

OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

DESERT RAMBLINGS

SPRING + SUMMER 2021 | VOLUME 34 • NO.1

SAGEBRUSH STRONGHOLD





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Barksdale Brown, Finance and Operations Director
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Gena Goodman-Campbell, Program Director
Corinne Handelman, Engagement Manager
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OFFICES

Oregon Natural Desert Association
50 SW Bond Street, Suite 4
Bend, OR 97702
(541) 330-2638

2009 NE Alberta Street, Suite 207
Portland, OR 97211
legal: (503) 525-0193
outreach: (503) 703-1006

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Backdrop: Beech Creek spring planting trip
Photo: Andy Shearer

OVERHEARD

"So much amazing biodiversity in the high desert!"
- @andyfilmsandhikes

"The Owyhee is my special place for so many reasons!"
- @stacyparrishklamath

"I read the story map today and loved it! Such beautiful
work and good info to know. I can't wait to visit the Hart
Sheldon area once the pandemic eases up."
- @fireheartedgirl

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OREGON
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Cover: Beatys Butte in the distance, a landmark in
the Land Between
Photo: Jim Davis

FROM THE OUTBACK

Dear friend of Oregon's desert,

As spring dawns and longer days coax desert wildflowers into bloom, a new era of opportunity in conservation awaits you. In just the past few months, the Biden administration has moved quickly with new mandates prioritizing public lands conservation, elevating the climate and biodiversity crisis, and returning science to its rightful and necessary place in natural resource planning and management.

Congress is following suit, with Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley introducing the pre-
cedential River Democracy Act of 2021 calling for protection of more than 1,000 miles of the
most ecologically important rivers and streams in the high desert.

And new opportunities may be available to protect some of the Great Basin's most intact
sagebrush landscape in the Greater Hart-Sheldon region, conserving the most important
pronghorn migration anywhere.

We're also celebrating the bipartisan confirmation of Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland,
the first Native American to join the President's cabinet in the 230 years of its existence. A
member of the Laguna Pueblo, Haaland will guide our nation's management of more than
500 million acres of public land, including those lands where her ancestors have lived since
time immemorial and more than 12 million acres in Oregon's high desert.

The significance of this moment cannot be overstated as Secretary Haaland's bold conser-
vation vision, combined with President Biden's mandates, leadership from Oregon's Sen-
ators, and the decades we've worked together to build conservation opportunities in the
high desert, create incredible opportunities for conserving the places we love.

Whether your favorite spot is nestled in the canyons of the Owyhee, spread below the big
sky of Greater Hart-Sheldon Region, along the banks of the John Day River or deep in the
Oregon Badlands backcountry, the year ahead brings tremendous optimism for our ability
to achieve meaningful conservation progress.

Your contributions, whether restoring streamside habitat, writ-
ing to your representatives or becoming a monthly donor, fuel
our continued work and give voice to the desert. Thank you for
meeting this moment and embracing the opportunities to con-
serve Oregon's high desert, now and always.

For a wild desert,

Ryan Houston
Executive Director



Tackling the Climate Crisis

How new presidential direction could play out in eastern Oregon

by Mac Lacy, *Senior Attorney*

Just hours after National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman delivered her stirring address at the presidential inauguration in January, President Biden issued a series of momentous executive orders. Echoing Ms. Gorman’s message of hope and collective purpose, the president’s first-day agenda ranged from rejoining the World Health Organization, to freezing student debt collection, to banning workplace discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees, to rejoining the Paris climate accord.

ONDA is especially heartened by the new administration’s strong commitment to the environment. Among the president’s new directives was a sweeping executive order, Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis, that commits the country to “immediately commence work to confront the climate crisis” by

- 1) listening to the science,
- 2) improving and protecting the environment,
- 3) reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and
- 4) bolstering climate resiliency in natural systems.

Executive Order 13990 applies to all federal agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, which oversees 12 million acres in Oregon’s high desert. The Bureau and other federal agencies must reconsider any actions taken during the last four years that “conflict with these important national objectives.” The order immediately cancelled the Keystone pipeline project, halted oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and set a course for restoring national monuments decimated by President Trump. The new president’s immediate and decisive direction also has important ramifications for ONDA’s work to conserve public lands, waters and wildlife.

