

Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the
Oregon
Natural Desert
association

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Fall, 1993

FROM THE OUTBACK

by Bill Marlett



Rangeland Reform

'94 is the new grazing initiative from Interior Secretary Babbitt and BLM Director Baca. The reform package consists of a proposed grazing fee increase and proposed changes to how the land is managed and how the grazing program is administered. Reform '94 is the second try at reform this year. Earlier this year, when grazing fee increases were proposed as part of the President's budget reduction package, western senators thoroughly trounced it (both Democrats and Republicans). Having hit one brick wall, the administration is myopically side-stepping Congress by proposing this new reform package in a form that will not require Congressional approval. As we have recently seen, the tentacles of western senators have reached into this process and the proposed grazing fee increase has already been reduced.

Most agree, the grazing fee issue is a red herring. How ludicrous that by raising the grazing fee conservationists will somehow find it easier to accept the continued unraveling of the land. Because the grazing system is set up to maintain public lands ranchers, the real question is how much does our government want to support a way of life that is devastating to the land. Public land

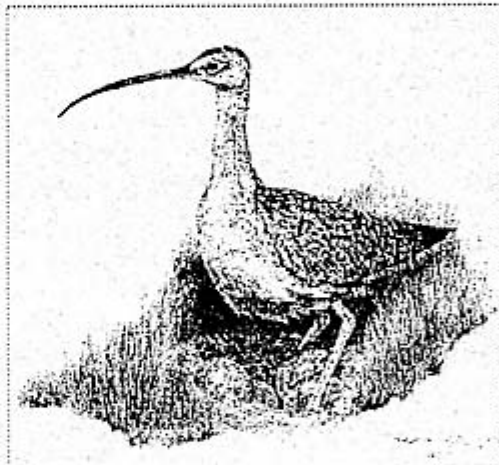
ranchers who are subsidized via a vis grazing fees is no different then the massive federal subsidies to the timber industry, water reclamation projects, or mining industry. Its all pork barrel on our public lands.

With western senators applying pressure on behalf of ranchers, the Administration now finds itself between a rock and a hard place on rangeland reform. President Clinton needs western Democratic Senators; western Senators need to placate western ranchers. The political balance in the Senate is precarious and the President is mindful of not alienating his democratic allies whom he needs desperately for his many other initiatives.

Conservationists have so far shown modest support for the proposed grazing reforms. The BLM and Forest Service have yet to put into practice ecological management on any piece of ground, so why, conservationists argue, should we waste our time on what many claim is little more than the agencies passing gas.

On the plus side, the Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed reforms will include a "no grazing" alternative to show the ecological and

financial benefits of total removal of livestock from public lands. While we all know cows will jump over the moon before federal agencies recommend this alternative, it fuels our position that public lands grazing must be phased out.



However, a no-grazing alternative alone is not a reason to support this reform. ONDA, like many conservation groups, is waiting for real change from the status quo. ONDA's most important issue is *suitability*. We want a decision that some areas should not be grazed, such as riparian areas, wilderness areas, and lands in the national park and national wildlife refuge systems, and a process to allow grazing to be removed from other lands that will have ecological or other significant values in the future.

President Clinton and Interior Secretary Babbitt know that significant reforms must be proposed in order for national and local conservation groups to move this issue to their front burners. And by now, they probably realize it will take the full support of the conservation community to pass anything of merit over the objections of western senators. It could be a great opportunity but if the past is any indication of the future, don't hold your breath too long.

by Alice Elshoff



Highlights of the ONDA Fall Board of Directors meeting included the election of George Wuerthner to our Advisory Board. Mr. Wuerthner is a noted naturalist and author who makes his home in Montana but is well known throughout the West, having published numerous articles in national magazines. He is a long-time grazing activist and we welcome him to our board.

Dates for important events in 1994 include:

- The LAW Conference in Eugene, March 10 - 13
- Desert Conference at Malheur, April 29 - May 1
- ONDA volunteer work week at Hart Mountain, June 23 - 27 (at the height of the wildflower season.)

The Board kicked off its High Desert Defense Fund, the most efficient way for our members to make our work possible. A brochure will be in the mail soon.

