

Desert Ramblings

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association

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From the Outback

by Bill Marlett

You know things are bad when you are in the heart of one of Oregon's premier primitive areas and the landscape is littered with PVC pipes staking out mining claims. A recent trip down the wild and remote Owyhee River reminded me of the seriousness of the gold mining threat looming on the horizon. Mining claims were pervasive throughout the canyon, some right down to the river.

My purpose in floating the Owyhee was to see some of Oregon's best desert wilderness and to contemplate a proposal by Idaho conservationists to designate the entire two million acre Owyhee Plateau, including parts of Idaho and Oregon, as a National Park. Although designated a Wild and Scenic River by Congress, the boundaries of the designation extend, on average, only 1/4 mile on either side of the Owyhee River. However, the greater Owyhee Canyon is miles across, not unlike the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River. If mining were to proceed outside the designated corridor, the impacts of mining would be an immediate assault not only on proposed wilderness, but on one of the largest and least developed areas in the US outside Alaska. Oregonians may have a chance to deal with the mining issue head on if a proposed initiative is circulated in Oregon to require full reclamation of mine sites in Oregon. While not an outright ban on cyanide heap leach mining, it would in effect make this form of rapacious mining too expensive to conduct as it would require miners to fully reclaim the land instead of leaving the land pock marked with huge, open pits in the earth.

But from a long-term perspective, stopping cyanide heap leach mining is only part of the solution to preserving this ancestral land of the Northern Paiute. We need a national designation that will encompass the

entire Owyhee Plateau, including lands slated for wilderness designation and those, that for one reason or another, do not presently qualify but could if restoration of the land occurred. A national park certainly would work better than the present arrangement with the Bureau of Land Management. Existing BLM policies and management are still anchored in the past mentality of "its no good if we can't put a cow on it or mine it." This kind of brute logic still pervades the agency as recently demonstrated by BLM's unwillingness to kick the cows off the Owyhee River in their draft Wild and Scenic River plan. If the BLM can't deal with the ecologic reality that livestock grazing, especially along a Congressionally designated "wild" river, is inconsistent with a land ethic sensitive to the ecologic boundaries of life in the desert, than we should find an agency more in tune with preserving ecosystems rather than unraveling them. Clearly the National Park Service would better fill this role. Conservationists have already made a proposal for a Steens National Park and Preserve. Certainly, it would not be inconsistent to ask the Park Service to take on a greater role in SE Oregon than just the Steens.

While we all have a basic, instinctive mistrust of government agencies and their motives, I think we need to pick the best of the lot and move on. What's most important is the land, and preserving remnants of wilderness and the ecosystems they represent. I agree with our Idaho friends that we need a national designation for the Owyhee Plateau, embracing several million acres minimum. The land can't wait forever. Eventually, the goose steps of industrial grazing and mining will render this unique area to waste. □

(Editor's note: readers are urged to take note of the notice in this newsletter regarding public input for the Grassy Mountain Mine located near the Owyhee River Reservoir. This precedent setting case may be the determining factor on whether other mining companies will follow to develop other sites or, preferably, stay out of Oregon.)



Book Review

Crossing the Next Meridian: Land, Water, and the Future of the West
by Charles F. Wilkinson (Island Press)

Review by Elaine Rees

Anyone interested in the environmental problems of the West ought to read this book. Wilkinson's professional background in law comes through solidly, as does his interest in environmental and Native American issues. These qualifications make him a likely analyst of the unique situation in which we find ourselves today—a confrontation between obsolete natural resource policies and environmental and social crisis.

Wilkinson refers to the obsolete policies as the "lords of yesterday." They are the Hardrock Mining Law of 1872, the monopolizing of the public lands by the livestock industry, the control of the national forests by the timber industry, the rapid and short-sighted proliferation of dams on rivers supporting anadromous fish, and the prior appropriation doctrine of water rights. To each of these he devotes an exhaustive chapter, weaving history, legal background, personal experience, and policy formulation into a coherent picture of the present dilemma.

For all his obvious concern for reestablishing a sustainable balance of nature, Wilkinson is unfortunately still enamored of the macho independence of the miner and the cattleman, and after making damning cases against their historic abuses, advocates preserving their lifestyles. One gets the sense that the author is either nervous about alienating a certain segment of his readership or the possibility that he himself might fall over the edge into environmental extremism.

