

Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the
Oregon
Natural Desert
Association

Volume 7, Number 2

Summer 1994

FROM THE OUTBACK

by Bill Marlett



Having previously ranted about Secretary of Interior Babbitt's grazing reforms, I will not dwell on the shortcomings of his most recent proposal. It does *not* contain a process for determining which public lands are *not* suitable for grazing (e.g., wilderness areas, riparian areas, etc.) and therefore doesn't even pass ONDA's threshold for taking it seriously.

The center piece of the rules—to be drafted by so-called working groups—will be "new" grazing standards for each state. I'm less concerned about finding good biocentric minded folks in Burns, Oregon or Elko, Nevada (although it won't be easy) than finding local people willing and able to speak their mind in the closed societies found in most small rural communities throughout the West. Free speech, dissent and debate are antithesis to the tight, political power structures woven in the social fabric of many small communities, most of which circle the wagons when any new thinking comes along.

Like it or not, we will have to live (and die) with Babbitt's new rules until politicians and the media stop subsidizing a way of life that undermines the ecological integrity of the land. Given the ubiquitous presence of the Marlboro

men along our highways and in the front pages of *Rolling Stone*, it may take awhile for the myth to die. But like cancer, the path of self-destruction is one way and terminal. ONDA's job, like Dr. Kevorkian, is to make the transition painless and swift.

On a brighter note, ONDA is going to "create" Oregon's first COW FREE

Desert. By law, state lands are required to provide income to the State's Common School Fund to support public schools.

Unfortunately, most state land has been leased for livestock grazing, impairing ecological values, polluting streams, and degrading fish and wildlife habitat. Worse, after the cost of administration and management, the State's grazing program provides virtually nothing to the School Fund!

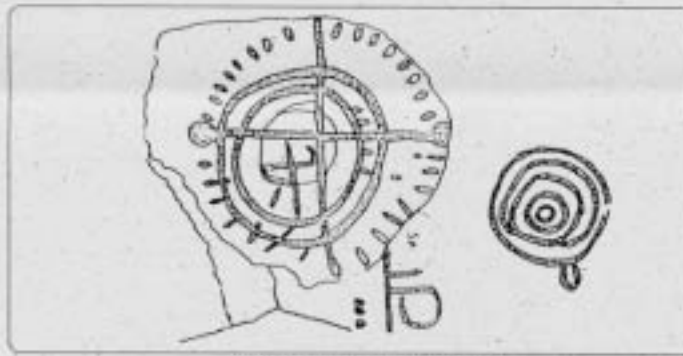
But not any more. We are going to stop this sweetheart deal for ranchers. With your help we will force the State into competitive bidding of state lands, lease the land, kick the cows off for good, and let nature restore the damage done by 100 years of abusive livestock grazing.

ONDA will "defend" the land with our volunteer corps of

wilderness rangers. Only activities compatible with wilderness such as scientific study, education and backcountry recreation will be allowed.

ONDA set up a Wilderness Fund with our first \$10,000 donation. Our goal is to endow the Fund with \$150,000 which will allow us to make the annual lease payment from the interest generated from the Fund. Our long term vision is to have all the Owyhee Canyonlands included in our High Desert Wilderness proposal as part of a one million-plus acre wilderness.

But before we lease the land, we need to change the rules. Send the Division of State Lands a letter (see *Action Alert*) supporting the option to allow state lands to be leased for "non use". *Thanks!*

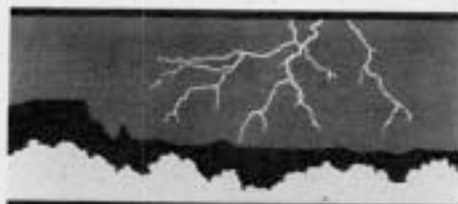


Owyhee Canyon Petroglyphs

desert wilderness in the Owyhee Canyonlands of SE Oregon. ONDA intends to lease 29,000 acres of state land in the heart of the Owyhee Plateau, bordering 26 miles of the Owyhee River, designated by Congress a "wild" river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

The Owyhee Canyonlands teem with antelope, mountain lions, bighorn sheep, mule deer and one of the highest densities of raptors in the U.S. The Owyhee slices through some of the wildest desert lands in the lower forty-eight with most of the adjacent BLM lands recommended as wilderness.