Listening to the science

It doesn’t take a doctorate in biochemistry to understand that empirical science must be the foundation for protecting human health and our environment. And while it may seem odd that the United States actually has to declare that it will “listen to science,” it is in response to government-sanctioned, anti-science sentiment over the last four years that resulted in damaging public policy decisions, including in Oregon’s desert landscape.

In 2017, for example, former Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke ordered the Bureau to “review” its landmark 2015 greater sage-grouse conservation strategy, a thinly veiled scheme to eliminate or weaken science-based protections for the species. In Oregon, this meant slashing a provision that had closed 13 specially-protected Research Natural Areas to livestock grazing for scientific research. The ungrazed areas were to serve as comparison sites to study the effects of grazing — and not grazing — on sensitive sagebrush plant communities essential to grouse recovery. Although the Bureau recognized the research was indispensable, the former Secretary wasn’t interested in that kind of data. This was the antithesis of science-based management, and ONDA has a pending lawsuit challenging the former Secretary’s decision.

President Biden’s executive order should allow the Bureau to get back to collecting valuable scientific information so it can make informed decisions about how best to save the sage-grouse.

Improving and protecting the environment

The president’s order conveys an urgent need to both improve and protect our environment. One of the major

challenges of a changing climate is the increased frequency and severity of wildfire in the West, including the sagebrush grasslands and juniper woodlands of eastern Oregon. ONDA supports effective, comprehensive, science-based wildfire management. For example, by emphasizing early detection and rapid response, there is less need for dangerous and expensive fire-fighting, and for damaging and unproven fire prevention techniques.

In contrast, the last administration favored harmful techniques, including an expansive plan to bulldoze 1,000 miles of so-called “fuel breaks” across 3.6 million acres of the Owyhee country in Oregon and Idaho. Marketed as a way to control wildfire, the project’s only guaranteed outcome would be to chop up large blocks of unfragmented sagebrush habitat necessary to sage-grouse survival. The Bureau’s environmental study clearing the way for these damaging fuel breaks has substantial data gaps and lacks published scientific support.

ONDA is hopeful that new leadership at the Bureau of Land Management will take a closer look at wildfire management options and reject this unproven gambit. Fuel breaks alone will not restore ecosystem resilience; it will take a holistic approach to protect and improve sagebrush habitats.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions

Executive Order 13990 also requires the Bureau to account for the benefits of reducing climate pollution to ecosystems and natural resources. ONDA has underscored this issue for years, but the Bureau — particularly under the last administration — has resisted addressing climate change effects in planning and management.

In 2010, ONDA struck a settlement agreement with the Bureau that required the agency to amend two land use plans to address wilderness, transportation, livestock grazing, and other issues across 7.6 million acres of public land in southeastern Oregon. In its environmental review, the agency refused to consider how different management options for these resources and activities could affect greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration. The individual and cumulative impacts from livestock grazing, invasive species, and wildfire on these public lands contribute

significantly to greenhouse gas emissions in eastern Oregon.

With Executive Order 13990 in place, the Bureau now has a crucial opportunity to rethink its path and adopt plans that account for the environmental and social cost of carbon and methane — and develop management options like voluntary grazing permit retirement to help balance the carbon budget on public lands.

Bolstering climate resiliency in natural systems

Finally, President Biden’s order requires the Bureau to emphasize climate resiliency in land management, a technical concept that offers great promise for high desert landscapes.

The agency could, for example, emphasize biodiversity and landscape-scale connectivity for the “Land Between” region that links the Hart Mountain and Sheldon wildlife refuges. This area encompasses some of the most intact and biologically significant sagebrush steppe remaining in North America. Conservation management within this crucial migratory corridor is essential to native species like sage-grouse and pronghorn that are contending with a rapidly changing climate. The same is true of the Owyhee region, where legislative and other protections could conserve millions of acres of wildlands in the heart of one of just two remaining sage-grouse population strongholds in the West.

