



OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

DESERT RAMBLINGS

FALL + WINTER 2021 | VOLUME 34 • NO.2

RIBBONS OF LIFE

Preserving the water that all the desert's
plants and animals depend upon



STAFF

Jeremy Austin, Policy Manager
Barksdale Brown, Finance and Operations Director
Allison Crotty, Development Director
Karina Diaz, Development Coordinator
Gena Goodman-Campbell, Program Director
Corinne Handelman, Engagement Manager
Ryan Houston, Executive Director
Jefferson Jacobs, Riparian Restoration Coordinator
Mac Lacy, Senior Attorney
Beth Macinko, Stewardship Coordinator
Craig Miller, GIS Specialist
Renee Patrick, Program Coordinator
Mark Salvo, Program Director
Hana Sant, Membership and Engagement Coordinator
Lace Thornberg, Communications Manager
Anne White, Wilderness Technician
Joanna Zhang, Conservation Fellow

ADVISORY STAFF

Bill Marlett, Senior Conservation Advisor

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gilly Lyons, President
Bob DenOuden, Vice President
Jim Stratton, Treasurer
Alan Hickenbottom, Secretary

Natasha Bellis, Elisa Cheng, Erin Gaines, Helen Harbin,
Ken Rait, Kirk Richardson, Monica Tomosy

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

www.onda.org

DESERT RAMBLINGS is published twice
annually (spring-summer and fall-winter)
by Oregon Natural Desert Association.



Backdrop: Pronghorn
Photo: Devlin Holloway

OVERHEARD

“After too long an absence, I just spent a week in Oregon’s Great Basin, and the smell of sagebrush was like Proust’s madeline.”

- Jim Dixon, @pdxoliveguy

IN THIS ISSUE

A LAKE ON THE BRINK

Saline lakes keep thousands of birds alive.
Can we keep Lake Abert a lake?
PAGE 4.

TOMORROW’S LEADERS

Tribal Stewards complete another
succesful season in the desert.
PAGE 6.

OREGON RIVERS MAKE A SPLASH

Senate hearings rarely go so smoothly.
PAGE 7.

IN SEARCH OF WATER

Every drop of water matters to desert
wildlife. Here’s how ONDA preserves it.
PAGE 8.

BIGHORN SHEEP

We almost lost these icons of the West.
PAGE 12.

READ MORE AT ONDA.ORG

OREGON RIVER READS

21 DAY HIKES ALONG THE OREGON
DESERT TRAIL

HOW-TO: PLAYA LIKE A PRO

Cover: John Day River Basin, near Sutton
Mountain.
Photo: Bob Wick

FROM THE OUTBACK



Photo: Greg Vaughn

Dear friend of Oregon’s desert,

There is a Greek proverb that aptly captures ONDA’s long-term conservation and restoration vision:
“A society grows great when people plant trees in whose shade they will never sit.”

Today’s investments, small victories and incremental progress grow over time to create an abundant future for Oregon’s high desert that will ultimately benefit all – urbanites and rural residents, newcomers and native Oregonians, young and old, and the many species that call the Sagebrush Sea their home.

You’ll read in this issue of Desert Ramblings about how your investments – in people, places, projects and campaigns – are bringing the positive, enduring, systemic changes that elevate conservation across Oregon’s high desert. Whether you are planting the trees that will bring shade to a desert stream in 2030, investing in young Indigenous leaders who will guide public lands management in 2035 or advocating for more innovative, science-based, holistic management plans that will take us through to 2040, your work today brings results tomorrow.

In the months ahead ONDA will continue pushing to protect more than one million acres of wilderness in the Owyhee Canyonlands, protect 1,000 miles of desert rivers and streams (and even a lake or two) as Wild and Scenic, and secure permanent protection for majestic Sutton Mountain in the heart of the John Day River Basin. And, all the while, we’ll be advocating for conservation-minded management across millions of acres of public lands.