The state of Oregon owns nearly 650,000 acres of land in Oregon's High



Oregon Natural Desert Association

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Oregon Natural Desert Association is to promote the preservation, protection and rehabilitation of Oregon's arid-land environment and to educate the general population on the values of preserving the natural arid-land environment.

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- Design & Layout:: Hanneli Francis
- Editors: Alice Elshoff
- Bill Marlett

Readers will notice in the sidebar the addition of five new board members and one new advisory council member. ONDA welcomes their knowledge and commitment, and we will be featuring each one in future newsletters.

FROM THE DEN

by Elaine Rees



The past year has been a roller coaster ride for the hopes of conservationists involved with "rangeland" reform. Secretary Babbitt's first proposals gave us real hope that long-needed and long-awaited changes were in the offing. Then there was the back-pedaling on grazing fee increases, followed by capitulations to the livestock industry and the decision to keep control at the local level, thereby disenfranchising the majority of public land owners—the rest of the U.S. citizenry. The final (we hope) bad news was the removal of Jim Baca as head of the BLM. Baca was demon-

strating a dedication to good public land management and was serious about reforms that had been originally proposed. That was probably his downfall.

Disappointed but not deterred, ONDA will aggressively pursue the avenues open to us to force land management agencies to properly care for the lands under their charge. The National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and other federal legislation are tools we can and will use to see that our natural heritage is protected—that our land is healthy, our water clean, and the other life forms with which we share this planet are sustained. We can do no better than to pledge ourselves to the task of defending our Mother Earth.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

MAY 21-22

VOLUNTEER WORK WEEKEND AT MALHEUR REFUGE

Bring work gloves, join ONDA and Central Oregon Audubon for a weekend of work and fun. Take down unnecessary fencing and take a birding tour of the refuge with the biologist. Details 389-4566.

JUNE 9-12 HART MOUNTAIN REFUGE WORK PARTY

(Please note this is a corrected date from the last newsletter)

This four-day work session will allow you to explore this remote and beautiful refuge while giving valuable assistance. Come camp with us, remove fences, then soothe aching muscles in a natural hot springs. Time will be made for hiking and great nature watching. Contact 389-4566.

JUNE 10 BOARD MEETING

Board members please note this meeting at the hot springs campground at 1 p.m.

JUNE 28 - JULY 2 CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH DESERT WILDERNESS

A four-day van trip sponsored by Pacific N.W. Field Seminars, with assistance from ONDA. Catalogs at our office or contact 389-4566. (Credit available through P.S.U.)

JULY 17 - 23 FIELD TOUR/SEMINAR TO ABERT RIM

Sponsored by Lane County Community College, with assistance from ONDA. Contact Elaine Rees at 683-2147.

AUGUST 18 - 23 VAN TOUR/SEMINAR TO SOUTHEAST OREGON

Sponsored by Portland Parks and Recreation, with assistance from ONDA. Contact Mary Garrard at 235-2972.

AUGUST 27 ONDA BOARD MEETING, TBA



PORTRAIT OF A PLACE



John Day River National Salmon Refuge?

by Craig Lacy

The mainstem of the John Day River flows 284 miles from its headwaters in the Strawberry Mountains to its mouth at the Columbia River. The second longest free-flowing river in the lower 48 states, the John Day is home to wild runs of chinook salmon and summer steelhead, populations of bull, rainbow, redband and westslope cutthroat trout, whitefish, several introduced game species such as smallmouth bass and walleye, and many non-game fish including redband shiners and dace.

The 117-mile North Fork draws its water from the North Fork Wilderness Area and meets the mainstem at Kimberly. This fork is a primary steelhead and salmon highway and spawning area.

