



OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

DESERT RAMBLINGS

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ONLY IN THE OWYHEE

STUNNING GEOLOGICAL FEATURES, RARE
PLANTS AND A RICH HUMAN HISTORY



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OVERHEARD

“Restoration is hard slow work. It takes hold, or doesn’t, in fits and starts. The immensity of the need can be discouraging, but we must carry on. I am so thankful ONDA carries on.”

JOHN CUNNINGHAM



IN THIS ISSUE

STANDING UP FOR TRANSPARENCY

The Freedom of Information Act requires federal agencies to disclose all government information upon request promptly. The Interior Department is trying to change the rules. PAGE 6.

ONLY IN THE OWYHEE

*Cover photo: Oregon’s Owyhee Canyonlands,
Mark Lisk*

What makes the Owyhee such a hot spot for botanical biodiversity? In part, an actual hotspot. PAGE 8.

A BUSINESS CASE FOR THE BADLANDS

As we mark the tenth anniversary of wilderness designation, it’s worth looking back on how this area came to be protected. PAGE 12.

ON ONDA’S BLOG

BURROWING OWLS

HOW TO SHOOT VIDEO IN THE DESERT DARK DESERT SKIES

For these stories and more, visit ONDA.org/blog.

Individual Action, Desertwide Impact

Dear desert friend,

As a relative newcomer here at ONDA, I've been awestruck by the incredible energy and bottomless appetite of ONDA's members and volunteers.

A recent talk – a Monday evening presentation on Hart Mountain – sold out 100 seats in just 4 hours. It's exciting to see our presentations and lectures drawing new people closer to the wonders of this landscape through imagery, science and armchair exploration.

When the 2019 stewardship trip roster went live at the end of February, hundreds of volunteers signed up and several trips took on long waiting lists. As you read this, legions of volunteers are emerging from hibernation to plant, pull and dig for desert conservation. Imagine watching ONDA's stewardship crews from high above, fanning out across the high desert to pull fence, restore habitat, fix trails and plant trees. You'd see them working in all corners of Oregon's desert – from the Deschutes to the Malheur, Hart Mountain to the Owyhee. 550 volunteers cranking out 12,000 hours of hard work restoring fragile landscapes and protecting habitat for wildlife.

"Can my effort actually make a difference?" you ask. Absolutely. Through the collective action of hundreds of volunteers, ONDA's restoration projects bring meaningful improvements to desert habitat. You restore resilient streams to buffer the effects of climate change and re-open corridors for important wildlife migrations.

"Does my comment matter?" Again, yes. When you sign a petition or write to your legislator, your voice is amplified by thousands of ONDA members who are also speaking up. As a member of this community of desert enthusiasts, your voice for conservation is stronger.

At a time when public lands face near daily assaults from lobbyists-turned-politicians, all of your efforts matter more than ever before. As described in Mac Lacy's article on FOIA (page 6) and seen daily in the news, the efforts to push the public out of public lands management is relentless. Transparency is being shuttered and only through a persistent and tireless fight to be heard can we hold the line to ensure a healthy future for Oregon's desert.

As you head out for a stewardship trip, settle in for a presentation, stand up at a town hall, or sit down to write a check, take pride in your commitment to protect, defend and restore Oregon's desert. You are making an incredible difference.