In the end, Wilkinson underscores what many have been saying for years—that we need to abolish "the philosophical ideas that fueled the lords of yesterday" (we need a new paradigm), we need to embrace the concept of sustainability, and we need to accept personal responsibility for our impacts on our environment. (He also came to the startling conclusion that we also need to come to grips with population growth!) While these are not new revelations, they certainly bear repeating.

Let's hope that this book finds an expanded readership and that more public land owners, both here in the west and "back east" will become motivated to demand long overdue policy changes and will maybe see the need for even longer strides than Wilkinson is willing to take himself.

Island Press has also recently published another book on the west, *Visions Upon the Land: Man and Nature on the Western Range* by Karl Hess, Jr. Before reading this book, it might be worthwhile to note that the copyright is not to the author, but to the libertarian Cato Institute.

Hess, an instructor in range science, limits his discussion to grazing issues. His book discusses three landscape visions that have brought the western range to its current state of ecological devastation—Jefferson's vision of the West as an agrarian society, Pinchot's vision of government management of the nation's natural resources, and the environmental vision of restoring the lands by force of legislation.

No one escapes the author's criticism, not even the livestock industry (although it is more than obvious that his heart is with individual ranching families who are trying to do the right thing). He does, however, heap special contempt upon the Forest Service and BLM. Their original mission as custodians perverted in overzealous pursuit of control of the land under their jurisdiction and the inevitable bureaucratic imperative for growth, these agencies are characterized as creatures of self-interest lacking any sort of accountability for their actions.

Considering the fact that Hess has no love for bureaucrats, it is amusing to note that he relies on information from Oregon BLM Director, Dean Bibles, regarding the ecological condition of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Sheldon Wildlife Refuge. Hess uses the Sheldon as an example of degradation resulting from the removal of livestock (Bibles evidently told him that there are no cows on the refuge). Those who are familiar with the Sheldon Refuge will be totally outraged by this Bibles-Hess fabrication.

Still, *Visions* can be useful for stimulating thoughts about past land uses, about current perceptions of the environmental movement, about the ramifications of current policies of multiple use and sustained yield, and about the merits of free-market environmentalism. You might just get a chuckle out of his solution to our current predicament, too. At the very least, this book provides an example of the diversity of thinking regarding what's best for the western range.

□



From Nightmare to Reality Newmont Mining's Grassy Mountain Project

by Gary Brown

Newmont Mining, the self-proclaimed darling of the mining industry, recently presented Oregon officials with its "Notice of Intent" to mine gold at Grassy Mountain in northern Malheur County. Newmont proposes to extract microscopic gold via the controversial cyanide heap leach mining process. Newmont's decision to mine gold in Oregon has drawn criticism from citizens throughout Oregon.

According to the Mining Law of May 10, 1872 (the infamous 1872 Hard-Rock Mining Law), mining is considered the best use of federal land; therefore, mining companies such as Newmont perceive that nothing can impede their progress in obtaining gold from the earth. Arrogant . . . yes! Correct . . . no! Thanks to a precedent setting U.S. Supreme Court decision, *California Coastal Commission vs. Granite Rock* (1987), individual states are allowed to address environmental concerns arising from this process. Considering that cyanide heap leach mining is an environmentally devastating practice, Newmont should expect strong resistance from Oregon residents.

Newmont Grassy Mountain Corporation, a newly formed subsidiary of Newmont Mining Corporation, proposes start-up in 1995. Plans indicate that 105,000,000 tons of earth will be removed to extract one pickup load of gold. Newmont officials have indicated that up to six other sites in the area have potential for gold processing. When completed, cosmetic reclamation will remain . . . along with the inevitable environmental degradation which will last into perpetuity. For example, in 1987, the Summitville Mine in Colorado was considered a state-of-the-art cyanide heap leach mine. Today, Summitville is considered to be the next Superfund site . . . costing taxpayers \$40,000 per day to maintain the site and up to \$60 million to clean up the environmental damage.