The rich, magnificent landscapes that characterize the desert, including the stunning canyons of the Owyhee, vibrant geology of the John Day or stark grandeur of Steens Mountain, all rely on your unwavering support and commitment. Thank you for planting that tree, writing that letter, making that phone call and sending that extra gift.

Thank you for standing up for Oregon’s high desert, today, tomorrow and always.

For a wild desert,

Ryan Houston
Executive Director



A Lake on the Brink

A vanishing Lake Abert puts millennia-old migrations and cultural sites at risk. Can we act in time?

by Mac Lacy, *Senior Attorney*

Deep in southeastern Oregon’s sagebrush country, a lake three times the size of Manhattan is disappearing. Lake Abert is a saltwater lake — the largest in Oregon and one of only six such waters in the United States. Sitting at the base of the 2,500-foot Abert Rim escarpment, the ancient lake is a crucial stop for hundreds of thousands of birds along the Pacific Flyway every year.

But Lake Abert is vanishing before our eyes. In 2014, the lake dried up completely for the first time since the 1930s. Scientists believe upstream irrigation diversions and a decade-long drought, combined with the effects of a rapidly changing climate, are to blame. The lake’s main source is the Chewaucan River. Water rights in the Chewaucan are over-appropriated, and Lake Abert is “last in line” to receive water behind irrigators and a reservoir at the river’s end. Not enough water makes it to the lake to compensate for increased rates of evaporation.

With less water, the lake has become more saline, which is threatening to collapse the lake’s food chain. As cyanobacteria and algae are replaced by hypersaline-adapted microbes, invertebrates like brine shrimp and alkali flies also then disappear. These are the main food sources for the 80-plus species of migratory

water birds that visit the lake each year, like the saltwater-loving Wilson’s phalarope. More than a quarter of this bird’s global population relies upon Lake Abert.

In turn, opportunities for birdwatching and photography may disappear, as a once-unique brine shrimp fishery already has. There is also concern about cultural sites that line the shoreline. Native Americans have lived for thousands of years along what is recognized today as a National Register Archaeological District.

ONDA has prioritized conservation of this vital landscape. Lake Abert is surrounded by nearly 100,000 acres of recognized and proposed wilderness lands. The Bureau of Land Management recognized both the lake and the rim as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. There is pathway to a better future for Lake Abert. Protecting these areas, along with ensuring that enough water makes its way into the lake, may help mitigate the effects of climate change.

If we act soon, this case of a disappearing lake could instead become a case study for saving a lake — and a model for using a multidimensional approach to tackle the problem of scarce resources exacerbated by a warming climate. ♦



Lake Abert is drying up as excessive irrigation withdrawals are exacerbated by a rapidly changing climate. The average temperature for Lake County has increased by at least 3.6°F since 1895, one of the highest increases anywhere in the United States. Ensuring more water reaches the lake will be essential in the years to come. *Photo: Craig Miller*



Tomorrow's Conservation Leaders

Another successful season for Tribal Stewards completed

by Beth Macinko, Stewardship Coordinator

If you happened to be hiking by High Lake in the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness in early July, you may have noticed a group along the lakeshore. That they were fishing would have been clear at first glance, but there was more to this scene than would meet the eye. This group of Indigenous teens and young adults was tapping into ancestral fishing traditions, and they were casting for non-native brook trout to assist with invasive fish removal efforts of the Burns Paiute Tribe and Malheur National Forest.

Tribal Stewards, run as a partnership between ONDA and Northwest Youth Corps, aims to connect regional Indigenous young adults with work experience in the conservation field while supporting the restoration of eastern Oregon wildlands. After a COVID-induced pause in 2020, ONDA was excited to support a new cohort of Tribal Stewards as they spent five weeks completing restoration and conservation projects across Oregon's desert.

This year the program brought members from several Pacific Northwest and Great Plains tribes together, with young adults affiliated with the Wasco, Yakama,

Umatilla, Chinook, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Klamath, Yurok, Siletz, Minicouju Lakota and Nez Perce nations participating.