Together for a wild desert,



Ryan Houston
Executive Director



Before and After Beaver

by Jefferson Jacobs, Riparian Restoration Coordinator

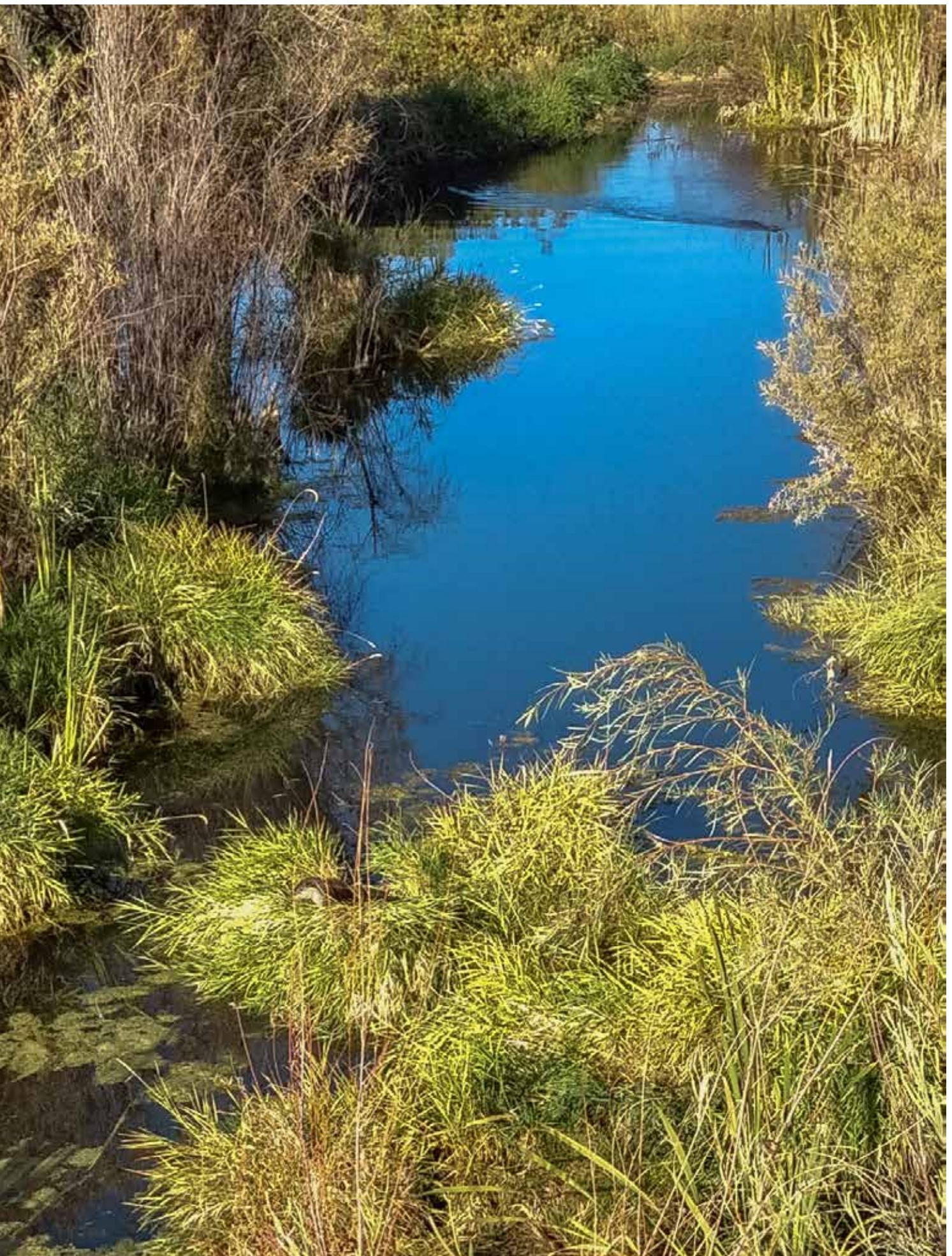
Mid-summer at Pine Creek in the high desert of eastern Oregon. Songbirds call from a shoreline thicket of shading willow and dogwood. After a busy morning of catching fish, a family of otters rest on a patch of grass: the front porch of the pond-builder's home. Freshly chewed branches and a growing string of dams upstream offer evidence of the nocturnal progress of the resident beavers as they work to complete the restoration of Pine Creek begun two decades ago.

In the 1990s, this creek was an eroded, ten-foot-deep ditch. Dry by mid-summer. Willows, let alone dogwoods, were rare. This area started to recover after the land manager removed the pressure of grazing. In a few years surviving willow began to emerge. In another few years, willows could outgrow the reach of hungry deer and elk. Beginning in 2008, ONDA volunteers began pitching in on efforts to replant native species that had been eliminated along this stretch of creek. Beavers made brief appearances, but without reliable water and enough deciduous trees for winter food, they'd either move on, starve or become cougar food.

