

Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the
Oregon
Natural Desert
association

Volume 6, Number 2

Spring, 1993



Habitat Restoration for Sage Grouse

by Carol Savonen

Sage grouse are much more dependent on native grasses and herbaceous plants in eastern Oregon's sagebrush country than previously thought, according to Oregon State University wildlife research scientist, John A. Crawford.

Crawford and his graduate students studied the habitat and diet of sage grouse in southeastern Oregon for three years. They have concluded that native forbs and grasses need to be restored if sage grouse populations are to return to healthy levels. The most likely reason that native grasses and forbs are relatively scarce in most of eastern Oregon's sagebrush country is because of poor livestock management practices, overgrazing, fire suppression and introduction of exotic plants and animals, according to Crawford.

The sage grouse is declining in most of Oregon, he said. It now occupies half its former in-state range, the high sagebrush plains east of the Cascade Mountains. The western subspecies of sage grouse was listed as a candidate for threatened and endangered status under the federal Endangered Species Act in 1985.

"The bulk of the population is now in Harney, Malheur and part of Lake Counties," said Crawford. "There are now vast tracts of land in Oregon which used to have sage grouse that now support few or no sage grouse." Not only the large, fowl-like birds found in fewer areas, they are producing fewer young. "The existing data show that since

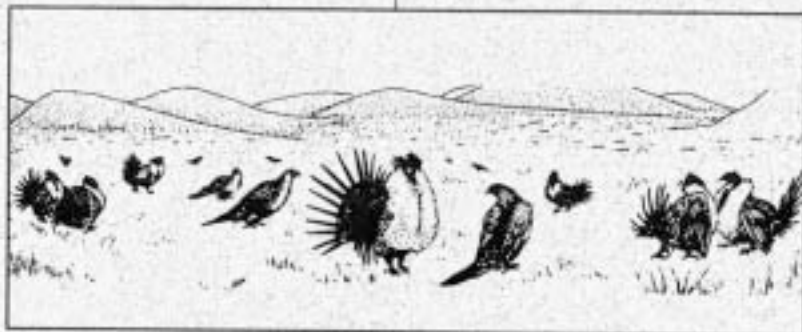
the 1950s, there are fewer sage grouse having fewer chicks," he said.

Crawford and his graduate students wanted to pinpoint the reason for the decline. Since 1989, they studied nesting and brooding sage grouse on two study sites in southeastern Oregon—one where sage grouse were doing well and in an area where they were sparse or declining.

One site, Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, has some of the highest populations of sage grouse and most intact sagebrush-bunchgrass ecosystem in the state. The second site, Jackass Creek, a BLM administered site in Harney County, had a more typical population of sage grouse on degraded sagebrush habitat with sparser grass and herbaceous cover, according to the OSU researcher.

Crawford said he knew sage grouse decline was linked in some way to nesting or brood rearing. He designed studies that would help find out what was different about successful hens, nests and broods versus unsuccessful hens.

Among the questions he wanted to address: Are nesting and brood rearing habitats different for successful nests compared with unsuccessful nests or broods? How does a hen's diet relate to its reproductive success? How does a chick's diet relate to its survival? Is predation on nests different in different habitats?



To try and answer these questions, Crawford and his students radio-collared 278 sage grouse hens and monitored 124 nests at both study sites over a three-year period. They looked at the type of vegetation the hens nested in, whether the nest eggs hatched and, if

(continued on pg. 3)



From The Outback

by Bill Marlett

You probably noticed our new bumper sticker "COWS KILL SALMON". Visions of ravenous cows plucking hapless salmon from their home might seem appropriate since the cows may not have anything else to eat (because they've eaten everything else!). But the reality is that cows are one reason for the decline of salmon in the Columbia River basin. With the listing last year of chinook salmon in the Snake River basin (a tributary of the Columbia located in Idaho, NE Oregon and SE Washington), there has been a good deal of talk about the population crash of Snake river salmon stocks. Most conservationists agree that the dams on the lower Snake and Columbia Rivers are the primary culprits. But long before the dams were built, salmon populations were on the skids. In part because of over-harvest, but largely due to a 100 year legacy of land abuse.