Friends of ONDA in Portland, in cooperation with Portland Audubon, filled the PAS meeting room to hear the Hart Mountain Refuge staff present their proposed 150-year Management Plan. Details of this plan are in your last Desert Notes.

Board member Elaine Rees and Friends of ONDA, Dave Stone and Dave Funk are providing a forum for Desert activists in Eugene. We'll be hearing more from this group. Interested activists in Eugene should contact Elaine Rees at (503) 683-2147.



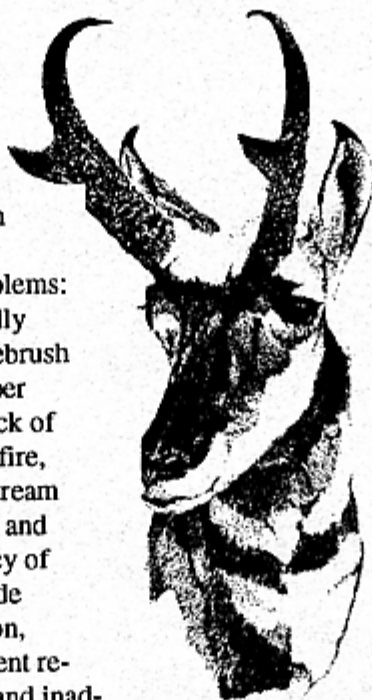
Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge:

Cow-free at Last

The cows are going home, according to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and management plan for the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge.

The Management Plan proposes to adopt the Ecosystem Management

alternative to solve Hart Mountain Refuge's core problems: unnaturally high sagebrush and juniper cover, lack of periodic fire, eroded stream channels and deficiency of streamside vegetation, insufficient resources and inadequate facilities to manage the increasing number of refuge visitors.



The Management Plan would:

- reduce sagebrush and juniper cover within 15 years through prescribed burning,

- allow riparian areas to restore primarily passively,
- discontinue the use of livestock grazing for the next 15 years,
- guide the redesign and improvement of one existing campground and the closure of the other and outline the development of three new camping areas,

- maintain 162 miles of roads open to the public,
- continue limited quality hunting,
- recommend 44,604 acres for

further study for potential wilderness designation and 11,276 acres for further study for potential research natural area designation,

- emphasize recreation focused on enjoyment of the refuge's unique features, such as remoteness, naturalness, and opportunities for solitude and life viewing.

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Wildlife Refuges Protection vs. Production

The Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Eastern Oregon recently proposed to add mink to the list of predatory species which ADC will kill in an effort to protect migratory Sandhill Cranes. After breeding pairs of cranes on the refuge fell from 236 pairs in 1971, to 181 pairs in 1986, federal wildlife officials began a predator control program to stop ravens from eating crane eggs, and stop coyotes and raccoons from killing Sandhill chicks. Since 1986, nearly 1700 coyotes and over 400 ravens

This population of Sandhill Cranes faces relentless human-induced threats...

have been killed. The reason for all this predator killing is ostensibly to increase survivorship of Sandhill Cranes.

This population of Sandhills faces relentless human-induced threats to their wintering ground in California's Central Valley from habitat loss and illegal hunting. Only 3,200 cranes still exist in this population.

According to current US Fish and Wildlife Service policy, if crane numbers drop to 2,000, the Central Valley population will be listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This would force a limit to development and curtail wetlands degradation in the heavily populated Central Valley of California. Faced with this prospect, wildlife officials made increasing Sandhill Crane production at Malheur the number one priority.

At Malheur, Sandhill Cranes breed in flooded meadows, building their nest in the protection of the vegetation, and foraging for protein-rich invertebrates, roots, and tubers in the water-softened soils of these flooded fields. The flooding comes from water running off the Blue and Steens Mountains. However, in recent years, drought has reduced water flows in the refuge's dilapidated irriga-

tion system, which in turn means that there is not enough water carried to the fields to provide for adequate nest sites for the cranes.

Other problems include cattle grazing and hay production on the meadows and uplands where these birds raise their chicks. After cattle eat and trample the grass, crane chicks cannot find many places to hide from their natural predators. Haying reduces cover, and harvest machinery takes its toll on chicks. The lands best suited for raising and feeding chicks are also those used for growing hay and feeding cattle. Thus far, the cattle seem to be given priority.