These Tribal Stewards gained experience in fields they were already familiar with, like fisheries and range fence work, and were introduced to new fields, like paleontology and wildlife biology. And, over the course of the program, they worked with more than 20 conservation professionals. This exposure to the wide array of conservation work should help these crew members see career paths they may be interested in exploring, and, with more Indigenous leaders entering the field, we can look forward to a more just, equitable and effective conservation community in the future.

All of us at ONDA are looking forward to seeing where these young stewards head next in life. ♦

Find more about Tribal Stewards on ONDA's blog at [ONDA.org](https://onda.org). To learn more about each participant, read "Meet the 2021 Tribal Stewards Crew." For a recap of the restoration projects they contributed to, read "A Diverse and Magical Place."



Oregon Rivers Make a Splashy Senate Appearance

by Mark Salvo, Program Director

Congressional hearings barely register for most of us otherwise busy with our daily responsibilities and just hoping to squeeze in a weekend trip to the high desert. And, admittedly, they can be rather uneventful affairs that even Congressional decision-makers will skip for other, higher priorities.

So, I appreciate that you might not have heard about the subcommittee hearing on the River Democracy Act held on June 23. But, let me tell you, I've watched many, many congressional hearings and never have I seen one go so well for a bill.

Senator Wyden and Merkley's rivers legislation had a spectacular day in the U.S. Senate.

Recall that the River Democracy Act proposes to designate thousands of miles of new Wild and Scenic Rivers across Oregon, including more than 1,000 miles of desert rivers, streams and creeks. This unprecedented legislation – the product of more than 15,000 nominations from river-crazed Oregonians – was introduced in February by two senators who value the importance of healthy, free-flowing waters to our environment and our economy.

Support for the River Democracy Act runs broad and deep, and that was palpable as the Senate Subcom-

mittee on National Parks took up the legislation that Wednesday morning in June.

Senator Wyden made a special appearance to advocate for his bill. An eastern Oregon rancher delivered pitch-perfect testimony on the importance of protecting Oregon's waterways as Wild and Scenic Rivers. The hearing record swelled with letters of support from business owners, rural residents, conservationists, veterans, sportsmen, students and community leaders. Fifty-one breweries from across the state thanked Senators Wyden and Merkley for the River Democracy Act and commended the community-driven process used to craft the bill. Finally, even federal agencies that would be responsible for managing these new Wild and Scenic Rivers testified in support of the legislation.

Of course, there are processes and challenges to come – "mark-up" and committee votes and floor votes – and the House of Representatives. Certain industries also stand opposed to the River Democracy Act. We'll all need to continue working hard to see this legislation through. But if this summer's hearing is any indication, thousands of miles of Oregon rivers could soon be wild and scenic forever. ♦

In Search of Water

Oregon's high desert doesn't have to be so dry

For the wildlife of Oregon's sagebrush steppe, every day brings a search for cold, clean water. Redband trout seek theirs under the shade of willow thickets along the river's edge. Great blue herons look along the fringes of marsh and wetlands. Whether found in a wide, quiet river or a babbling creek, every drop of desert water supports life. Even a small snowmelt-fed pool that quenches a pronghorn's thirst keeps that animal going for another day.

Story by ONDA staff. Photo: Alan Majchrowicz

Unfortunately, current management doesn't always give these precious water sources the respect and care they deserve. Our state and federal policies haven't always treated water as scarce, or recognized how our actions in one place can impact everything else downstream, and for a very long time. The Hudson Bay Company extirpated beaver from much of Oregon back in the 1820s and we are still grappling with the consequences of that. Overgrazing dating back nearly 200 years, and ongoing today, have left streambanks bare. Oregon Department of Environmental Quality has found that 44% of the rivers and streams across all of Oregon are in need of help.

Top that off with an escalating climate crisis, population growth, new and shifting resource extraction demands and land uses — and you can see how we've ended up where we are today, with widespread drought, and water far scarcer than it needs to be.

We can't go back in time, but we can take control of where we go from here. Do we throw our hands in the air, throw in the towel, or, throw our whole selves into restoration?