The 60-mile South Fork flows from the Aldrich and Ochoco Mountains and joins the mainstem at Dayville. A significant population of native Redbands isolated above Izee Falls are genetically different from all other trout populations in the basin.

Unlike the mostly-spring-fed Deschutes, the John Day is a runoff river and usually experiences peak flows (known to reach 42,800 cubic feet per second (cfs).) in April and May.

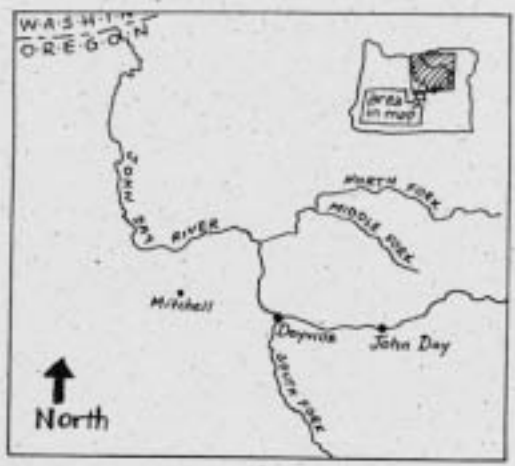
However, the river and its tributaries are severely over-appropriated and flows often drop to near 0 cfs in summer. Further, many of the 1,723 irrigation diversions along the river are unscreened, resulting in direct loss to fish populations. Low flows exacerbate the adverse impacts of roads, mining, timber harvests and livestock grazing.

With 95% of the land in the John Day basin grazed by livestock, most water quality problems such as high water temperatures, high silt levels, low oxygen levels and loss of riparian cover can be traced to grazing. (For a full discussion of the impact of cattle in Oregon, see *Waste of the West*, by Lynn Jacobs, or *Sacred Cows at the Public*

Trough, by Denzel and Nancy Ferguson.)

In 1971, ODFW released 82 smallmouth bass into the John Day near Service Creek. In 1972, another 160 were released near Picture Gorge. These

continued on page 6



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Study Reveals Impacts of Livestock Production on Wildlife

by Elaine Rees

A study commissioned by the Portland Audubon Society indicates that almost 200 animal species have been adversely affected by livestock production in the West. Native fishes have been most severely impacted, including approximately 50 special status species.

The study focused on animals listed or being considered for listing as federally threatened or endangered and those with special status in one or more of the western states. Livestock production is documented to be the primary factor in listings or special status for the following species: the black-footed ferret, Utah prairie dog, gray wolf, masked bobwhite, Lahontan cutthroat trout, Yaqui catfish, Yaqui chub, beautiful shiner, Cui-ui (a fish of the Truckee River basin), Kanab amber snail, and Bruneau hot spring snail. There are another 35 species for which livestock production is considered to be a significant factor in population declines. Sonoran pronghorn, grizzly bear, northern aplomado falcon, least Bell's vireo, Devil's Hole pupfish, and Chinook salmon are some of the species which fall into this category.

Livestock production adversely impacts native wildlife both directly and indirectly: grazing and trampling, suppression of fires (which results in the conversion of grasslands to shrub-dominated communities), water diversions and ground water depletion (impacting fish and certain invertebrate species, particularly snails), predator control measures, the conversion of habitat to cropland for the production of livestock feed and the transmission of disease from domestic to wild species.

In all, 192 animal species are documented or suspected to be negatively affected by livestock production in the West. According to the study, scientific documentation indicates that this activity is a primary or significant factor in the decline of 46 western wildlife species. Fifty-four percent of these are fish. There is also strong opinion that an additional 57 species are significantly impacted by livestock production, and it is suspected that another 71 species are negatively affected in all or in portions of their ranges. For 18 species, livestock grazing may have or have had at one time, a positive effect on habitat or populations.