* * *

Everyone deserves a clean and healthy environment and the freedom to roam wild spaces and enjoy our shared natural resources. Executive Order 13990 provides key new direction for realizing that vision. ♦



Conserving public lands, like the Pueblo Mountains, builds climate resiliency.
Photo: James Parsons

Independent Stewardship

This summer, ONDA volunteers will be out across the desert, planting, monitoring, maintaining and more

by Gena Goodman-Campbell, Program Director

Volunteers building a protective fence above the South Fork Crooked River.
Photo: Mark Darnell

Are you daydreaming about getting out to the desert this year? Give your adventures on Oregon's dry side an elevated purpose by volunteering with ONDA as an Independent Steward. We will give you all the tools you need to make a difference.

While ONDA's group stewardship trips continue to be on hold until we can safely gather again, the conservation and restoration needs of Oregon's high desert remain exceptionally high. ONDA has a safe and creative solution that will allow hundreds of volunteers to work to improve the health of critical desert lands, waterways and wildlife and care for the places we love. Independent Stewards will be individually matched to a critical project and supported every step of the way.

Our goals for 2021 include:

- » Planting 12,000 native trees and shrubs along desert streams like Hay Creek and the South Fork Crooked River
- » Inventorying proposed wild and scenic rivers from the Central Oregon Backcountry to the Owyhee Canyons
- » Monitoring wildlands and wildlife habitat in critical

landscapes like Hart Mountain and the Alvord Desert

- » Maintaining trail and monitoring for recreation impacts along more than 100 miles of the Oregon Desert Trail in the Steens Mountain Wilderness and Fremont National Forest

These strategically selected actions address urgent and ongoing stewardship priorities in some of Oregon's most unique, compelling and ecologically vital locales. The need is great, and as a steward your energy and talents will be put to good use improving the health of desert ecosystems and informing our broader conservation and policy work for the long-term.

People of all skill levels are invited to complete the application form at onda.org/independent-stewards.

And, please share this call for volunteers far and wide. ♦

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

To follow the progress made by ONDA's Independent Stewards, head to onda.org/notes-from-the-field, watch for Notes from the Field updates on Facebook or follow #independentONDA on Instagram.



Critical Protections in Sight for Desert Waterways

Senators Wyden and Merkley Introduce the River Democracy Act of 2021

by Joanna Zhang, Conservation Fellow

On February 3, 2021, Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley introduced the River Democracy Act of 2021 to add 4,700 miles of Oregon's rivers, streams, creeks and even lakes to the National Wild and Scenic River System. This grassroots legislation is the largest Wild and Scenic Rivers proposal in our nation's history, and it came about thanks to thousands of Oregonians across the state – including a strong showing of hundreds of ONDA supporters – who submitted their favorite waters for consideration in the bill.

More than 1,000 miles of vital desert waterways, including segments of the Owyhee, Malheur and John Day rivers, Whychus Creek and Succor Creek, made it into this legislation thanks directly to desert advocates nominating them.

The proposed rivers and streams in Oregon's outback provide clean drinking water to local communities, drive tourism and recreation, and support prime habitat for salmon, steelhead, native trout and other wildlife. By designating these waterways as Wild and Scenic, they will be kept dam-free, forever, and a mile-wide corridor will protect the valuable ecological, recreational and cultural resources along their banks.

The River Democracy Act of 2021 is truly a landmark bill for Oregon's public lands and waters, safeguarding one of the state's most treasured resources for generations to come. ♦

CALL FOR STREAMSIDE STORIES

We're looking to highlight people who are passionate about Oregon's desert rivers and want to share their connection to these special places. These stories will be featured on ONDA's blog and social media. Please reach out to Joanna at jjzhang@onda.org if you'd like to participate in this Streamside Stories project.



Owyhee River. Photo: Chad Case



John Day River. Photo: Greg Burke



Whychus Creek. Photo: ONDA archive

Story by Jeremy Austin, Policy Manager

Sagebrush Stronghold

Imagine paddling a canoe from Hart Mountain to Las Vegas. Twenty-thousand years ago it would have been possible with just a handful of overland portages.

The arid landscapes we know today held a connected series of inland seas, created and fed by melting Pleistocene glaciers. In fact, high up on the walls of many closed basins today you can still see a “bathtub ring,” the geomorphic shadow of ancient lakes. Such a ring exists on Poker Jim Ridge at Hart Mountain.