By 2015, these banks were lush with willow and chokecherry. It was time to encourage beaver to come and stay for good. ONDA volunteers installed more than a dozen beaver dam analogues to help raise the water table and to help the spread of deciduous trees that would inspire beavers to take over in the final stage of restoring their creek. Within a year, beaver were building dams up and down the 10 miles of Pine Creek. The "ditch" was filling in, and high spring flows returned to floodplains they hadn't visited in a hundred years. Today, there is water year-round almost everywhere on the creek. Thanks to the dedication of ONDA's members and volunteers, this restoration process has reached a point where Mother Nature can take over and finish the job.

Can you spot the otter? *Photo: Mark Darnell*







A new Interior Department rule would make it harder for citizens to obtain the kind of public information that ONDA has used to protect fish and wilderness values in the John Day River Basin and across the desert. ONDA is pushing back.

Photo: Ben Gordon

Standing Up for government transparency

by Mac Lacy, Senior Attorney

Good public policy can only result from a well-informed public, but apparently President Trump's Interior Department doesn't agree.

In a notice released quietly, days before New Year's Eve and in the midst of the government shutdown, the Trump administration proposed regulatory changes that would make it more difficult and time-consuming for citizens to obtain public information from the Interior Department under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

ONDA uses the FOIA in a variety of ways, from tracking land management, to getting records about how agencies consider our inventory information, to unearthing political interference and arbitrary decision-making.

In January, ONDA joined more than 130 other public interest organizations in comments on the proposed rules. The groups contend that the changes would severely undermine government transparency, violate the act itself, and limit important public rights guaranteed by law.

The Trump proposal would give agencies more leeway to put "complex" requests on a slower processing track and increase the burden of how specifically citizens must describe the information they are requesting (supposedly to alleviate Interior of "unreasonably burdensome" work). Perhaps most egregious, agencies could limit the number of requests a citizen or group can send to the government each month, in order "to treat requestors equitably."

These changes would undermine the FOIA's

basic objective of the fuller and faster release of information.

ONDA has been down this road before, taking on executive branch attempts to hamstringing citizen efforts to see what their government is up to.

During the George W. Bush administration, the Commerce Department adopted regulations that slowed and restricted government responses to FOIA requests. That hindered ONDA's ability to watchdog environmental agencies, as we'd receive stale, or even worthless, information about environmental damage long after it occurred.

In *ONDA v. Gutierrez*, we successfully challenged Commerce's rule. The court agreed that delayed responses impeded ONDA's ability to monitor the field and assess the success or failure of agency land management. That courtroom victory had a lasting benefit. After ONDA defeated the Bush administration's appeal, Commerce permanently amended its FOIA regulations. Today, agencies produce all responsive records in existence up to the date the agency begins its search.

But the Interior Department, in its latest about face, contends that the changes it proposed during the shutdown will reduce litigation over agency backlogs in processing FOIA requests. That seems unlikely, given the rules' bent toward facilitating more stonewalling and delays in producing public records.

If adopted as proposed, the administration will surely find itself in court. ♦



ONLY IN THE OWYHEE

by Corie Harlan, Owyhee Canyonlands Coordinator

17 million years ago, the hotspot that currently fuels the many geothermic wonders under Yellowstone National Park was at work transforming the region where Idaho, Oregon and Nevada's borders meet today.

Four calderas in the Owyhee Canyonlands area exploded simultaneously, spewing hot volcanic gases, volcanic ash and large chunks of volcanic rock and molten froth for thousands of square miles. The multiple ash layers and numerous deposits laid down during this time boast a painter's palette of colors, ranging from yellow to green to red with streaks of black and brown throughout.

As journalist Tim Neville observed during one of his many visits, "Oregon's Owyhee reminds me a lot of Southern Utah's red rock country...only dipped in fudge."



Greely Flats. Photo: Mark Lisk

Over time, weather and erosion formed the stunning geological features and volcanic ash spires and tufts found in the Owyhee today. And this unique history is also why so many flora are endemic to the area: 28 plant species (and counting) are found only in the Owyhee.