How Your Tax Dollars Subsidize Agri-Business by Killing and Harassing America's Wildlife

REPORT AVAILABLE

Ben D. Deeble & Felice Stadler, Environmental Clinic Program, University of Montana. 1993



NETWORK COURTESY OF STEPHEN TRIMBLE'S THE SAGEBRUSH OZON

This well-documented 50-page report is a must for citizens who wish to influence our government's decisions on killing wildlife. It explains in concise language what the ADC program does, who it serves and how it gets its money.

For instance, in 1991, ADC spent over \$38 million in the 11 western states. While the agency likes to say that it protects human health and safety (reducing bird hazards around airports and controlling rabies) and protects natural resources such as endangered species, the fact is that less than 8% of their budget goes to such projects. The bulk of ADC's budget, a whopping 70%, is spent to make the land safe for livestock. Contrast this with the fact that only 2% of all livestock losses are caused by predators.

This report makes it clear that wildlife is held in the public trust so that the shooting of cougars and the poisoning of prairie dogs represents a "taking" of public property. Therefore, all citizens have a right to influence both the federal and state appropriations of these public funds spent by a public agency to kill the public's wildlife.

In Oregon, it is worth noting that while the bulk of funds (98%) come from public appropriations, 75% of the work is done on private land. Even the remaining 25% of work done on public

lands benefits private agri-business since a portion of this work is done on BLM and USFS grazing allotments.

The report ends with a clear explanation of the ways in which citizens can interact to affect the ADC program. Copies of this document can be obtained from:

Predator Project
PO Box 6733
Bozeman, Montana 59771
phone/fax: (406) 587-3389

Please include a \$10 donation for the report—it is well worth it!

OPEN THE DESERT

by Michele Penner

*At first glance the desert is sparse,
Speeding through it,
It's aridness emanates meagerness.
But pay sharp attention.
Explore. Look closely.
Details grow.
Life expands into intricate patterns
Of angles and colors.*

*The desert is full of surprises.
Hidden beauty.
Night life that sparkles under moon and stars.
Sweet scents that enfold the breath.
Watchful eyes.
Patience.
Haggard heights and deceptive distances.
Wildflowers that spring into life
With rain's gentle persuasion.
Silence.*

*The desert is made of vastness.
It flickers and hums
And plays with our senses.
It is a place to fling our thoughts
And absorb our reflections.*

Kill the Cowboy

By Sharman Apt Russell.
1993. Addison-Wesley
Publishing Company



"This book offers no simple answer," states the author in the opening sentence. A rather surprising beginning in light of the imperative title. Neither a clarion call to commit the ultimate in ecotage nor even a definitive argument to expunge the romanticized figure of the buckaroo (and therefore the domineering, exploitative machismo that has been revered in our culture), this book is actually a juxtaposition of portraits of people involved in the Battle of Mythology of the New West (the subtitle). Included are a ranching couple, a professional environmentalist, a land manager, a woman who travels with a wolf, Native Americans and a goat walker. Russell also makes reference to eco-feminism, creation spirituality and cowboy poetry. This is a book one can easily read in two or three evenings and, while not particularly profound, is poetic. Desert activists will recognize some of our own local personalities.

The Desert's Past: A Natural Prehistory of the Great Basin

by Donald K. Grayson. 1993.
The Smithsonian Institution Press.

Three hundred pages of text dealing with the various definitions of the Great Basin (hydrographic, physiographic, floristic and ethnographic); Ice Age influences; Pleistocene lakes, glaciers, flora and fauna, the Holocene era; Great Basin archaeology and the historic archaeology of the Donner Party add up to more than just a few nights of light reading. This book is definitely of the reference type. Oregon areas covered include Connley Caves, Alkali Lake, Steens Mountain, Fort Rock basin, Goose Lake, Silver Lake, Klamath Lake, and the Chewaucan Lake basin. If your local library accepts purchase requests, this would be a good suggestion.

With the addition of this column, we intend to introduce in each newsletter ONDA people of great importance to our organization and desert conservation. For the next several issues we will highlight our Advisory Council who represent a great range and depth of knowledge and commitment on which we have come to depend.