A Difference to Depend On

All of ONDA's restoration work has one overarching aim: to restore the natural ecological processes that sustain healthy waterways and watersheds.

Thanks to the steadfast support of our members, we've built a successful track record by pairing our carefully targeted, hands-on restoration work with strong advocacy for public lands and waters.

Sometimes this work is easy to observe.

Take part in a stream restoration project and you can watch the water level rise by the end of the work day. Spend a day planting willows along a stream and you'll hear more songbirds trilling at sunset.

No less gratifying, but somewhat harder to observe is the progress made in the halls of Congress or the windowless conference rooms of an agency office and over the course of many, many meetings as we bring your conservation agenda into state and federal management planning.

Admittedly, we prefer being out in muddy work boots, but we're more than willing to put on button-up shirts and roll up our sleeves to preserve desert water. ONDA is actively involved in numerous state and federal planning projects, and we are a member of Oregon's Beaver Working Group, where we are helping devise a suite of management recommendations that will maximize beavers' benefits on a much broader landscape.

This dry work rarely makes headlines, but it, too, is key to the health of streams throughout the high desert.

You can count on the ONDA community to pull out all the stops to keep desert waters flowing. Our members call their elected officials — often! Our staff weigh in on environmental assessments and management plans, with our legal team at the ready to ensure adherence to existing law, protections, designations and plans. We collaborate with watershed managers, landowners and other non-profit groups to find creative solutions to landscape-wide issues. And, we are always striving to see our restoration successes last — well beyond the lifespan of a beaver, a person, or even a tree — by protecting the lands and waters where we work. Right now, ONDA is committed to supporting the passage of the River Democracy Act, a bill that will protect the most essential streams and rivers in the desert. Long after that protection is secured, we'll be there to ensure these waterways are well managed in perpetuity.

Successful restoration takes time and dedication, but every ounce of effort feels worthwhile when you see desert streams falling back into rhythm. Pine Creek had straight-cut banks when ONDA began its rehabilitation work there and the land along it was hard, rocky and inhospitable. Walk toward Pine Creek now, and you can feel the ground beneath your feet squish.



Photo: Bob Petit

With hundreds of volunteers and thousands of supporters all pitching in year after year, ONDA has been able to measurably improve streamside habitat across the high desert, and to do so in a way that will endure for generations. As this work brings water back into the landscape, it gives desert wildlife — all the coyotes and golden eagles, the mule deer and long-billed dowitchers and all the rest— a greater chance of finding the water they seek. It gives them a better shot at survival.

Next time you hear a western meadowlark sing, just imagine it is saying thank you. ♦

Taking a Holistic Approach to Preserve Desert Water

For any river, creek or spring in eastern Oregon, you can imagine that ONDA is implementing a variety of intertwined strategies to support the health of that waterway over the long-term.

HAY CREEK | JOHN DAY RIVER BASIN

Severe floods and a history of heavy use had left Hay Creek, a key tributary of the John Day River, in bad shape – stick straight and essentially devoid of riparian habitat. With an end goal of recovering this area to the point that it can sustain beaver colonies, we have built dozens of beaver dam analogs, protected hardwood saplings and planted the native species missing from the plant community along this creek.