In order to protect Oregon's environment from this irresponsible industry, we are asking for your help. Here is what you can do:

- Get involved in the permitting process for Newmont Grassy Mountain Project. Oregon's Technical Review Team, represented by state permitting agencies, will need to hear from you. Your name can be added to the master list of interested individuals by writing to:

Oregon Dept. Of Geology and Mineral Industries
(DOGAMI)
1536 Queen Ave. S.E.
Albany, Oregon 97321

Please send \$5.00 to cover mailing costs. (*Editor's note: if you are on DOGAMI's master list, you should have received word of the formation of two advisory committees: the Project Coordinating Committee and the Technical Review Team. You may choose to receive agendas of these important committees' scheduled meetings.*)

- Become involved in the BLM review of the Newmont Grassy Mountain Project. Newmont is required to complete an EIS. The Draft EIS is expected to be completed in 1993. Please write to:

Ralph Heft
Resource Manager
Vale BLM
100 Oregon Street
Vale, Oregon 97918

- Join Oregon's Responsible Mining Initiative process. The 1991 Oregon Legislature passed laws regulating chemical mining. Although Oregon laws are considered stringent, they are not adequate. Therefore, it will be necessary to ask Oregon voters, through an initiative referendum, to pass new provisions such as refilling of the open pits when mining is completed. We will begin collecting signatures in August, 1993, in order to be included on the November, 1994 ballot. Should you wish to be involved, please write to:

Concerned Citizens for Responsible Mining
P.O. Box 957
Ontario, Oregon 97914

Oregon is the only western state to have been spared this method of mining. Even so, some believe that cyanide heap leach mining will come to Oregon and Newmont's proposal will be the first of many to consume the state. Will we allow Newmont Mining to conduct business in Oregon in the same tawdry fashion as Summitville has in Colorado? Our response must be *no* to business as usual by compelling Newmont and others to accept full responsibility for damage incurred as a result of their activity. The mining industry has reached its environmental credit limit and the bill must be paid. the buck stops here.

□



Catlow Valley Redband Survey Call

by Eric Schulz

Located on the west face of Steens Mountain are three streams which have been reported to contain a subspecies of Redband distinct from their cousins in the Blitzen.

Although their drainages are contiguous, the Catlow Valley Redband are said to be more closely related to Goose Lake and Fort Rock Redband than to those of neighboring Blitzen.

The three streams, Home, Three mile, and Skull Creeks, are part of the 220,000 A. South Steens Allotment which is grazed by Roaring Springs Ranch. This property recently changed hands. The new owners have convinced the BLM to put cattle back on the allotment one year earlier than the original owners had agreed. The cows are on the forage now. Concurrently, the BLM is taking wild horses off the allotment because of resource damage. Go figure.

The last time these streams were surveyed for stream condition and fish populations was twenty years ago. According to Wayne Bowers, S.E. Region ODFW Fisheries Biologist, "Habitat conditions are the same or worse. Livestock continue to hammer all three drainages."

Currently, the ODFW is conducting electrophoresis studies of these fish to determine genetic makeup.

ONDA is interested in finding out more about these fish, the measured condition of their habitat, and the implications of range (cow) management decisions on their well being. To bring the information up to date, I am leading a survey team into Skull, Three Mile, and Home Creeks several times this summer to perform the new STEP stream survey which is compatible with the R&E survey protocol and also used by the BLM fisheries staff to track stream condition.

Dates of the volunteer effort have not been set. I am looking for one to three folks who will be willing to learn the new protocol, commit six to ten days this summer and share in some extraordinary country. There may be some evening fishing excursions and hot spring searches as well.

Please contact Eric Schulz: 388-4291 as soon as possible so that we can begin to arrange our schedules.



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. Participants must pre-register.

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.



Take an ONDA Vacation

Aug. 30 to Sept. 3

Make your vacation count this summer by joining ONDA in some important conservation work. Camp out in the magnificent setting of Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge, help remove fences no longer needed for livestock management, hike and enjoy interesting campfire presentations by noted desert experts each night.

After two years of no commercial grazing and a good snowpack year, the refuge should be stunning. Space will be limited and you must pre-register. Cost \$75. For information and registration, call Alice Elshoff at 389-4566.

Editor's note: Last month we inadvertently ran a picture of a sage grouse lek from *The Birder's Handbook* by Paul Ehrlich, David Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye without noting the source. We apologize for that oversight.



ADC News

by Barbara Butler

The Animal Damage Control National EIS Draft is out and ONDA responded to it. It is business as usual. The preferred alternative is the ongoing program. Such a brick wall is difficult to penetrate. I feel there must be other approaches which will confront ADC more effectively. We have received the Vale District EA on predator control. We shall be reviewing it.

ADC itself is now the agency which is reviewing and making the decisions on the EAs and EISs of the National Forest Service and BLM. Unbelievable! The fox guarding the henhouse.