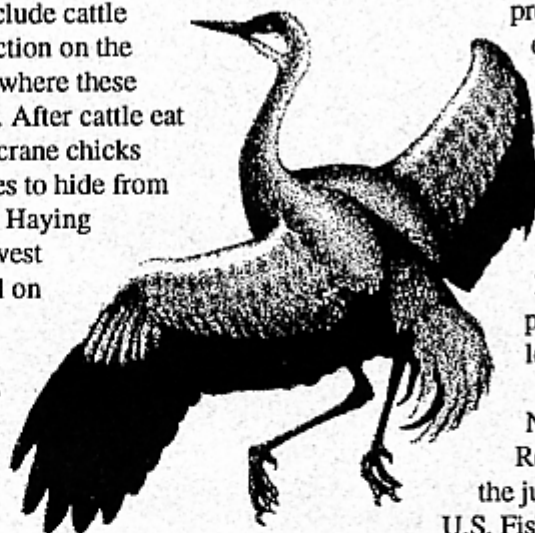
Caught between pressure to increase crane production to preclude listing birds under the ESA, the expense of renovating the refuge's irrigation system, and

pressure from local ranchers to provide cheap forage and hay, refuge staff decided that the easy and cheap way out was to kill predators. Despite past

predator control efforts, the crane populations have not responded as well as managers would have liked. Crane production is lower than ever.

The Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is under the jurisdiction of the

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) who's arrogance is summed up by its statement: "The refuge was not established as an inviolate sanctuary for all wildlife. The refuge was also not established with the intent



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ONDA Intervenes in Abert Fiasco

An application for a preliminary permit has been filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to build a pumped-storage hydroelectric project 31 miles north of Lakeview in Lake County, located partially within the Abert Rim Wilderness Study Area.

The proposed project would consist of a 300-foot-high dam forming an 830 acre upper reservoir on Rabbit Creek, two 36-foot-diameter 1,575 foot long concrete pipes connecting the upper reservoir at the top of Abert Rim with an underground powerhouse at the base of Abert Rim, a 43 mile long 500 kV transmission line, a 3.5 mile long 500 kV transmission line, and a converter station and appurtenant facilities.

The applicant, Patrick E. Slattery of

Abert Rim Hydroelectric Associates (located in Greenville, South Carolina) proposes to use the southern portion of Lake Abert as a lower reservoir by constructing two 30-foot-high dikes, one 12,500 foot long and the other 19,000 feet long. The approximate cost of the studies would be 2 million dollars.

At this stage, the applicant will only be authorized to conduct feasibility studies, at an estimated cost of 2 million dollars.

ONDA will oppose this project because it would be a violation of a proposed wilderness area and would be an ecological disaster for Lake Abert and Rabbit Creek. Future issues of *Desert Notes* will follow progress of this issue.

by Craig Lacy



The BLM will soon release a draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement on the John Day River System. This plan is a result of the 1988 Oregon Omnibus Wild and Scenic Act. BLM is the lead agency involved in writing the Plan. It will be available at the Prineville BLM office soon and public hearings are expected as early as October this year.

If you enjoy solitude, natural values, and an occasional trip on the John Day River, then you should get up to speed on some of the issues coming forth in this plan.

The following is a short summary of some of the key issues.

Jet Boats

The current plan allows jet boats at water levels over 1,000 cfs. Some segments of the John Day are restricted seasonally; one segment is withdrawn from use completely. The State Marine Board has lobbied heavily to allow motor craft on the John Day.

Jet boats are not a compatible use of the River. They disturb nesting birds in the waterfowl refuge, they effect spawning fish, cause stream bank erosion and sheriff reports indicate some irresponsible users sluice birds on the river from moving powercraft. Jet boats don't belong on the river anytime, anywhere. This issue may be a "red herring" to divert people from some of the other resource issues.

Grazing

According to the BLM, grazing is not an issue and therefore, will not be dealt with in this Plan. Grazing is covered under the Two Rivers Management Plan and individual allotment management plans.

Grazing affects many of the outstanding valuable resources along the river corridor including wildlife, fisheries, scenic, vegetative, esthetic and

recreational values. It also affects water quantity and quality. The Two Rivers Plan was written in 1985, before the John Day was designated, and does not reflect public concern over protecting its outstanding values.