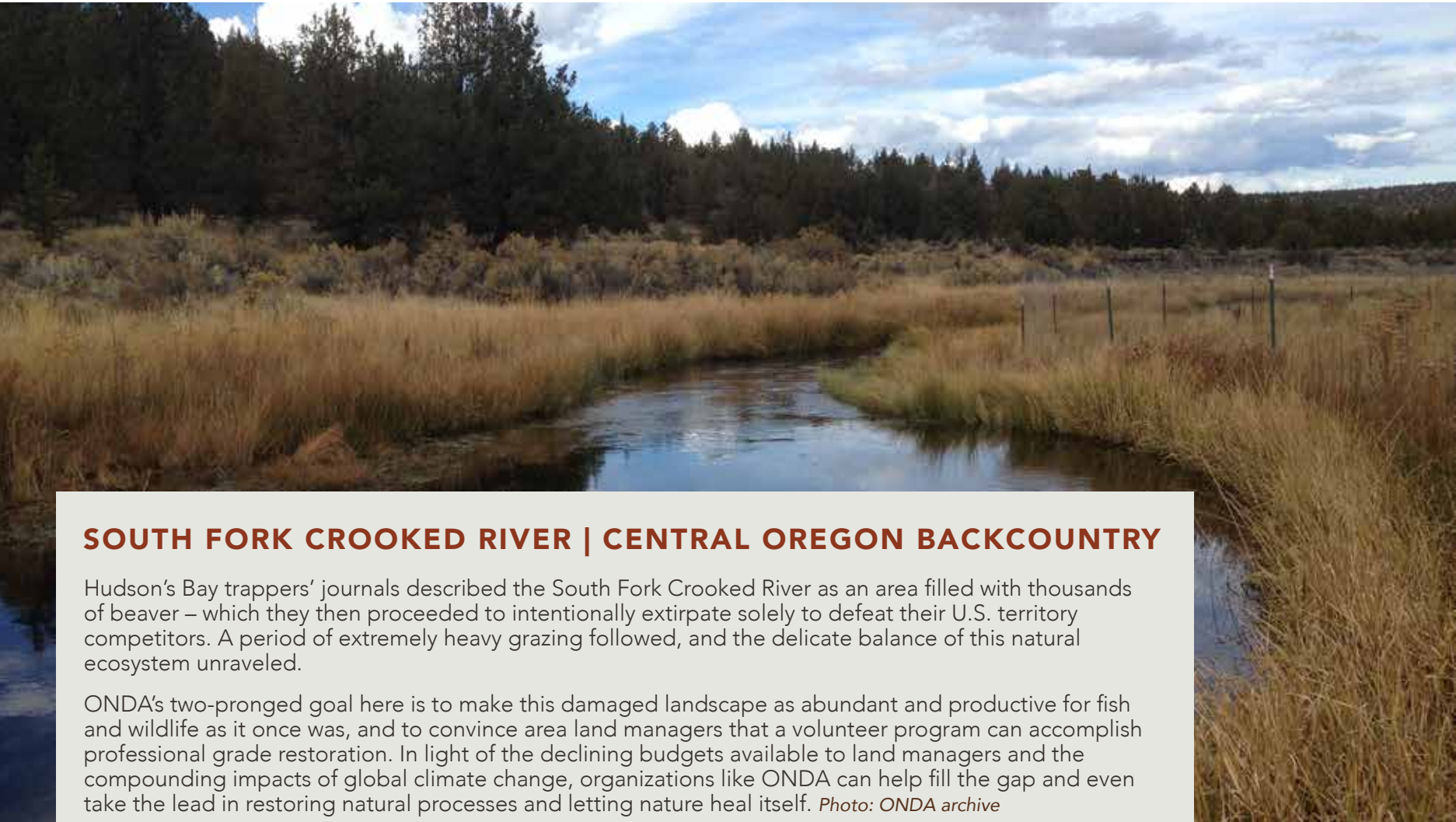
*Volunteers have put in thousands of native plants along Hay Creek.
Photo: Corinne Handelman*



SUMMIT CREEK | MALHEUR NATIONAL FOREST

Summit Creek and other creeks that serve as headwaters for the Malheur River offer essential bull trout habitat, but decades of overuse had put this endangered fish on the brink of blinking out. Decades of focused advocacy and legal intervention relieved the use pressure, and legions of volunteers have stepped up to build fencing to protect the most sensitive streamside habitat. Today, these important creeks and rivers are being considered for additional protection under the River Democracy Act.

*A late-fall-turned-early-winter fence building trip.
Photo: Sage Brown*



SOUTH FORK CROOKED RIVER | CENTRAL OREGON BACKCOUNTRY

Hudson’s Bay trappers’ journals described the South Fork Crooked River as an area filled with thousands of beaver – which they then proceeded to intentionally extirpate solely to defeat their U.S. territory competitors. A period of extremely heavy grazing followed, and the delicate balance of this natural ecosystem unraveled.