The life cycle of the salmon today resembles a biological gauntlet. The dams are the most efficient fish killers. Young fish moving downstream in the spring are ground up in the turbines, or are stunned going through the by pass systems and become easy prey for squaw fish. When the young fish hit the "dead" water behind the dams, the resulting disorientation not only makes them easy prey but also uses up valuable energy reserves in their bodies. This problem has been "solved" by the Corps of Engineers by forcing the young fish on barges and giving them a ride downstream around the dams. Most of these battered fish subsequently perish from shock and trauma, not unlike the forced round up and relocation perpetrated on Native Americans last century. For the "lucky" adult salmon that return back to the Columbia River to reproduce, they face the daunting task of swimming upstream over the concrete clots plugging our rivers. And after finally reaching their homelands, salmon

face the bovine wall; bleak and barren habitat. More subtle than dams, but equally efficient at killing salmon. As important as the issue of "dam safety" is to the salvation of salmon, equally critical is the restoration of habitat abused for over 100 years by logging, grazing, mining and irrigation practices.

Wild (naturally reproducing in streams) salmon need wild habitat.

Salmon populations are actually far worse than the public has been led to believe considering that most salmon today began life in a hatchery. And why do we need hatcheries? Because without them, we would have few, if any, salmon to harvest. An artificial hatchery (i.e., manmade spawning and rearing habitat) is a poor substitute for wild habitat. Genetically homogeneous, mass produced fish are bad biology, unnatural, and expensive. They are bureaucratic band-aids covering up gaping wounds in our watersheds.

Nature's hatcheries are the streams and tributaries in the headwaters of watersheds. Walk the streams of NE Oregon (or anywhere in the western US for that matter!) and see the telltale signs of abuse: streams full of silt, stream banks devoid of vegetation (resulting in lethal water temperatures and low dissolved oxygen), algae, spawning areas covered with sediment, dried up springs. And the list goes on.

Both the dams *and* the habitat must be fixed. Some dams will have to go. As salmon recovery inches forward, we will see more salmon returning to carry on with the great circle of life. It's our job to make sure they have a "home" to return to. Which is why ONDA along with several other conservation groups have filed lawsuits against the BLM, Forest Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service for failing to consult over the potential impact from further grazing and other abusive land use activities in the watersheds home to the threatened Snake River salmon.

Conservationists have been trying to protect riparian and fish habitat from the ravages of livestock grazing for years. I'll be the first to admit we've had little success. Most streams in the West are in fair or poor condition because of cows. According to some, streams in the West are in their worst condition in history. Cows continue to trash fish habitat with impunity, abetted by the BLM and the Forest Service (with perhaps a little encouragement by our friends in the ranching community!). Let's hope with the weight of the Endangered Species Act looming, federal agencies will take a hard

look and a hard line against further abuse (at least on public lands), and begin the recovery. The least costly, biologically efficient (not to mention politically difficult) way to restore cow battered habitat is to kick the cows off our streams. Period! But until the cows come home, cows will continue to kill salmon.



DESERT BIGHORN PRINT by Jean Drescher See back page of Newsletter



Draft Alert The Snake River in Hells Canyon:

A Livestock Feedlot
and Jet Boat Speedway
Or
A Wild River?

The Hells Canyon Preservation Council (HCPC) has developed a citizen's alternative called "The Solitude Alternatives" as a unified plan for management of the Snake Wild and Scenic River. This plan, summarized below would restore the river ecosystem and enable river users to spend time in a wild, quiet, pristine environment rather than a loud, industrialized atmosphere. It has been endorsed by a wide variety of rafting, outdoor, and conservation organizations including ONDA. The Solitude Alternatives will be displayed in the Forest Service's draft EIS alongside a variety of other alternatives.

Your immediate written support for the Solitude Alternatives is imperative if an environmentally and recreationally viable river management plan is to be implemented by the Forest Service! Send as brief or lengthy a letter as you like to:

Forest Supervisor
Snake River I.D. Team
P.O. Box 907
Baker City, OR 97814

Express your support for the Solitude Alternatives which include:

- Jet Boats: outlines two plans for management; both reserve parts of the river for non-motorized use; both ban jet skis and require research to determine effects of jet boats on river ecosystem.
- Livestock, Ecosystem Protection: phases out all public land allotments from river corridor within two years; restores native riparian vegetation.
- Floatcraft: maintains existing permit system and numbers of floaters; does not restrict float launches outside "high use" season.
- Aircraft, Land Vehicles, Roads: limits aircraft landings to three portal airstrips; prohibits ORV use and closes ORV roads and prohibits new road construction.
- Trails, Facilities: Proposes construction of new trail-head and trail segment at Eagle Bar that would connect with the Snake River trail in Idaho.

