you, ONDA supporters, for making this healing day, and so many more like it, possible!



# TEAMING UP TO SAVE SALMON

By Ben Gordon  
Stewardship Director

The cold water that Middle Columbia River steelhead need to survive has been hard to come by in the creeks that feed into the Upper John Day River for decades, and as a result fish populations have seen a precipitous decline. With a warming, drying climate adding to pressures that include grazing and invasive plants, marshaling resources to save the salmon is an urgent conservation priority. Thanks to the ONDA community, a new collaboration is taking on this challenge and improving the outlook for this threatened native species.

This year, ONDA and the Malheur National Forest have doubled down on their joint efforts to improve streamside habitat for the benefit of native fish and, in turn, myriad desert wildlife, throughout the Upper John Day River basin.

This holistic effort, referred to as the Collaborative Native Fish Habitat Restoration of the Upper John Day River Watershed project, aims to restore floodplain connectivity, native riparian plant communities, channel structure, and water quality along East Fork Beech Creek, Big Creek, Bear Creek, and Wiwaanaytt Creek. To get this project off the ground, ONDA leveraged funds provided by Wildlife Conservation Society, New Belgium Brewing, individual ONDA donors and donated volunteer labor to earn a matching grant from the National Forest Foundation, an organization that funds restoration efforts on National Forest lands across the country.

ONDA and the Malheur National Forest each bring unique value to the project, and this project showcases how conservation organizations and federal agencies can tap into each of their strong suits to make tangible progress towards critical, and



*ONDA and the Malheur National Forest are bringing their strengths together to recover a threatened salmon species. Photo: Sage Brown*

in common, conservation goals.

As Malheur National Forest Supervisor Steve Beverlin noted, “ONDA has the experience and capacity to organize and deliver outstanding help, as demonstrated by similar cooperative efforts over the past three years.”

From the salmon’s perspective, this collaboration is a classic case of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. By combining expertise and sharing resources, ONDA and the Malheur National Forest can be more effective and work at an accelerated pace.

Our members and volunteers appreciate partnerships for maximum impact as well. As

Martha Ahern, a stalwart volunteer from Madras who took part in the Beech Creek fence repair project in May, noted, “I enjoyed being part of a collaborative process that involves more than one

organization working together. That felt good to me.”

Each creek included in the project will benefit from a unique restoration approach. On Wiwaanaytt and Bear Creeks, ONDA will install small organic structures that mimic natural beaver dams to increase the availability of water during dry summer months. At Beech Creek volunteers will mend and build new fences to keep cattle from accessing the streams. At Big Creek, ONDA will plant thousands of native plants to provide shade and make the banks more stable to restore the cool, clear and abundant water conditions native fish need to survive.

“We applaud the Malheur National Forest for approaching riparian restoration on a watershed scale and feel so fortunate to have an agency partner that is as committed to improving the ecological function of the John Day watershed as we are,” said Jefferson Jacobs, ONDA’s riparian restoration coordinator.

ONDA is grateful for the strong partnership with the Malheur National Forest and looks forward to improving the far reaches of the Upper John Day watershed to not only recover the Middle Columbia River steelhead populations to viable levels, but to make their habitat healthy enough to support sustainable fisheries and to provide a wide range of benefits – ecological, cultural, social – for the people who enjoy these public lands and waters.

## Middle Columbia River Steelhead *Oncorhynchus mykiss*

This distinct population of Pacific salmonid spawns and rears in tributaries to the Columbia River in central and eastern Washington and Oregon. The Middle Columbia River steelhead was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2006. In a 2016 review of the species, NOAA Fisheries determined that the greatest opportunity to advance recovery is to increase flows in the Yakima, Umatilla, Walla Walla and John Day basins.

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: AARON TANI

**Aaron Tani**, an ONDA member since 2016, regularly volunteers on stewardship trips and contributes monthly as part of the Sage Society.



*Aaron Tani discovers new places through stewardship.*

A Central Oregonian since 1986, Aaron has grown to love Oregon's high desert for its vastness and the solitude found while exploring this landscape. Friends introduced Aaron to ONDA, and his first experience on a stewardship trip on the South Fork Crooked River motivated him to do more.

"There are so many hidden gems of Oregon's high desert. ONDA brought places into my life that I don't think I would have ever seen if it wasn't for the stewardship trips," says Aaron.

While it was the high desert landscape that inspired him to participate in stewardship work, Aaron stepped up his financial commitment to conservation by becoming a monthly donor in the

Sage Society after getting to know the people in ONDA's community.

"I like to say it's all the places I go with ONDA," said Aaron, "but really I feel it's the people – your staff and volunteers – who make those places even better. I'm grateful to be a part of such an amazing group."

Aaron contributes monthly so that ONDA can conserve and restore the places that he's fallen in love with for his kids and grandkids to discover.

"Maybe with ONDA's help, they can see all the work that has been done to make these amazing places even better."

Want to join ONDA's most forward-thinking members by becoming a monthly donor? Joining the Sage Society is easy and provides sustaining support to protect the wild landscapes you love. [www.onda.org/givemonthly](http://www.onda.org/givemonthly)

## ONDA EVENTS CALENDAR

August 1	Ask a Public Lands Policy Pro happy hour with Ken Rait   Portland
August 13	Are Beavers the Key to Vibrant Desert Rivers?   Burns
August 14	Explore the Owyhee's Wonders   Ontario
August 15	Ask a Conservation Attorney happy hour with Mac Lacy   Portland
September 6	Exploring the Economic Future of Wheeler County   Mitchell
October 5	Wild and Scenic Film Festival   Bend
October 9	Celebrating Oregon's Wild and Scenic Rivers   Portland
November 2	2019 Wild Desert Calendar Release Party   Bend
November 2	High Desert Hootenanny   Portland
December 7	High Desert Hootenanny   Bend

For time, location and other details, and the complete list of events that ONDA is hosting or participating in, check our events calendar online at: [www.onda.org/events](http://www.onda.org/events).