ONDA’s two-pronged goal here is to make this damaged landscape as abundant and productive for fish and wildlife as it once was, and to convince area land managers that a volunteer program can accomplish professional grade restoration. In light of the declining budgets available to land managers and the compounding impacts of global climate change, organizations like ONDA can help fill the gap and even take the lead in restoring natural processes and letting nature heal itself. *Photo: ONDA archive*





Bighorn rams sport huge horns weighing about as much as all the rest of their bones; ewes also have horns, which are smaller and less curled. ONDA's work to conserve the most ecologically important landscapes in Oregon's desert includes some of the most important bighorn sheep habitat in the state.

Photo: Shannon Phifer

Species Spotlight: Bighorn Sheep

By Scott Bowler, *ONDA Volunteer*

You can learn more about bighorn's evolution over the last half a million years or so and some of their unique adaptations on ONDA's blog.

Bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) once ranged far and wide all across the West, in great numbers and a variety of habitats. Their large population and distribution was brought down by unregulated hunting, habitat loss and destruction from grazing and development, and diseases contracted from domestic animals. By 1900 or so, there were likely no bighorn left in Oregon.

Today, Oregon is once again home to the two subspecies – the Rocky Mountain bighorn (*Ovis canadensis* ssp. *canadensis*) and the California bighorn (*O. c. californiana*) – that historically lived here. There are probably fewer than 5,000 statewide, and all are descended from animals reintroduced starting in the 1950s. As they are spread around in some of our wildest and most remote areas, seeing a bighorn herd is a rare treat.

The California bighorn is the subspecies you'll see in Oregon's drier areas. There are 3,500 to 4,000 individuals in Oregon, distributed in roughly 30 herds. These herds will migrate up and down in elevation as seasons, vegetation and water availability dictate, but typically don't move as far horizontally across the landscape as, say, a herd of elk might travel. Reliable places to see bighorn in the high desert are on Steens Mountain and Hart Mountain, above and along the John Day River, on the east side of Lake Owyhee around Leslie Gulch, and in the Pueblo Mountains. You can, however, encounter them in large, steep rocky areas throughout the Sagebrush Sea.

Our work to protect places like the Greater Hart-Sheldon, Owyhee Canyonlands and John Day River Basin can improve the outlook for these icons of the West. ♦

Let's Send Low-Flying Jets Back to Base

ONDA members are accustomed to massive and controversial planning processes for Oregon's high desert. *Sage-grouse conservation. Wilderness inventories. Bureau of Land Management resource planning.* The list goes on.

Now comes another huge and imposing planning process, this one proffered by the U.S. Air Force. In July, the Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho issued a drastic new plan to conduct more intense fighter jet training over an enormous swath of southeastern Oregon, including the Owyhee Canyonlands. Their proposal would allow for more fighter jets to fly faster (supersonic!) and lower (100 feet!) over millions of acres of Oregon's outback, to the detriment of wildlife, wilderness and local communities. In addition to the noise and disturbance (low-flying jets have blown out the windows in southeastern Oregon homes), the Air Force also uses flares in training exercises, a practice that has ignited desert wildfires in the past. Fortunately, even the most powerful military in the world must comply with federal planning and conservation requirements. ONDA is working diligently to ensure that the Pentagon accounts for sage-grouse, bighorn sheep, wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers in its proposal.

Please be on the lookout for how you can add your voice to this latest, contentious new process. ♦

Farewell, Corie and Caelin! Welcome, Karina!

This summer held a few transitions for the ONDA staff family. Corie Harlan, who'd worn number of hats during her nine-year tenure at ONDA, including campaign manager leading the charge of Owyhee protection efforts, has taken on a new role at Central Oregon LandWatch. Caelin Weiss, who coordinated events, volunteers and membership drives, has moved to the Bay Area and is now working for AmazonWatch. We wish them both all the best in their efforts to ensure sustainable development in the U.S. and abroad.