The public should be offered a range of alternatives including no grazing. While there have been noticeable riparian improvements in recent years in some river segments (such as Service Creek to Clarno, especially on private lands) much of the river is overgrazed and in poor condition. Anything less than excellent riparian condition is unacceptable.

If you enjoy solitude, natural values, and an occasional trip on the John Day, then you should get up to speed on some of these issues.

Access

BLM would increase access for motorized vehicles in some of the most

remote areas of the river.

Fisheries

The fishery does not receive adequate attention in this Plan. Resource degradation that has driven the fall chinook to the verge of extinction and reduced the populations of spring chinook and summer steelhead continue. Headwater populations of rainbow, redband, native cutthroat and bull trout are basically ignored.

Recreational Use Levels

There is nothing in the range of recreational opportunities for those who seek solitude included in the Plan. In an earlier draft, one would have another float party in visual contact 50% of the time. That's the LOW end of use. The high end of course was seeing another float party 100% of the time. The current draft now calls for 50% of the campsites being used as the low end of the use spectrum. Eliminating motorized access in more remote sections is not considered.

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Grazing Permit Not a Property Right, Court Says



The U.S. district Court of New Mexico has ruled that grazing permits are not property rights and therefore cannot be governed by "takings" restrictions. In McKinley vs U.S., attorney Karen Budd Falen argued that the Forest Service decision to reduce the number of cattle on a rancher's allotment was arbitrary and capricious, and that the agency had failed to do a takings assessment as required under Executive Order 12630 (signed by former President Reagan).

During the past 20 years, the Forest Service had found the rancher's allotment in "poor or very poor" condition. Judge Hansen ruled that the agency's range analysis was sound and the Executive Order does not create a previous cause of action, nor is it applicable because a permit is not a property right, so it cannot be "taken" by the federal government. "although the permits are valuable to ranchers," Judge Hansen wrote in his opinion, "they are not an interest protected by the Fifth Amendment against taking by the government who granted them with the understanding that they could be withdrawn... without payment of compensation."

Source: NWF Range Reformer, Spring '93

ADC Ordered Off Most BLM land in the West

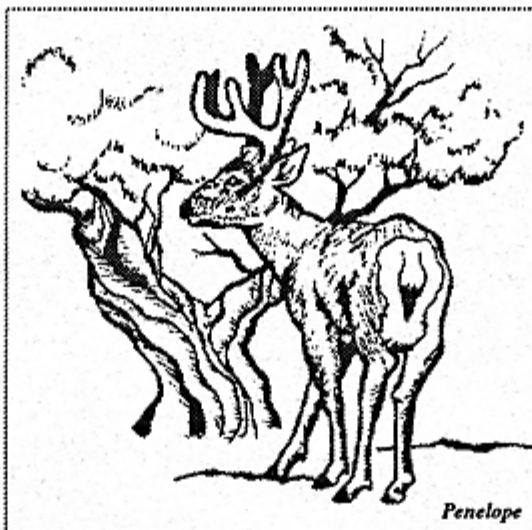
by Nancy Zierenberg

In a memo from the Bureau of Land Management Washington office dated April 6, 1993, state directors were instructed to inform Animal Damage Control (ADC) that all Animal Damage Management (ADM) activities on districts where there is no current plan or Environmental Assessment (EA) in place, will cease. If district EA's are under appeal, activities are banned on those districts as well.

This directive, in place until further notice, was in response to the US Humane Society's filing of eight separate appeals. These appeals cited the lack of process accompanying on-going ADC activities on BLM districts in Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada. A motion was filed asking for an automatic stay of these activities due to the lack of preparation of decision records according to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This motion also specified that a public participation process be included in the decision making.

By not having an ADM plan in place at the beginning of this year, BLM is violating its own directives as well.

ADC will not be operating on BLM lands in Montana, Wyoming, and Arizona, or on most BLM lands in Utah, Nevada, Oregon and New Mexico,



according to one official. Agency people in California and Colorado said that little ADC activity occurs on BLM land in those states. Michael Milstein, writing for the Billings Gazette, reports Idaho BLM official halted ADC activities four months earlier because of legal appeals.

However, it was specified that emergency control may be exercised if a rancher is sustaining continued livestock losses.