Where lakes have all but disappeared, they have been replaced with salt desert scrub, sagebrush, perennial grasslands, and rich wetlands like those of the Warner Valley. Together, these communities are part of one of the most spectacular and vast ecosystems on the entire planet — the Sagebrush Sea.

Stretching from Oregon to the Dakotas, the Sagebrush Sea is home to some of the most iconic and recognizable wildlife in the West, including pronghorn, sage-grouse, golden eagle, coyote and rattlesnake. Prior to the 1800s, sagebrush covered more than 296 million acres of North America, providing food, water and shelter for an astounding diversity of life. Today, roughly half of those acres remain, and the scale of habitat loss has made sagebrush steppe one of the most threatened ecosystems in North America.

Fortunately, strongholds still exist. The Greater Hart-Sheldon Region in southern Oregon and northern Nevada encompasses some of the most intact and important sagebrush plant communities left on earth.



Stretching between southern Oregon and northern Nevada, the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region offers some of the most important sagebrush communities left on earth. *Photo: Jim Davis*

CONSERVING WILD LANDS

Anchored by two of the largest wildlife refuges in the United States, Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge and Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge, the region supports one of the longest and largest pronghorn migrations in North America, a migratory pathway that has been the focus of more than a century of landscape-scale conservation efforts.

In 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognized the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region as one of just six sagebrush strongholds remaining, areas found to possess the native habitats necessary to support the long-term survival of the Greater Sage-grouse. Within Oregon, the region is often referred to as the “crown jewel” of sage-grouse habitat, and supports more than a quarter of the states remaining birds.

The importance of the region stretches far beyond its borders. Saline playa lakes – salty bodies of water that lie in the footprints of the Pleistocene giants – play an outsized role in the survival of migratory birds as they make their way along the Pacific Flyway. Without these important stopovers, tens of thousands of birds would not be able to complete some of Mother Nature’s most epic migrations.

ONDA’s Commitment

Since the early 1990s, ONDA has sought to establish a consistent conservation framework for the important wildlife habitats both inside and outside of the Hart Mountain and Sheldon wildlife refuge boundaries. In 1998, ONDA led a group of 23 conservation and wildlife organizations to nominate 1.1 million acres of Bureau of Land Management lands surrounding the refuges as the Pronghorn Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Since then, numerous other conservation proposals have been considered, proposed, and analyzed, all aimed at preserving and protecting the region and its incredible wildlife.

There is a long history of stewardship and restoration here too. In the early 1990s, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that livestock grazing was not compatible with refuge management goals and livestock were removed from both Hart Mountain and Sheldon refuges. ONDA began to coordinate volunteers to rehabilitate important wildlife habitat, remove obsolete barbed wire fence, and to research the response of native plants and animals to livestock removal.

At Hart Mountain, ONDA and partners rolled up nearly 300 miles of barbed wire fence, a project that took the better part of two decades to complete. Similar efforts are still underway at the Sheldon refuge, where Friends of Nevada Wilderness has led the



ONDA volunteers celebrate fence removal success on the High Lakes plateau, knowing that pronghorn, sage-grouse and other wildlife can now move through this area safely. *Photo: Jeremy Austin*

charge on removing 330 miles of fence. More recently, ONDA has been developing plans to restore important springs and riparian corridors on the lands between the refuges, areas that are essential to the survival and migration of regional wildlife.

The Foresight to Act

In the coming months, important federal planning processes will make decisions that directly affect the region’s nationally recognized wildlife habitats. These once-in-a-generation opportunities will shape the management of public lands in the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region for the next two decades. With the ongoing national conversation surrounding both the climate and biodiversity crises, it’s now more important than ever that we conserve and protect the very values that make this nation’s fragile and irreplaceable public lands an important resource for current and future generations.

Few places in North America still retain healthy sagebrush plant communities at a landscape scale. Oil and gas drilling, interstate highways, commodity production, and development pressures have created near impenetrable barriers for wildlife in other places within the Sagebrush Sea. In the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region, pressures exist, yet wildlife still roam free.