In Septemeber, we welcomed Karina Diaz as our development coordinator. Karina grew up in St. Paul, a small town in western Oregon, where she was always fascinated with the high desert. Her desert love has grown even stronger now that she lives in Sisters. Karina holds a bachelor's degree in marketing and Spanish from the University of Portland. She places a high value on community and brings background in non-profits and event planning to ONDA. ♦



Photo: Mark Darnell

MEET JOHN BAUMAN & JENNY ZIMMERMAN

THESE RETIREES FOUND JUST WHAT THEY WERE LOOKING FOR

by Hana Sant, *Membership and Engagement Coordinator*

Retiring to Central Oregon felt like a perfect fit for John Bauman and Jenny Zimmerman. They would have a diversity of landscapes within a quick drive and, best of all, easy access to the high desert.

As soon as they became Central Oregonians, John and Jenny set out to find an environmental nonprofit organization they could connect with.

"We soon found a strong community connection with ONDA — it's a group of people really doing the work," John said, adding, "There are so many challenges to conservation and ONDA is focused on each aspect of the work of protecting these places, from holding agencies accountable to protecting places like the Owyhee Canyonlands and the Hart-Sheldon wildlife corridor."

Steens Mountain is their desert destination of choice. "It's one place we keep going back to, and we've even volunteered on trail maintenance trips there," says Jenny.

As ONDA members and legacy donors, John and Jenny fuel vital conservation work and ensure Oregon's high desert lands and waters are wild, vibrant, and brimming with opportunities to inspire. ♦

To be alerted when the high desert needs you to speak up, just text the word ONDA to 52886, or visit our Take Action page at [ONDA.org](https://onda.org).

FALL+WINTER EVENTS

To learn more or register for any of these events, visit [ONDA.org/events](https://onda.org/events).

Wild & Scenic Film Festival
Friday, Oct. 1 | 6 p.m.

The 2021 Wild & Scenic Film Festival will be a virtual, streamed-in-HD to your home event. We'll be sharing a collection of films that speak to environmental concerns and celebrate our planet. Don't miss this year's awe-inspiring lineup!

Minimizing Risk, Maximizing Reward: How to Recreate Safely
Thursday, Oct. 14 | 5 p.m.

Would you know what to do if you were injured while exploring the desert? Join us for insights into assessing your risk and the decision-making process during an incident, plus tips to keep you safe on your next adventure.

Envisioning Wild
Nov. 10, 2021 - Jan. 7, 2022

ONDA's 2022 Wild Desert Calendar virtual exhibit, "Envisioning Wild," features the wild, wonderous and inspiring images of Oregon's high desert that are featured in the 2022 calendar. Enjoy behind-the-scenes stories and a truly unique collection of wilderness photography.

Seasons of the Desert
Tuesday, Nov. 16 | 5:30 p.m.

Each season in Oregon's high desert, a new world unfolds. From spring blooms to autumn's migrating birds, this virtual presentation will teach you a bit about what you'll find year-round in the desert and provide travel suggestions to appreciate seasonal wonders.



YOUR OPINION MATTERS

As an ONDA member, your support propels critical high desert conservation initiatives. Thank you!

By taking less than 10 minutes to provide your feedback on your connection to ONDA and the programs you enjoy, you'll help us to be even more focused and effective in our efforts. Share your thoughts with us before October 8 at bit.ly/2021ONDASurvey