Once again its time for the public to get involved in the predicted whirlwind of EA preparation for ADM on BLM lands. It will be important for people to follow this process and participate in local district decision making. Both agencies need watchdogging since both have been collaborating in allegedly illegal operations on public lands.

This is also a perfect time to write a quick letter to Bruce Babbitt, the new Secretary of the Interior, who oversees the BLM, to let him know of your support for this decision. You can bet he's hearing the opposite from the livestock industry.

Bruce Babbitt
U.S.D.I., Mail Stop 6218
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Source: Wildlife Damage Review,
Summer '93

SANDCRANES continued from page 3

to maintain a natural ecosystem." According to policy, these lands have been put aside to help protect and produce enough waterfowl (including Sandhill Cranes).

Although it is official USFWS policy that predator control will not occur on national wildlife refuges for the protection of livestock, it is done. In the case of the Malheur, several ranchers have suggested that the refuge conduct coyote control year round for the protection of livestock. Instead, the refuge "designed the program to be as selective as possible for animals causing the problem." Now, they only control coyotes from February through mid-September. Trapping is also allowed for economic and "recreational" purposes, and predator control is con-

ducted to increase hunting opportunities.

If USFWS is truly interested in upping crane numbers, then why aren't they addressing the real issue of habitat destruction? Let them hear from you about the management of wildlife refuges. The new nation-wide draft plan for refuge management is out. Write USFWS to get a copy, and let your voice be heard.

USFWS
Refuges 2003 Planning Team
US Dept. of Interior
Mail Stop - 670 ARLSQ
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240
(202) 28-5634

Information from Summer 1993 issue of
Predator Project.

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WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL

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CAPTURADAS EN ESTAS TRAMPAS

Sign beside road to Whitehorse Ranch
in Western Oregon.

"100 Women Bearing Witness" Denied ADC Access

by Barbara Butler



The program developed by Wildlife Damage Control, "100 Women bearing Witness," was never able to be implemented in any of the participating states this summer, due to Animal Damage Control's refusal to allow anyone to accompany field agents in their work.

Earlier this summer Wildlife Damage Control launched a national effort to expose the ADC's field practices. 100

Although women were willing to sign waivers, ADC stood steadfast in their refusal.

Women Bearing Witness were to approach local offices of ADC to accompany a field agent for the purpose of observing and documenting field work on federal and public lands. This would mean observing things as checking of

trap lines, snares, or M44s, dispatching of trapped animals, denning activities, animal gunning or calling and shooting.

Reasons cited by ADC for their refusal were safety of the witnesses, exposure to wildlife diseases, remote area locations, etc..

Although women were willing to sign waivers, ADC stood steadfast in their refusal. ADC offered field day demonstrations instead, unacceptable substitutes.

In Oregon, requests by ONDA of ADC regional office for any specifics on rancher referrals and other operations, has not been forthcoming to date.

If you feel ADC should allow the public to have a hands-on experience with the field agents and witness their practices (what do they have to hide?) contact the Regional Office of ADC.

Regional ADC Office
Thomas Hoffman
State Director
USDA - APHIS - ADC
2600 SE 98th
Portland, OR 97266



JOHN DAY PLAN continued from page 4

much they could do to improve water flows and quality. Non-point pollution due to livestock is the main source of water problems here.

Fire Management

Again, not considered an issue in the plan.

A copy of the draft can be obtained from:

Bureau of Land Management
Prineville District Office
P O Box 550
Prineville, OR 97754
Dan Woods, River Planner
(503) 447-8762

Editor's Note: Craig Lacy is available to speak before your group for more detailed information:

Craig Lacy
57 Pinecrest Ct
Bend, OR 97701
389-2434

UPCOMING EVENTS

Fall Field Trips

All trips are free and open to everyone. Please call well in advance to register. Trips fill on a first-come basis.

OCTOBER 23 - 24, 1993 Sutton Mountain

Join us for one or two days as we explore this magnificent area recently acquired by the BLM along the beautiful John Day Valley.

- Van transportation furnished for the two-day component, if you want to camp out near fresh water with indoor shelter available should weather turn nasty.
- Caravan along in your own car if you can only do the Saturday day hike.
- Call trip leader, John Howell, (503) 593-2701 for information and registration.



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