The Solitude Alternatives provide a solid, clear vision for restoration of Snake River/Hells Canyon ecological values of the deepest canyon on Earth.

□

(Sage Grouse, continued from pg. 1)

so, how long the chicks lived. They studied what the hens ate before egg laying and what chicks ate after hatching.

They found sage grouse reproduction to be precariously low—out of 278 hens studied at both sites, a total of nine chicks lived to August. Many of the hens didn't nest at all. Predators ate many of the eggs and chicks of those that did nest.

Hens in areas with habitat degraded by grazing, fire suppression and introduced weeds like cheat grass had lower nesting success. Successful nests were those with significant amounts of tall (greater than seven inches) grass at the nest site. Grass helps hide the nest from predators like coyotes, ravens and ground squirrels. Relatively dense sagebrush also helped conceal nests from aerial predators.

"We found three and one-half times more tall residual grass at successful nest, than at nests raided by predators," Crawford said. "Therefore, loss of nests to predators seems to be a result of habitat inadequacies."

Sage grouse hens who laid eggs had diets high (up to 50 percent) in native plants like milkvetch, hawksbeard and desert parsley. These native forbs contain more protein and phosphorus, nutrients essential for reproduction than does sagebrush.

"Forbs are more important in the diet of the hens and chicks than we suspected, and grasses are more important as cover for nesting." They found that successfully reared chicks used a wider variety of habitats for food than previously known. "Hens move chicks around from big sage to low sage to lake beds and meadows," said Crawford. "The more successful chicks at Hart Mountain ate a larger proportion of forbs and insects than the less successful chicks at Jackass Creek, which fed on a higher percentage of sage."

"The bottom line is that much of the sage grouse habitat is so degraded from poor land management that it is inadequate for successful reproduction. We need to manage for the proper kind of herbaceous cover if we are going to have successful production of sage grouse young. We have to restore habitat and bring back a balance of grass and forbs into the sagebrush community. Otherwise, there will be pressures brought to bear on management agencies by those concerned about the future of the sage grouse in Oregon."

□

(Editor's note: ONDA's position on sage grouse in Oregon is that they should be petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Only by listing the birds under the Act will the BLM be responsive to the needs of the sage grouse and their habitat.)



ADC Action Alert

We may never see a better time than the present to put an end to the Animal Damage Control (ADC) Program. With President Clinton's new economic strategy to cut all unnecessary federal spending, now is our chance to see that the new administration as well as our Congress people know exactly how we feel about the ADC. Your response at this particular time will make a huge impact on Clinton's economic advisors. We urge you to take the time to call or write to the new administration.

Call the **Fraud, Waste and Abuse Hotlines**: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture 1-800-424-9121; U.S. Dept. of Interior 1-800-424-5081. (You don't have to leave your name; all calls are confidential.)

Our suggestions for what to include in a letter are as follows:

• The ADC exists as a blatant subsidy to the livestock industry. Taxpayers should not be expected to provide a zero-risk business environment for anyone. We demand a leaner and more efficient government in which public interests, not private interests, are served first.

• The ADC predator control program is neither cost-effective nor biologically sound. In 1992 the ADC spent over 45 million taxpayer dollars to kill wildlife on public lands and to develop poisons and control techniques for wild animals. Most of these techniques are indiscriminate and place threatened and endangered species in jeopardy. At the same time the government spends millions to kill predators, it also funds multi-million dollar programs to protect and reintroduce endangered species.

• In fiscal year 1992 over 109,000 predatory mammals and more than 1.5 million birds were "reported" killed by the ADC. Its killing methods—poison baits, traps, snares, denning and aerial gunning—are indiscriminate and inhumane.

• Ranchers need to be responsible for protecting their own livestock and doing so with non-lethal techniques.