While inland seas no longer connect the vast landscapes of the Greater Hart-Sheldon, native plant communities do. The importance of that connection echoes through the basins and rimrock, across the playas and wide open expanses of sagebrush, and into the very fabric of the life that calls this place home. We must have the foresight to act and preserve one of the last strongholds of the Sagebrush Sea. ♦

Wildlife of the Land Between

It’s no surprise that Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge and Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge harbor strong populations of wildlife. That is, after all, exactly what they are designed to do.

You may not know that the land and water between these two refuges also provides critical habitat for many birds, fish and mammals. Some are seasonal visitors passing through, while others are year-round residents.

Here are five of the 300-plus vertebrate species that depend on the Land Between.



The Great Basin collared lizard is endemic to the western United States. *Photo: Devlin Holloway*



One of the great spectacles of the high desert happens when thousands of migratory birds, including sandhill cranes, fill the skies over the land between each year while traversing the Pacific Flyway. Their arrival in this area is heralded as one of the first signs of spring. *Photo: Dan Streiffert*



Greater sage-grouse rely entirely on sagebrush leaves during the winter. *Photo: Tom Koerner, USFWS*



Pika generally stick to high alpine talus and other cool microclimates, but a rare low elevation population lives in the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region. *Photo: Neal Herbert*



Pronghorn can flourish in southeastern Oregon’s rolling sagebrush hills because they do not rely on tall vegetation for hiding cover. Instead, they count on their eyesight and speed to evade predators. *Photo: Greg Burke*



GREATER HART-SHELDON: SAGEBRUSH STRONGHOLD

Visit <https://bit.ly/sagebrush-story-map> to take an interactive digital journey through this region.



Photo: Nick Perla

Species Spotlight: Golden Currant

By Elizabeth MacLagan, ONDA Volunteer

Golden Currant | pokopisa | *Ribes aureum* Pursh

Widespread along streams and floodplains east of the Cascades, golden currant has a far flung history which stretches back to fossils in John Day country as early as 37 million years ago. This shrub thrives in the western United States where it is native, and it is also found further east and even in Europe as a popular cultivar and wild escapee.

For Northern Paiute people, the plant is known as pokopisa. Ribes is an Arabian word meaning rhubarb, aureum is Latin for “golden,” and Pursh identifies the German-born immigrant botanist who examined the plant hoard collected by the Lewis and Clark expedition and gave the plant its botanical name.

A traditional food of the Paiute people, one of the old seasonal golden currant gathering grounds was along the bank of the Silvies River east of Burns. The berries are still eaten fresh or dried. The shrub also supports the life of many animal species including songbirds, chipmunks, and ground squirrels.

Easily transplanted and lacking a central trunk, golden currant rhizomes hug the soil and allow the plant to spread by suckering. These qualities make it an ONDA favorite for stream habitat restoration. One-hundred percent of the plants that ONDA volunteers added along the South Fork Crooked River survived the otherwise devastating flood of 2017, reports ONDA’s Riparian Restoration Coordinator Jefferson Jacobs.

This shrub, which can reach up to 10 feet tall, has many upright branches, three to five lobed leaves, and orange to burgundy berries. Unlike its cousin the gooseberry, golden currant lacks spines. If you spot this shrub in spring bloom, be sure to lean in to enjoy the sweet, clove-like fragrance of its golden trumpet flowers.♦

Three More Scientists Join Board and Staff



Monica Tomosy brings three decades of leadership experience working for federal agencies — the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Geological Survey, and Forest Service — to ONDA’s board. Along with being a seasoned manager of human, scientific and logistical resources, she is also an experienced biologist. Monica has served as the Chief of the Bird Banding Laboratory, worked on Endangered Species Act listing and critical habitat determinations and policies, and guided natural resource research and conservation programs, projects, and partnerships. She holds a graduate degree in Resource Ecology from the University of Michigan.