ENDEMIC AND IMPORTANT PLANTS

The myriad fudge and sherbert-colored ash layers and deposits and varying level of nitrates in the soil create unique micro-climates where rare, ash-dependent plant species thrive. The canary-hued stunner Packard's blazingstar (*Mentzelia packardiae*)



Grimy mousetail.

prefers greenish-yellow ash-tuff talus slopes, while the diminutive grimy mousetail (*Ivesia rhypara* var. *rhypara*) grows on shallow, apricot-colored ash substrate.

Rare plants aren't the only flora that thrive in the Owyhee. Even with limited rain fall and temperatures that plummet below freezing in winter and soar to well over 100°F in the summer, resilient, adaptable and straight-up tenacious species like bitterroot (*Lewisia rediviva*) abound in this arid landscape. Widespread throughout the West, this hardy, flowering perennial can live for over a year without water. From its hardiness to its ephemeral rose-pink blossoms to its high nutritional value, bitterroot has helped shape the ecological and cultural history of the Owyhee's desert.



Well adapted for the desert climate, bitterroot can survive for over a year without water. Photo: Devlin Holloway

A dietary and medicinal staple, bitterroot is a culturally significant plant for several Native American tribes in the West. Spring expeditions were timed to coincide with the blooming of the bitterroot flower and often scouts would be sent out to check on the readiness of the plant for harvesting. Traditionally, the roots were gathered, dried for storage, and used for food or trade. The outer layer of the root is bitter, so it was cooked and often mixed with meat, berries and fat. New mothers drank a tea-like infusion from the raw root in order to increase milk production when nursing infants. Additionally, it was eaten to settle an upset stomach and was also used for pain relief.



12,500 year old basketry, Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands. Photo: Tom Connolly

A RICH HUMAN HISTORY

For at least 13,000 years semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers inhabited the Owyhee Canyonlands. There are more than 500 known archaeological sites in the Owyhee. Near ancient campsites and hunting blinds, archaeologists have unearthed weapons and stone tools made from chert, obsidian, agate, jasper and opalite. These lithic scatters include bones of bighorn sheep and deer hunted centuries ago, as well as remnants of seeds and plants. A number of excavated sites reveal objects of an ancient daily life including pottery, clay figurines, woven baskets, nets and sandals.

Today, the Owyhee Canyonlands is home to a living cultural richness for the indigenous Northern Paiute, Bannock and Shoshone tribes. These ancestral lands contain areas considered sacred and the landscapes, rivers, fish and wildlife support tribal traditions to this day.

INTACT, INCREDIBLE - AND UNDER THREAT

Many of Oregon's high desert wonders exist only in the Owyhee.

Much like the desert itself, it takes time, effort and patience to unlock and come to know the many hidden treasures and secrets of these particular wild lands, waters and wildlife. The high desert is a fierce, harsh yet fragile place. It's a landscape to travel slowly in, to look closely at, to revel in...and ultimately, to protect.

The current administration has not been kind to public lands anywhere, and this beloved part of Oregon is no exception. It is an alarming, uncertain time for Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands.

Rollbacks on bedrock laws and bi-partisan plans protecting clean air and water and vital habitat for imperiled species like the Greater Sage-Grouse have left millions of acres of southeastern Oregon's public lands vulnerable to mining, drilling and industrial development. Natural gas exploration is on the rise throughout Malheur County. This past December, the Malheur Enterprise published a story about the Grassy Mountain Gold mine owners intent to expand their reach for gold in this region, which has high mining potential for gold, silver and uranium. And, as the Argus Observer reported last September, a new, major highway connecting Canada and Mexico could run right through these public lands.

In the face of these mounting threats, ONDA remains steadfast in our commitment to permanently protect Oregon's Owyhee.

With the help of stalwart supporters like you, we're working across the state with our partners, elected leaders and neighboring communities to find a solution that protects the Owyhee's ecological, recreational, cultural and economic values and the livelihoods tied to them. Protecting this place is now a question of when, not if – because there's only one Owyhee. ♦



THE OWYHEE IN BLOOM

If the Earth laughs in flowers, then it's uproarious in Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands right now. Spring and early summer are peak wildflower season in this remote part of southeastern Oregon.