I personally have written Rep. Peter DeFazio to ask him to initiate some reform of ADC. The points emphasized are:

- That ADC has not accomplished its goals of lethal control; it is an ineffective program.
- That ADC is not cost effective.
- That ADC must become accountable to the agencies and the public for its policies.
- That the money used by ADC be accounted for in specific budgets.

ONDA will participate in a program initiated by Wildlife Damage Review of Tuscon, Az. Two by two, women in the west will request ADC to accompany ADC field personnel on their daily rounds. They will carry cameras, notebooks, and tape recorders to document ADC activities. The kind of things of interest to us are: trap lines, dispatching of trapped animals, M-44 poison for dens, frequency of checking traps, etc. This is to educate the public on ADC activities and take recent photos of their activities, as they say our photos are outdated.

Any woman wishing to take part in this activity please contact Barbara Butler. She does want a partner and additional pairs of women to assist.



Borax Lake Chub Loses Again

A recent decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) rejected our 1990 appeal of the BLM's permit to allow Anadarko Petroleum Corporation to drill and conduct flow tests on a geothermal lease site adjacent to Borax Lake-home to the endangered Borax Lake chub. Borax Lake is situated at the southern tip of the Alvord Basin, adjacent to Steens Mountain, within the boundaries of the proposed Steens Mountain National Park and Preserve. This caps the latest in conservationists attempts to bridle the BLM in their reckless abandon to allow geothermal development in the Alvord Basin.

The Borax Lake chub doesn't have the luxury of packing its bags and moving on to another job site like so many BLM employees. Isolated for thousands of years in a 10 acre, thermally spring fed lake, the chub lives in complete and total seclusion. While our argument that the decision to allow test drilling should be considered in the context of full production and its attendant consequences was dismissed in this case, one judge at least noted that in the event that Anadarko pursues development of the site for energy production, such action would require a full Environmental Impact Statement.

Continuing evidence seems to support our contention that disruption of the hydrogeology in the area could disrupt the tenuous living environment of the chub. In the event that the test data proves successful, no doubt Anadarko will proceed to the next phase of production testing and field development. Unfortunately, the IBLA and BLM take the short-sighted view that unless expressly prohibited, exploration and test drilling can proceed. While the IBLA suggests this information would be useful down the road in further deliberations of whether to proceed, we believe that the reverse logic should apply, that one should refrain when in doubt. Is 10 megawatts of energy really worth the loss of part of our biologic heritage? Evidently, the BLM and Anadarko thinks it is.



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ONDA Expands

The board of directors has moved to effect a major shift in ONDA's structure. As of July 1, ONDA will have on board a paid director. Bil Marlett, who has spent many dedicated volunteer hours on ONDA's behalf, and has served as the board's president since 1991 will fill the part-time position. He has been charged with the difficult tasks of stabilizing ONDA's precarious finances, implementing the board's policies and coordinating ONDA's activities.

After ONDA's excellent experience with a legal intern (Curtis Fisher) last summer, ONDA will have three legal interns this summer. One of the interns will be shared with Hell's Canyon Preservation Council, and will be working on salmon issues. The other interns will be assisting ONDA on its many other issues, including several pending appeals regarding the Steens Mountain area, water quality and grazing. Welcome aboard Anthony West, Jim Knapp and Steve Meier.

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Barbara Butler , ADC issues Sisters, OR
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Bighorn Sheep Print Available

ONDA is pleased to announce a new offering in its Membership Information (see back page). The 20x24 inch print of a Desert Bighorn offered with a contribution of \$250 is from an original oil by artist Jean Drescher. The print is on display at the ONDA office.

Jean is a native of the North American West who developed early in life an avid interest in wilderness and wildlife. Her view of wilderness is all-encompassing, placing man as a part of nature, no greater or less in value than any of the other parts.

Her drawings and paintings begin in expeditions into nature and evolve from a rich reserve of personal observations, photographs and literature. They reflect her intense interest in shapes and lighting. She says of the painting process, "Successful composition is a dynamic of interplay of interesting shapes and lighting. Lighting is the most challenging and rewarding aspect of painting because color is rarely what it appears to be. Rather, it is defined entirely by its relationship to all the colors by which it is surrounded. Lighting is the primary element creating the mood of a work of art."

ONDA is extremely grateful for this generous donation.