## GET SOCIAL WITH ONDA



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## BOARD AND STAFF UPDATES

## Thank You

A member of our board of directors since 2010, most recently as treasurer, **Jeff Frank** wrapped up his service on ONDA's board this spring. Jeff's intimate knowledge of Oregon's history and geography, financial savvy, and passion for conservation has provided an invaluable perspective to ONDA's efforts. Jeff and his wife, Ann, are members of ONDA's Rimrock Society for donors who have made a legacy gift to ONDA.

## Welcome Aboard

Our newest board member is KEEN's Advocacy Manager **Erin Gaines**. Erin represents KEEN on local, state, and federal policy issues and activates KEEN employees and fans around important issues. Erin previously worked for Oregon Senator Ron Wyden as a Legislative Correspondent and his Natural Resources Counsel in his Washington D.C. office. Read Erin's bio and meet her fellow ONDA board members at [onda.org/our-community](http://onda.org/our-community).

## Executive Director Search

Our executive director search committee is currently reviewing a pool of strong applicants for the role. We look forward to having a new director in place sometime this fall, with **Brent Fenty** continuing to serve until a new director is named.

## Seasonal Field Staff and Summer Interns

Thanks to your steadfast support, Oregon's high desert has a few more caretakers this summer. Our habitat monitoring technicians **Anne White** and **Emilie Bedard** are conducting extensive surveys to assess the health of critical sage-grouse habitats. Wildlands interns **Michael Tauriainen** and **Nick Maithonis** are assessing the condition of thousands of acres of public lands. GIS Intern **Zane Fields** is updating Oregon Desert Trail maps, monitoring wildlands and more.

## A Fond Farewell

**Michael O'Casey**, on our stewardship team since 2011, has taken a new role with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

## Taking on a New Role

In July, our talented development coordinator **Lisa Foster** stepped into a new role as wilderness stewardship coordinator, bringing a wealth of field experience with the U.S Forest Service with her. She will be leading stewardship trips and managing our independent stewards program.

## Say Hello

**Caelin Weiss** is joining the ONDA staff as our development associate. This Colby College graduate brings a passion for conservation and relevant past work experience in community organizing, advocacy and project management to the role.





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## ONDA DESERT OUTING: **THE PUEBLOS**

A rugged adventure awaits visitors to the Pueblo Mountains.

Part of the Great Basin, the Pueblos are a north-south oriented mountain range in southeastern Oregon and northwestern Nevada, just south of Steens Mountain and Alvord Desert. Most of the range is a Wilderness Study Area. Although it is not as large as neighboring Steens, this 30-mile long range is also a fault block mountain. The 8,634-foot Pueblo Mountain summit is the second highest point in southeastern Oregon.

No defined hiking trails exist here, just a series of large cairns near the crest of the mountains. This challenging hiking, which is part of both the Desert Trail Association's Desert Trail and ONDA's Oregon Desert Trail, requires strong navigational skills, but rewards with lush meadows, vast views and the potential to catch glimpses of resident bighorn sheep.

### Trip Details

**Drive time from Bend:** 4 to 5 hours

**When to hike:** spring and fall

**Hiking distance:** 27 miles one-way

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

### Access Information

Access into the Pueblo Mountain range is not straightforward, but several primitive roads lead into the area.

**On the northern side:** Start your hike from Fields Station, or drive three miles south on Highway 31 to Sesena Creek and the first cairn on the ODT/DTA route. Other access points include up Arizona Creek and behind the Denio Cemetery. Be aware of private land parcels in the wilderness study area; our Oregon Desert Trail maps show the private land.

**On the southern side:** The southern side of the range is best accessed from Denio Cemetery. Visitors can park at the entrance and hike



*The Pueblo Mountains call for cross-country travel. Photo: Renee Patrick*

into the range. The current Desert Trail/Oregon Desert Trail route follows Denio Canyon upstream, but extremely overgrown willow make this a daunting, frustrating experience. A better alternative is to hike the unnamed canyon just north of Denio Canyon. This option gains 1,500 feet in elevation, but provides easier hiking and offers a glimpse into the past through mining shacks that dot the canyon.

### Notes and advice

As always, hikers should carry the 10 Essentials and follow Leave No Trace principles. Make sure to pack your compass, maps, sturdy boots and backpacking gear for an extended trip. Bring plenty of clothing layers, as temperature extremes are the norm. Expect unpredictable weather conditions – it can snow in May! In the lush spring season, mosquito repellent

and plant and animal identification books are helpful.

The small communities of Fields, Ore. and Denio, Nev. border the Pueblos and visitors can find lodging, gas, restaurants and limited groceries.

For more detailed notes and advice, see:

[ONDA.org/OregonDesertTrail](http://ONDA.org/OregonDesertTrail)

You'll find this stretch of the 750-mile Oregon Desert Trail described in our guidebook and maps as "Section 16." Details about water availability, resupply options in the area, waypoints and mileages can be found in the trail resources.



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