In addition to velvety-purple lupine fronds and fiery-orange paintbrush spikes, you may also encounter the oh-so-fluffy and rare Owyhee clover (*Trifolium owyheense*), one of 28 endemic plants found nowhere else on earth.

GREAT PLACES FOR WILDFLOWERS

- Leslie Gulch, Juniper Gulch, Dago Gulch
- Three Fingers
- Birch Creek
- Three Forks
- Anderson Crossing

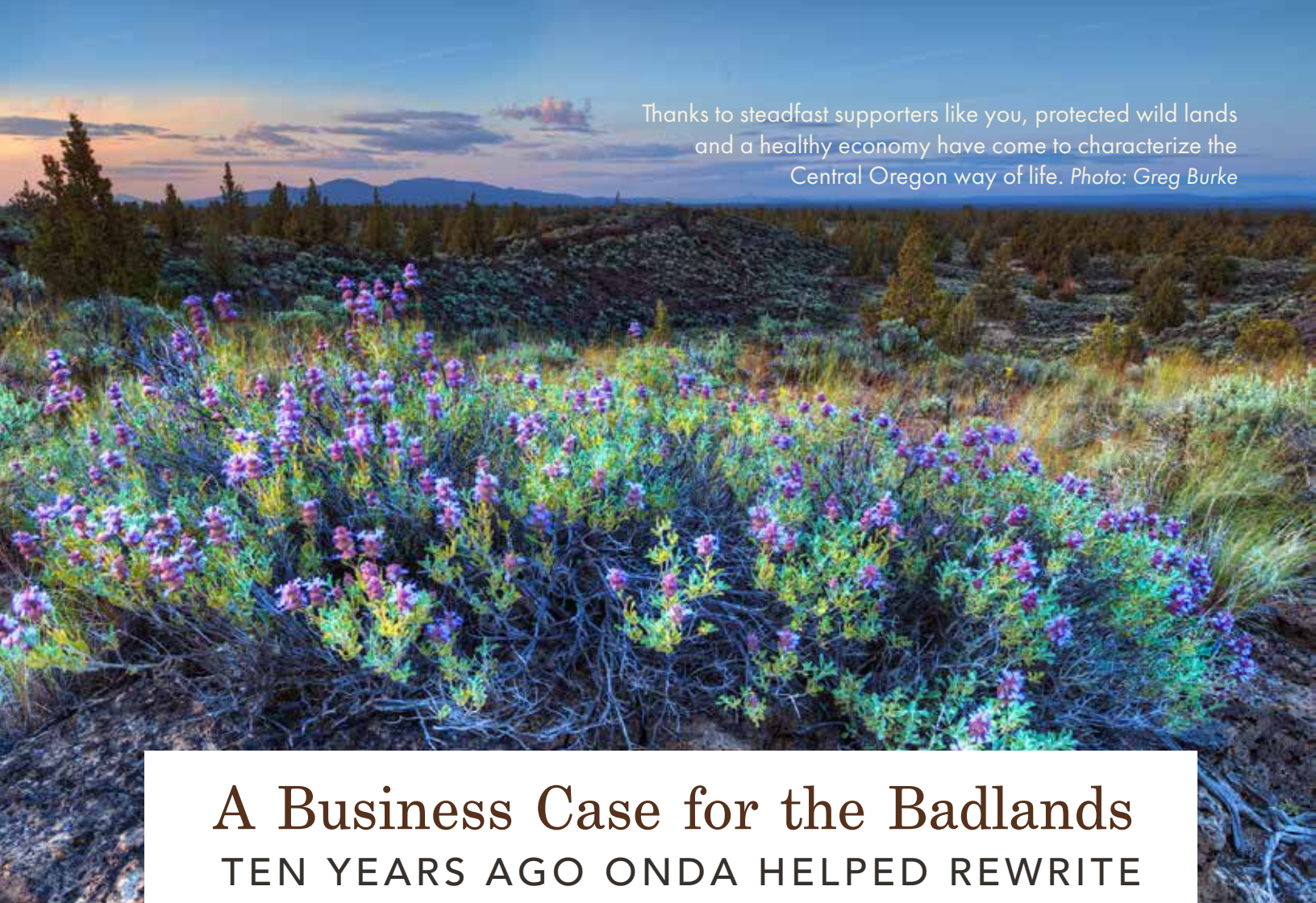
Find more information at onda.org/owyhee.