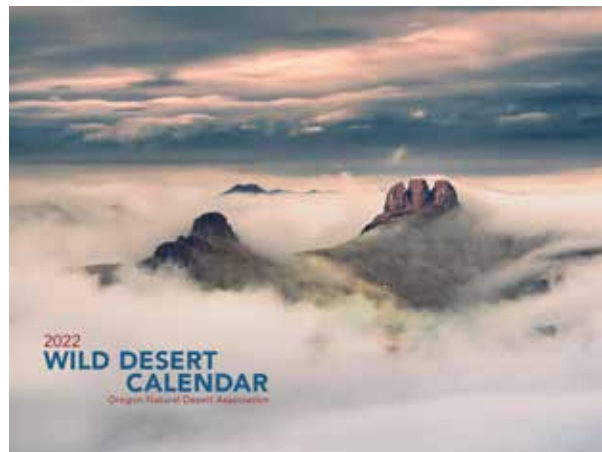
Photo: Tara Lemezis

WILD DESERT CALENDAR 2022

ONDA's Wild Desert Calendar shares awe-inspiring photography of Oregon's desert lands, waters and wildlife, as well as evocative prose and phenological observations.

Members, watch your mailbox for the 2022 edition in November. For gift-giving, you can find the calendar for sale across Oregon wherever books and outdoor gear are sold, or order through [ONDA.org](https://onda.org).

Photo: Chase Jablonski



An Autumn Pilgrimage to Malheur

by Craig Miller, GIS Specialist & Jeremy Austin, Policy Manager



Photo: Dan Streiffert

Visit the marshlands of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in fall to experience the profusion of birds and other wildlife that depend on this extraordinary desert ecosystem.

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is an 188,000-acre wetland oasis, shaped roughly like the letter "T." Situated south of Burns, Ore., in the Harney Basin, the refuge's lakes, wetlands, meadows and riparian areas are fed primarily from snowmelt originating in Steens Mountain to the southeast, as well as the Silvies River watershed to the north. Thoroughly exploring the refuge could take several days / weeks / a lifetime, but you can sample a variety of habitats by following the refuge's 42-mile self-guided auto tour that travels south from the refuge headquarters to the historic P Ranch, through the scenic Blitzen Valley. That tour takes at least two hours to complete, unless, of course, you get sidetracked by multitudes of birds.

In drought years, wildlife will be most abundant between Buena Vista and P-Ranch. A side jaunt to Krumbo Reservoir can be a rewarding adventure and a stop at the Friends of Malheur store at the Wildlife Refuge headquarters is well worth your time to learn about what species are being seen and other local news. Wherever you end up exploring, birds are most numerous during September when fall migration is at its peak. Visitors at this time of year may be lucky enough to see any of the most famous refuge visitors, including sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, white-faced ibis, American white pelicans, great and snowy egrets, great horned owls, eared grebes, and a wide variety of warblers.

The Page Springs Campground, just south of the refuge, provides an excellent basecamp for visiting the refuge. Or, nearby lodging can be found in the town of Burns, at Crystal Crane Hot Springs, at the Frenchglen Hotel, and at The Malheur Field Station, which is conveniently located near the Refuge Headquarters. Note that, in contrast to BLM-managed lands, dispersed camping is not allowed on the refuge.

Given its importance to wildlife, ONDA has long been involved in policy and conservation activities on this refuge and played a leading role in helping shape the 2013 Comprehensive Conservation Plan which addresses various issues including invasive fish and weeds, livestock grazing and habitat protection. ONDA continues to be an active partner, assisting the refuge in a variety of habitat restoration and stewardship projects.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS: From Bend, Ore., take US-20 east 130 miles to Burns, Ore. Continue onto US-78 past Burns 1.7 miles, then turn south on 205. Continue south on 205 past the Narrows, then turn east on Sodhouse Lane to reach Headquarters in 6 miles.

To download the Blitzen Valley Auto Tour guide (developed by Alice Elshoff, one of ONDA's founding members), visit the Visitor's Guide to the Steens Mountain Region on [ONDA.org](https://onda.org). To get involved in ONDA's stewardship efforts at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and across the desert, email monitoring@onda.org.



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 plants with bright red, spiky flowers. The ground is sandy and covered with sparse, dry vegetation. In the background, there is a large, rounded desert hill under a clear blue sky. The text "GOT GRIT?" is overlaid on the left side of the image. "GOT" is in large, blue, sans-serif capital letters, and "GRIT?" is in large, yellow, sans-serif capital letters with a slight shadow effect.

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)

Photo: © Michelle Patrick