RON CRONIN, a professional photographer who makes his home in Portland, is a seventh generation Oregonian. He recently brought his slide presentation entitled, "The Poet in the Desert: C.E.S. Wood and the Landscape of Legacy" to Bend as a benefit for ONDA. He will repeat the presentation in Eugene later this spring.

In the past, Ron has given generously of his time and talents to the Friends of the Gorge in their struggle to bring protection to Columbia Gorge. He and his wife published two calendars and a poster and even went to DC (the supreme sacrifice) to help lobby for the Gorge Bill. His large format images have also traveled to DC with ONRC and the Ancient Forest Alliance to confront Members of Congress with the stunning reality of Oregon's Ancient Forests.

These acts reflect Ron's deep commitment to the preservation of nature for its own sake. In his own words: "I feel strongly that one should pay one's dues, or rent, to live on this land and that is one reason why I do so much for various environmental groups. I think the primary value of my work is to use it to show people just how beautiful and spiritually valuable healthy environments are. People need to gain an emotional link to the land if they are to be moved to protect it. Through my photographs, people are confronted with nature alone, without the usual distractions of the photographer's persona imposed upon the scene...If the viewers feel that they have 'been there' and actually experienced what is in the photographs, then I have done my job."

JOY BELSKY is Staff Ecologist with the Oregon Natural Resources Council, where she reviews the scientific adequacy of resource management plans and develops the scientific basis for protecting natural ecological systems. She has a B.A. from Smith College, a Masters of Forest Ecology from the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and a Ph.D. in plant ecology from the University of Washington. Prior to joining ONRC she was Research Assistant Professor at Syracuse University and senior research associate at Cornell University, where she investigated the ecology of grazing systems and the dynamics and ecosystem properties of tropical savannas in Tanzania and Kenya. She has also taught graduate-level ecology courses at Cornell University and carried out ecological studies in alpine and subalpine meadows in the Cascade and Olympic Mountains, coniferous plantations and mixed deciduous forest in South Carolina and Tundra in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska.

It is this rigorous training and wealth of experience that we have come to depend on as we endeavor to bring knowledge to bear on the vexing problems of how to manage for sustainable, healthy desert ecosystems. The scientific discipline she brings to our advisory council helps us challenge many long-held but often erroneous ideas about how desert ecosystems function.



ONDA Interns Hail from the South

All three of ONDA's current legal interns are southern transplants. Fear not, though, for these transplants hail from the Deep South, not Southern California.

Kris Balliet and **Jack Sterne** are both from South Carolina, while **Beth Winkowski** strayed from Georgia. All three are current or recent students at Northwestern School of Law at Lewis and Clark College in Portland.

Kris Balliet has been Bill's "point person" in Portland for the past year, recruiting Lewis and Clark students to ONDA. Kris is "in love with rivers" and has played a major organizational and research role in ONDA's Clean

Water Act, no-cows lawsuit. Kris will graduate in May and spends as much time as possible at a llama ranch in Sisters, which she caretakes with her partner Jack.

Jack Sterne finished his coursework last December and will graduate with Kris in May. Until then, Jack is spending his remaining time in seclusion at the llama ranch enjoying the serenity of browsing elk and singing coyotes out his front door.

He became involved with ONDA through his work on the board of the Northwest Environmental Defense Center in Portland where he helped write ONDA's appeal for the Donner und Blitzen Wild and Scenic River plan. He also organized a team of students to write the appeal of the Deschutes National Forest's decision to allow a massive system of off-road-vehicle

trails on the Fort Rock District, adjacent to BLM's Millican Valley, 20 miles east of Bend.

Although they love Oregon's High Desert and may return someday, Jack and Kris are headed to Palmer, Alaska in June to practice law and continue their environmental activism in the great North Country.