• We demand that this outdated tax-supported federal war on wildlife come to an end, and that the government begin to protect our natural heritage.

Make copies of your letter and send it to as many of these people as possible:

Your U.S. Senators and Representatives

Dept. of Agriculture Secretary, Mike Espy
USDA, 14th and Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

White House Office on Environmental Policy,
Kathleen McGinty
Old Executive Office Bldg.
Room 358
Washington D.C. 20501

Leon Panetta, Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503

Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior
and
Jim Baca, Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior
(Director BLM, designee)
and
George Frampton, Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior
(Under-Secretary of the Interior designee)
Mail Stop 6218
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington D.C. 20240

Senate:
Agriculture, Rural Development Related Agencies
Chairman Dale Bumpers
SD-140
U.S. Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

House:
Agriculture, Rural Development Related Agencies
Chairman Richard Durbin
10 Room 2362
RHOB
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515





The Wildlands Project

Wild Earth magazine has just published a special issue devoted to *The Wildlands Project*, a continental organization working with ONDA, regional activists and conservation biologists to protect and restore biological diversity throughout North America. The special issue was distributed to tens of thousands of people, including ONDA members active in defending biodiversity and Wilderness in North America.

The Wildlands Project sets a new agenda for the conservation movement. It seeks to develop proposals for reserves based on the needs of all life, not just humans. The critical role of *The Wildlands Project* is best summed up by Dr. Paul Ehrlich, distinguished author and Bing Professor of Population Studies at Stanford University: "It is quite clear that the Endangered Species Act, although the best act of its sort in a major nation, is inadequate to protect the precious biological resources of North America. More is needed, and this plan to coordinate the efforts of conservation organizations, activist groups, indigenous people, conservation biologists, ecologists, and others is the sort of effort that is required."

The Wildlands Project is not content with fighting "for a mere slowing of the rate of destruction of natural diversity," explains Dave Foreman, Project Chairman. "What we seek is nothing less than the full flowering of natural biological diversity of North America." Dr. Reed Noss, conservation biologist and Science Director of *The Wildlands Project*, considers "wilderness recovery to be the most important task of our generation."

The Wildlands Project, in cooperation with regional groups and conservation biologists, will develop proposals for core reserves throughout the continent. Such reserve proposals will be developed utilizing the best science to ensure the perpetuation of biodiversity at genetic, species, ecosystem and landscape levels. Reserves will be linked by broad habitat corridors to allow for dispersal of wide-ranging species, genetic exchange between populations, and migration of organisms in response to climate change.

The Wildlands Project will provide scientific support to regional groups, assist in the exchange of expertise and strategy among groups, provide mapping and other technical assistance, research threats to biodiversity and undertake a major publishing and educational effort to communicate information about proposals to a broad audience and to advocate timely implementation of projects in each region.

For more information or to order copies of *The Wildlands Project* issue of *Wild Earth*, call Kelly Treese or Rod Mondt at 602 884-0875, or write *The Wildlands Project*, 1955 W. Grand Rd., Suite 148A, Tucson, AZ 85745.

Unexploded Ordnance Guards the Kuwaiti Desert

Prodigy Services

Kuwait's desert, battered by Gulf War bombing, gushing oil wells and Iraqi mines, is blooming again. Millions of mines and bombs are still strewn across the country. They may be dangerous to people and livestock, but to the environment, they're unlikely ecological guardians.

Together with increased Kuwaiti military patrols, the unexploded ordnance is a daunting deterrent against hunters, desert joyriders and flocks of grazing sheep, which all took their toll on the area over the last 20 years.

The desert is blooming again. It's wonderful. The vegetation is recovering at a tremendous rate," says Charles Pilcher, professor of pharmacology at Kuwait University. "This kind of unexploded ordnance has had a beneficial effect. Duck and coot species . . . have risen in some instances 100-fold. In the old days we might have had 20 or 30 of one species of duck, and they've gone up to 200."

Twenty years ago, the area looked more like American prairie than Arabian desert. "It depended on rainfall, but even after a poor winter there was quite a lot of vegetation," Pilcher says. "In my time here I've noticed phenomenal desertification of western Kuwait." Pilcher says a relatively small investment could provide regular wardening at nature reserves, enabling them to shelter a variety of birds. "Kuwait, tiny as it is, is an important location because it's at the head of the Gulf. There are a lot of northern Eurasian species coming to the Gulf to spend the winter."