Growing up in Wyoming and Utah, **Natasha Bellis** gained an early appreciation for wild and open spaces. Roaming southern Utah’s Canyonlands inspired her to pursue a career in environmental studies; she has spent the past 20 years working to conserve and protect natural resources. Currently, Natasha is a Program Manager with the Deschutes River Conservancy. Natasha holds a masters of science in environmental studies from the University of Montana and a JD from Lewis and Clark Law School with a certificate in Environmental and Natural Resource Law. As a former law clerk with ONDA, Natasha is excited to return to the organization as a board member.

As ONDA’s Conservation Fellow, **Joanna Zhang** will be engaging with ONDA’s supporters to advocate for the protection of the Owyhee Canyonlands and other wild desert lands and waters.



Growing up in Missouri, Joanna explored the forests and trails around her hometown. She fell in love with the outdoors while living in Peru before college. She studied ecology and evolutionary biology at Princeton University, where her senior thesis focused on land management and livestock-wildlife conflicts in Kenya. Just prior to joining ONDA, Joanna was in Spain on a Fulbright grant, studying the naturalization of almonds in the Iberian Peninsula.

To read their full bios and meet the rest of ONDA’s staff and board, visit the About Us tab on onda.org.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

MEET NATE WILSON-TRAISMAN

STAYING CONNECTED TO WILD PLACES

by Caelin Weiss, Development Coordinator



Nate Wilson-Traisman’s connection to Oregon’s high desert dates back to childhood trips and remains strong to this day.

“I remember visiting the Painted Hills as an 11-year-old, and being in awe of the dramatic colors and ancient fossils. As an adult, I’ve come to love this region for so many reasons: the way the John Day river carves through the rugged landscape, the afternoon light on the Painted Hills, the expansive view from atop Sutton Mountain. Mostly, I appreciate the beauty and the history of the place... when I’m there, I feel more connected to my own sense of belonging in space and time.”

His new favorite memory of Oregon’s high desert is watching a massive thunderstorm roll through the Painted Hills in May 2020.

“The colors of the hills were more pronounced than I’d ever seen them. It was my first time leaving Portland since the start of the pandemic, so the trip itself felt especially significant. It’s a memory I’ll always treasure.”

It’s Nate’s professional opinion as a therapist that wild places play a pivotal role in our individual and community healing by reinforcing our connectedness to a larger ecosystem. As he explained, “I believe connectedness, or a sense of oneness with our natural environment, helps breed compassion and empathy — both crucial aspects of health and healing!”

As an ONDA member, Nate contributes to the protection of wild desert places and their ability to heal, amaze and inspire.

Photo: Nate Wilson-Traisman

SPRING+SUMMER EVENTS

To register for any of these events, visit onda.org/events.

Stories from the Sagebrush Sea
Tuesday, April 20 | 5:30 p.m.

final event in ONDA's 2021 High Desert Speaker Series

Take a virtual journey through the high desert with Ed Jahn, executive producer of "Oregon Field Guide," OPB's flagship television series dedicated to exploring Oregon's wonders. He will take you on a behind-the-scenes tour of the captivating stories his crew has captured through years of crawling every backroad in Oregon with an eye toward the beautiful, the fascinating and the wonderful.

Behind the Lens
Wednesday, May 5 | 6 p.m.

Do you appreciate the beauty of Oregon's high desert and wish your photos matched up with what you experience? Get tips and tricks for shooting in the desert from few of the photographers who make ONDA's Wild Desert Calendar so damn beautiful each year. You'll see how you can contribute to the 2022 edition of the calendar and come away with more desert places for your bucket list.

Wild Waters Ahead
Monday, May 17 | 5:30 p.m.

ONDA community members showed how much they value desert rivers, streams and creeks by nominating countless waterways for protection. Now, more than 1,000 miles of these waters could be protected under the River Democracy Act. Join us to learn more about the rushing rivers, hidden hot springs, and spectacular streams across Oregon's high desert and how you can take the next step in advocating for their conservation!

High Desert Wonders
Tuesday, June 8 | 6 p.m.

Whether you're a new member of the desert conservation community, or want to be introduced to the vast beauty of Central and eastern Oregon, you're invited to join us to get to know the High Desert Wonders. Our team will share stunning imagery, tips to plan your next visit, and provide ways to advocate for this special landscape.

One of a kind Owyhee
Wednesday, June 16 | 5 p.m.