Beth Winkowski is a second-year law student who will take over Kris' role as student organizer next year. Beth, a graduate from Notre Dame University, has done excellent work on the John Day River lawsuit. Along with Kris and Jack, Beth is committed to kicking cows off our public lands. If these three interns are any example, Lewis and Clark, ONDA, and the Deep South will continue to produce an excellent litter of High Desert rats for years to come.

fish spread quickly through the river.

Of the six life histories of native anadromous ocean-going fish that existed before European settlement, only two life histories remain. The four extirpated life histories spawned in the now-severely-damaged lower river and accounted for over 85% of all fish in the river.

Historically, 100,000 or more spring chinook returned to spawn in the John Day Basin each year. Today, less than 3,000 return.

Spring chinook migrate into the John Day in April, reach holding pools near spawning grounds by late June, and spawn in late August or September. During low water years, fish may encounter passage problems, inadequate flows, and intolerably high water temperatures. The river is closed to chinook fishing.

Fall chinook may be extinct in the John Day Basin. Anecdotal reports of recent catches in the lower part of the river nurture hopes that some remnant populations exist and can be recovered.

The John Day steelhead run is genetically one of the wildest runs in the state. Although, 500,000 hatchery fish were released in the 1960's and there is a definite problem of stray hatchery fish coming into the John Day from other hatcheries on the Columbia.

Steelhead migrate up the Columbia in May and June and reach spawning areas on the John Day by mid-June. Eggs incubate for approximately one month before hatching; juveniles grow for two to three years before migrating to the ocean.

On a good year, 30,000 steelhead will return. On a bad year, 3,000. Last year was a bad year and emergency fishing regulations were put into effect. Much of this decline can be traced to unscreened irrigation diversions, a prime factor in young fish mortality.

We have waterfowl refuges, marine sanctuaries, and antelope and elk refuges. However, we do not have refuges to protect our freshwater fishery resources and their evolutionary heritage for future generations. We desperately need such a reserve system for salmon and other cold-water species.

ACTION ALERT

Letters Urgently Needed! Let the state lands board hear from you on two important matters. Rest assured that they are hearing from the industries involved!

COMMENTS DUE BY MAY 13TH

State Rangeland Leases

The State contracts out its 650,000 acres of land east of the Cascades to raise money for the Common School Fund. Not much, it seems, less than \$50,000 per year, since the only activity allowed is grazing.

It is time to end this anachronism and put this land out for competitive awarding of leases to be used for practices that not only generate more revenue, but turn around the destruction caused by grazing. Groups like ONDA are willing to lease these lands at a higher rate for purposes such as:

- Wilderness
- Water quality
- Watershed values
- Fish and wildlife habitat
- Ecological and scientific research
- Native plant & seed production (to bring down the costs of restoration work)
- Undeveloped, primitive recreation

Make your voice heard as part of the "non-use movement"!

Support Option 3 of the draft rules. This option allows competitive bidding and uses other than grazing. The rules aren't perfect, so you may want to comment on the following as well:

1. The rules currently allow the previous rancher to match the high bid of a non grazing applicant. This is patently unfair and contrary to any notion of fair and open competitive bidding. Ranchers should not be allowed to match the high bid.
2. The rules should designate which lands, if any, are **suitable** for grazing. Many state lands are being permanently degraded by continued livestock grazing and should be rested.
3. The rules should be livestock neutral. No preference should be given to prior lease holders or livestock operators.

SEND LETTERS TO:
Division of State Lands
775 Summer St., NE
Salem, OR 97310

The far-sighted anglers who founded the Izaak Walton League succeeded in establishing a national fish refuge for smallmouth bass on the upper Mississippi on June 7, 1924. Seventy years later no new national fish refuges have been established.

Why not a John Day National Salmon Refuge?

ONDA is advocating this idea for the John Day Basin to restore the tribal and

sport salmon fishery, restore the integrity of the watershed and to provide a model for similar refuges in the Columbia Basin—perhaps the entire basin!

ONDA will be working with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Indian Reservation (whose ceded lands include the John Day Basin) and other conservation groups, to make such a refuge a reality.