Petroglyph, Stone Bridge, Lake County
South of the northeast corner of Hart Lake at site of old stone military bridge ca. 1868. Designs are both geometric and naturalistic. Some vandalism by shooting in "target" petroglyph.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTE TO FIELD TRIP PARTICIPANTS

Weather is often severe and terrain rough, so proper dress and footwear are essential. Bring water and lunch. Please contact trip leaders for difficulty, mileage, etc. You participate at your own risk. Unless otherwise noted, all one-day field trips leave from the parking lot at the horseshoe pits at Juniper Park, on East 7th and Franklin Ave. at 8:00 A.M. It is always a good idea to call ahead (Alice Elshoff)

- April 30-May 2 Desert Conference XV: Malheur Field Station, featuring Walk'n Jim Stoltz, Terry Tempest Williams. Registration limited to 200. Call 223-9007.
- May 6-9 Summer Lake and Abert Rim: This birding and hiking trip will explore one of South Central Oregon's outstanding natural areas. ONDA member, Craig Miller, will guide birding trip at Summer Lake and hike up Abert Rim's Poison Creek drainage. This is a moderately strenuous two-mile hike. Two nights of camping with the third spent at Summer Lake Bed and Breakfast. Contact Portland Parks & Rec at 796-5132.
- May 27 Karen Coulter will present a slide show featuring forest health issues in the Blue Mtns. The ideas presented have application for all east side forests. Sponsored by Forest Conservation Council. 7:00 P.M., Environmental Center.
- June 3-6 Christmas Valley Adventure: This trip will explore the geology, archaeology, natural and human history and wildlife of the wilds of Christmas Valley area of Central Oregon in easy day hikes. Base camp will be at Green Mountain. Of major appeal will be the full moon occurring during the trip. Contact Portland Parks & Rec at 796-5132.
- June 11-13 Spring Basin Birding: This is a weekend of hiking and botany in scenic John Day River country in Central Oregon. Itinerary will include a one-night backpack. Sponsored by Audubon Society of Portland. Contact Linda Craig 224-6240.

- June 17-21 Guano Creek Wilderness Study Area: This course will base camp and explore the natural history of Guano Creek Wilderness Study Area. Registration began on March 10 for this trip open Lane County residents only. Contact Elaine Rees 683-2147.
- July 2-5 Trout Creek Mountains: This trip will involve a short backpack to a base camp and day hikes to explore several canyons in these scenic mountains on the Nevada border. The wildflowers and butterflies should be magnificent at this time. Sponsored by Audubon Society of Portland. Contact Linda Craig 224-6240.
- July 10-17 Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge Conservation Outing: ONRC is sponsoring this six day event in the now cow-free Hart Mountain Refuge. Three days will be spent doing restoration work by tearing out barbwire cattle fences. The remaining three days will include hiking and exploring this magnificent high desert wilderness. Contact ONRC 223-9001.
- April is Earth Month!**
The Bend area is loaded with activities. For a comp. list, see the
Central Oregon Environmental Center
16 N.W. Kansas Ave. 385-6908
- April 17 An Evening of Music & Poetry, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, The Curiosity Shoppe, downtown Bend, 8:00 P.M. \$3, 382-3408.
- April 25 William Kittredge, writer, readings from his books and slide show by Terry Steele, Hitchcock Auditorium, COCC, 7:00 P.M., \$5-\$25, 389-4566
- May 7 Appearing in concert: Walking Jim Stoltz, *Forever Wild*, a multi-media celebration of wilderness. 7:30 P.M., Aspen Hall, Shevlin Park; \$7 General, \$4 Student/Senior, kids under 12 free.
- May 27 Pacific N.W. Field Seminars 1993 outings calendars available at Environmental Center or by writing to Pacific N.W. Field Seminars, 83 S. King St., Seattle, WA 98104. These informative outings run from April through October and cover a variety of subjects from Oregon's High Desert to old growth rain forests, from archeology to astronomy.