Get to know the unique landscape of the Owyhee Canyonlands, from the rolling rapids to the sagebrush plateau. You'll travel back in time to follow the long history of how the Owyhee came to be and learn more about how you can be involved in the future of conservation across this vast region.

YOUR DESERT PHOTOS MATTER

You can introduce a new generation of conservation advocates to Oregon's high desert by sharing your desert images with ONDA for our calendar, newsletter and other publications.

Our 2022 Wild Desert Calendar submission process is open now through June 12, 2021.

We're particularly looking for shots from wilderness study areas, winter scenes, desert plants and animals, and people recreating responsibly.

Submit at onda.org/submit-your-photos.

Hedgehog cactus. Photo: Sage Brown



Soak It All in at Succor Creek

by Beth Macinko, Stewardship Coordinator



Photo: Alan Majchrowicz

TRIP DETAILS

Drive time: 5.5 hours each way from Bend

Best Season: late spring/early summer, fall

Spring highlights: wildflowers, bird and wildlife watching

Visit the rugged canyonlands of Succor Creek State Natural Area in late spring to experience many natural wonders of Oregon's desert: stunning canyon scenery, interesting geologic features and robust wildlife and plant communities. Succor Creek has a rich cultural history as well. It is among traditional lands of the Northern Paiute, Shoshone and Bannock people, who have lived in relation to this area for over 10,000 years. Settlers homesteaded here in the early 1900s.

Looking for one more good reason to head to Succor Creek? You'll experience firsthand a place where ONDA is operating two high-profile conservation campaigns. A 13.7-mile stretch of Succor Creek is proposed for Wild and Scenic River designation in the River Democracy Act, an initiative to preserve the outstanding natural values of 1,000 miles of desert rivers in Oregon. Succor Creek also lies near the heart of the Owyhee Canyonlands where ONDA's community of advocates is actively campaigning to conserve over 1.1 million acres of wild public lands.

From the Succor Creek Campground, there are many opportunities for curiosity-driven cross-country exploration. Hike up or downstream to check out the power of the spring creek flows. Study the stratigraphic sequence of geologic formations written on the canyon walls. Search for thundereggs — rocks that are similar to a filled geode. Spot caves dispersed along the canyon as you wander through an abundance of rhyolite and basalt features. Reflect on millennia of human activity in this landscape. Watch for the spring wildflowers, birds, and wildlife sustained by the perennial waterway. When you're ready for a break, find a sun-soaked spot to kick your feet up and relax to the sounds of the free-flowing creek and admire the majestic canyon, knowing that your support of ONDA will keep this quiet, beautiful spot natural and wild for years and years to come.

Succor Creek State Natural Area has 18 primitive campsites and no potable water source. Watch out for poison ivy along the creekside.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS FROM BEND, OR: Take US-20 east 244 miles to Vale, Oregon. Continue onto US-26 East for 12 miles, then turn right to continue on US-26 East/US-20 East for 7.5 miles to the town of Nyssa. In Nyssa, turn right onto OR-201 and stay on OR-201 for 20.5 miles. Turn right onto Succor Creek Road. You will reach Succor Creek Natural Area in 15 miles. Be cautious about visiting after wet weather.

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



50 SW Bond Street, Suite 4
Bend, OR 97702

Protecting, defending and
restoring Oregon's high desert
since 1987.

Learn more at **onda.org**.

A photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there are several tall, thin, red flowers with many small blossoms. The ground is sandy and covered with some dry grass and small shrubs. In the background, there is a large, rounded, brown hill under a clear blue sky. The text "GOT GRIT?" is overlaid on the image. "GOT" is in large, blue, sans-serif capital letters. "GRIT?" is in large, yellow, sans-serif capital letters with a black outline. The text is positioned on the left side of the image, with "GOT" above "GRIT?".

GOT GRIT?

PUBLIC LANDS CONSERVATION TAKES
GRIT AND DETERMINATION.

Adding ONDA to your will or estate plan is much easier.
Your simple action today fuels conservation for the long haul.

Allison@ONDA.org | 541.330.2638 x315 | [ONDA.org/legacy](https://onda.org/legacy)

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