Photo: Devlin Holloway



GET INVOLVED

Text "ONDA" to 52886 to put the power of advocacy in the palm of your hand. We'll let you know where and when to raise your voice for southeastern Oregon's wild lands, waters and wildlife.



Thanks to steadfast supporters like you, protected wild lands and a healthy economy have come to characterize the Central Oregon way of life. Photo: Greg Burke

A Business Case for the Badlands

TEN YEARS AGO ONDA HELPED REWRITE THE WILD LANDS PROTECTION PLAYBOOK

by Gena Goodman-Campbell, Public Lands Coordinator

On March 30, 2009, President Obama signed the Oregon Badlands Wilderness Act into law, and, in the decade since, the Badlands has gone from locals' secret to a celebrated part of Central Oregon's identity.

As the Badlands Wilderness itself has become better known, the story of its creation has faded from memory. And, if you are new to the region, you might not know that the Badlands was only protected after a decades-long campaign rife with challenges and setbacks. In order to get a wilderness bill introduced, passed, and signed into law, you need local support. For years, that "local support" was narrowly defined as an endorsement from local elected officials. Though the Bend City Council endorsed the Badlands Wilderness proposal twice, ONDA had failed for years to gain support from the

Deschutes County Commission.

In 2006, ONDA decided to try a new, and at that time radical, strategy: focus on building business community support instead of endorsements from local government. This strategy proved wildly effective, not only with businesses directly dependent on outdoor recreation, but also with the region's big employers such as Deschutes Brewery.

Today, building business support is considered a key element in any wilderness campaign, and the outdoor industry is asserting itself as a powerful political force for public lands protection. Here in Central Oregon, many people take it as a given that protecting places like the Badlands and growing a healthy economy are not at odds, but in fact go hand in hand. ♦

To Chris Van Dyke and Teague Hatfield, Our Gratitude

by Ray Hartwell and Kirsten Blackburn

Please join us in extending our sincere appreciation to Chris Van Dyke and Teague Hatfield who are retiring from ONDA's Board of Directors after several terms of excellent service.



Though he downplayed his efforts as a "small businessman," Teague Hatfield leaves large (running) shoes to fill. As FootZone's owner, he hosted many events to connect the outdoors community with desert conservation. Teague was a key member of the communications and finance committees and instrumental in our executive

director search. His business and management experience, commitment to community, and willingness to contribute bolstered ONDA's work in myriad ways.



Chris Van Dyke brought his unmatched experience as a lawyer, communications guru, executive officer and entrepreneur to our board room. With a passion for wide open landscapes and an iconic Van Dyke smile, Chris revolutionized how ONDA communicated, reminding us of the power of love of place. Chris challenged the status quo, brought vigor and strategy to

board meetings, worked tirelessly to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands, jubilantly emceed our Wild & Scenic Film Festival, and so much more.

Say Hello to Hana Sant

In January, Hana Sant joined ONDA as our Membership and Engagement Coordinator. Hana grew up in Bend and spent her childhood exploring and falling in love with Oregon's high desert and rural communities. An interest in social science and community work led her to earning a bachelor's degree in sociology at Willamette University in Salem and pursuing a career in the non-profit sector.

Over the past decade, Hana has worked for non-profit organizations in Colorado, Washington and Oregon in a variety of roles including public engagement, program and project management, fundraising, volunteer management, community outreach and event planning.



MEET MARY MCCORD ONDA VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE

by Corinne Handelman, Outreach Coordinator

Mary McCord and her husband Tom formed a personal connection with Oregon's high desert long before moving to Bend, and they continue to fall in love with new places across the state. After attending a Wild & Scenic Film Festival, they were inspired to become ONDA members, and Mary is now an active volunteer.