Marketplace

O **NDA** shirts, short-sleeve and long-sleeve t-shirts and sweatshirts are still available. Colors available are *grey, navy, peach, or white*. Sizes available are *small, medium, large, and extra-large*.



| | | |
|---------|----------------------|---------|
| Prices: | Sweatshirts | \$22.00 |
| | Short-sleeve t-shirt | \$12.00 |
| | Long-sleeve t-shirt | \$16.00 |
| | Boycott Beef T-Shirt | \$12.00 |

In addition to **ONDA** logo shirts, we are offering some very special books to members. *The Sagebrush Ocean: A Natural History of the Great Basin* by Stephen Trimble is available for \$34.95. Forward by Barry Lopez.

This is the best general introduction to the ecology and spirit of the Great Basin, a place where the desert almost seems to mirror the sky in size, where mountains hold ravens, bristlecone pines, winter stillness and unseen, but satisfying, the possibility of bighorn sheep.

Other books: *Waste of the West*, Lynn Jacobs: \$28.00
Sacred Cows at the Public Trough, Denzel Ferguson: \$9.00

NEW!! High Desert Poster (18x28) \$15.00—stunning high desert poster by Ron Cronin

NEW!! High Desert Postcard (pack of 10) of the High Desert Poster Scene: \$5.00

NEW!! Road Map, *A Visitor's Guide to Oregon's High Desert*: \$5.00

NEW!! 12-page Tabloid, *Desert Notes*: \$5.00 for 20 copies.

If you would like to become a member of **ONDA** or if you are due to renew your membership, please use the form on the opposite side of this page.

Check the Date on the Mailing Label for your Membership Expiration Date.



ORDER FORM

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

| ITEM | COLOR (NOTE CHOICE 1 and CHOICE 2) | SIZE | QUANTITY | TOTAL |
|--|------------------------------------|--|-------------------|---------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| 5 BOYCOTT-BEEF BUMPER STICKERS NO CHARGE - ADD \$2.00 SHIPPING | | | XXXXX | XXXXXXX |
| MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: ONDA | | MAIL TO: ONDA 16 N.W. KANSAS BEND, OREGON 97701 | SHIPPING/HANDLING | \$2.00 |
| | | | TOTAL: | |

**OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION
MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION**

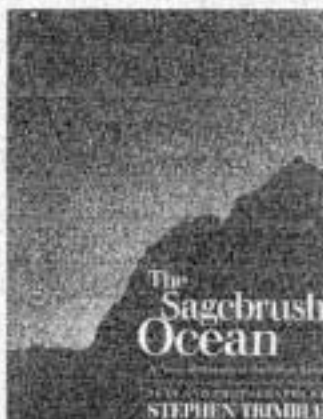
I'd like to join the Oregon Natural Desert Association and receive the quarterly newsletter and desert action alerts.

Regular Membership : \$20.00
 : \$35 (includes Visitor Guide)
 : \$50.00 (includes poster)
 : \$100.00 includes one of:

Sponsor: \$250.00
 includes special print of Desert Bighorn Sheep



Waste of the West, by Lynn Jacobs
 or
The Sagebrush Ocean, by Stephen Trimble
 or
Hole in the Sky, by William Kittredge



PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER



ONDA Membership Application

**MAIL TO:
 ONDA
 16 N.W. KANSAS
 BEND, OR 97701**

Regular Membership:
 \$20.00
 \$35.00 (includes Visitor Guide)
 \$50.00 (includes poster)
 \$100.00 (includes choice of one:
 The Sagebrush Ocean
 Waste of the West
 Hole in the Sky
 \$250.00 (includes print of Bighorn Sheep)

I'll Volunteer To:
 Adopt a Wilderness Area
 Write Letters
 Lead/Organize Field Trips
 Distribute Literature
 Organize Other Activists
 Office Work (Bend, only)
 Other (Specify):

NAME: _____
 ADDRESS: _____

 PHONE: _____

O.N.D.A.
 16 NW Kansas
 Bend, Oregon
 97701

NONPROFIT ORG.
 U.S. POSTAGE
 PAID
 BEND, OR.
 PERMIT NO. 381

Forwarding and Return Postage Guaranteed

Address Correction Requested