As Mary says, "I find enjoyment in the peaceful wide open spaces, geology, and rich history of Oregon's high desert. It's truly an amazing place."

Mary appreciates the camaraderie that comes with volunteering alongside other ONDA supporters both in the office and in the field.

She finds hope working with others who share the same agenda, saying, "If you have the ability and desire, it's important to do something to contribute. It doesn't have to be big, because every little bit helps."

Her wish for the future is a more resilient landscape in the face of threats like climate change. With the effort of ONDA members and volunteers like Mary, the outlook is certainly brighter. ♦

Learn about the various ways you can pitch in at [ONDA.org/volunteer](https://onda.org/volunteer).



THE GREATER HART-SHELDON REGION

Recognized as one of the most important blocks of sagebrush steppe habitat on the planet, the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region is anchored by two of the largest wildlife refuges in the west. The two refuges were established in the 1930s in response to significant declines in pronghorn populations. Today over 7,000 individual pronghorn call this region home, seasonally migrating between their summer and winter ranges. *Photo: Jon Williams*

WHEN IT RAINS, IT FAWNS

Late spring is prime time for observing life in Oregon's high desert. In May and early June, after a 250-day pregnancy, female pronghorn give birth to precocial twin fawns. Weighing up to 9 pounds each, pronghorn fawns are able to walk within a mere 30 minutes of being born. The nutritious spring growth and intact plant communities at Hart Mountain make it among the most important fawning grounds for pronghorn in the northern Great Basin. *Photo: Jeremy Austin*



UPCOMING EVENTS

For all details and our full list of events, visit onda.org/events

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| March 11 | Sex Lives of High Desert Plants and Animals Portland, OR |
| March 26 | Upper Snake River Tribes Take on a Changing Climate Bend, OR |
| March 30 | Badlands Bash Bend, OR |
| April 8 | Hart Mountain Revealed Portland, OR |
| April 9 | Survival Strategies for Desert Species Bend, OR |
| April 19-21 | Annual General Meeting Fossil, OR |



CELEBRATE SPRING BASIN

by Ben Gordon, Stewardship Director

What is the perfect way to celebrate the ten year anniversary of Spring Basin Wilderness? Hike its rolling hills and admire its spring flowers. Situated between the John Day River and Clarno Fossil Beds unit of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, Spring Basin is seldom explored, yet easy to access and can be experienced as a day hike or extended backpacking trip.

From the Spring Basin trailhead, hike north cross-country for 0.4 miles until you intersect a trail. Turn left at the junction for Spring Basin Canyon to ascend a ridge to Horse Mountain. After gorgeous views from the remote peak, zigzag down into Hay Bottom Canyon and reconnect with a trail that ends at a southern border of the wilderness area. From there, follow the boundary westward until the John Day River comes into view and you meet Clarno Road. Head north to your car. *Photo: Jim Davis*

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

From Bend, follow Highway 97 north to Madras. Continue on Highway 97 for 17 miles, then turn right on Highway 293/Antelope Highway. After 13.5 miles, continue onto State Highway 218 E. Turn right onto Clarno Road. Proceed 3.5 miles on dirt road to the parking area.

For more desert outings, check out our Visitor's Guides at onda.org/guides.

TRIP DETAILS

Drive time: 2 hours from Bend, OR

When to hike: spring

Hiking distance: 4 miles round trip, with a 9 mile round trip option

Difficulty: 5, off-trail travel



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50 SW Bond Street, Suite 4
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COMING UP ON INSTAGRAM:

Dark skies, bats and butterflies



FOLLOW @THEOREGONDESERT

PLAN YOUR LEGACY IN 3 SIMPLE STEPS.

1 REFLECT

How will you continue to support the places you love after your lifetime?

2 CONNECT

Call ONDA. We'll talk you through how to include ONDA in your will.

3 PERFECT

How you feel knowing you stepped up today to sustain Oregon's high desert tomorrow.



Photo: © Greg Burke

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Protecting, defending and restoring Oregon's high desert since 1987. Learn more at onda.org.