

Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the
Oregon
Natural Desert
Association



Volume 7, Number 1

Winter/Spring 1994

FROM THE OUTBACK

by Bill Marlett



You may have read in the newspaper that Secretary of Interior Babbitt is back-pedaling on Rangeland Reform '94. He is now proposing that we turn management of our public lands over to working groups of ranchers, concerned citizens and conservationists. These working groups, predicated on the principle of consensus between group members, will empower people to do good for the land and make us all winners. We want it all. No one likes change, but working groups represent a stage of denial in our collective inability to confront ecological reality.

ONDA has been a part of similar "working groups" in the past. If anything, they give credibility to the notion that cows are part of the natural landscape of the West and do little for the health of the land. Therefore, we have chosen not to be a part of any working group whose purpose is to better manage cows. This raises a dilemma: if we don't participate, we have no effect on the process. On the other hand, by participating, we legitimize a process designed to maintain the status quo. It's a no win situation.

Secretary Babbitt also wants local involvement. This makes for great sound bites in cowboy country, but it is be-

cause of 100 years of land management dominated by local interests that we now have ecological breakdown on the arid lands of the West. Secretary Babbitt should be more concerned about giving the land a voice along with the majority of Americans who have never had a chance to say whether they even want livestock on our public lands.

More to the point, a recent national survey found that **one out of three surveyed (45% in Oregon) agree that livestock grazing should be banned on federal rangelands while nearly half of the respondents (43% in Oregon) agree that livestock should at least be prohibited from wilderness areas.**

Can working groups be successful? Only if all the "sacred" cows are on the table. The public has a legitimate interest in deciding *where* grazing should *not* occur. Cows in wilderness areas? How about in national parks, wildlife refuges, salmon bearing streams, riparian habitats or habitats for threatened species?

Can Secretary Babbitt reform grazing on our public lands? Not likely. Grazing reform centered on consensus based working groups will fail for two reasons:

1. It assumes that cows are part of the natural fabric of our western landscapes.

2. It does not accept as a legitimate interest those

who want to end livestock grazing, if not on all public lands, on lands unsuitable for grazing.

We should ask Secretary Babbitt to kill Rangeland Reform in '94 (or make it a part of the President's welfare reform initiative). The political reality is that the substance of any grazing reform will be bartered away in the Senate for needed votes on President Clinton's Health Care initiative.

Public opinion is growing for an end to the abuse of our public lands. The longer dogged ranchers and bullheaded western Senators maintain the status quo, the greater will be the momentum to throw the cows off public lands for good.

We should wait for the real thing. □



Petroglyph from Hart Mt. Antelope Preserve

FROM THE DEN

by Alice Elshoff

Looking back over ONDA's six-year existence, it is amazing to see what we've been able to accomplish as a small but highly dedicated group of desert activists. While SMALL can be effective when pressuring land management agencies to comply with environmental laws, BIGGER will be necessary to influence our legislators and the public at large toward creating our vision of a High Desert Ecosystem that is diverse, healthy and sustainable.

So, 1994 will see a push toward increasing membership which we have simply been too busy to accomplish. With the help of a grant from the Lazar Foundation, membership development will join the ranks as another of our number one priorities.

As we grow, efficiency of operation becomes even more important (our

budget has always been lean and mean) and so we urge all of our members to join the Desert Defense Fund. You will receive a brochure explaining how an automatic monthly deduction from your checking account can come directly to ONDA. This is the most efficient way to keep us going, saving us many dollars in printing and mailing membership reminders, as well as saving you the nuisance of more mail. It also gives us a known monthly income which certainly takes a lot of guess work out of budgeting. I had my doubts about how I would like this but have found it to be painless, legal, moral and non-fattening. How can you lose...give it a try. □



ANNOUNCEMENTS

HELP!

There must be someone out there that "does numbers!" ONDA is in need of a new treasurer. Needed is someone who lives in Bend to co-sign checks under the supervision of the board, receive and receipt moneys, prepare an account of current financial status for quarterly board meetings and make monthly deposits. Please give us a call, Bill Marlett at 385-6908 or Alice Elshoff at 389-4566 if you would like to fulfill this valuable service.

FEB. 9TH, 7PM DESCHUTES NATIONAL FOREST OFFICE, BEND

Please turn out for up-to-date information on the Abert Lake ACEC plan to designate this important area an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

FEB. 11, 7PM BEND, HITCHCOCK AUDITORIUM

ONDA is delighted to host the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance for a showing of their professionally produced slide show, *Imagine Wilderness*. Please join us for an evening exploring the Kaiparowits Plateau, the free-flowing Virgin River and the Wingate and Navajo Canyon country. Call for dates and locations of this slide presentation in Eugene and Corvallis the same week, 385-6908 or 389-4566.

FEB. 16, 7PM

Mining Initiative informative slide show. At the C.O. Environmental Center, 16 NW Kansas Street, in Bend. See related article page 4.

APRIL 29 - MAY 1

15th Annual Desert Conference at Malheur. Squirrel away this date now because another exciting conference is in the works. Brochures out in early March.



continued on page 6

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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ACTION ALERT

Leslie Gulch ACEC Draft Plan Unveiled

BLM finally kicks the cows out

Leslie Gulch, one of the many magnificent side canyons of the Owyhee River, is dominated by spectacular geologic formations. Honey-combed cliffs, outcrops and spires, are a result of differential weathering of 15 million-year-old tuff, in some places 2,000 feet thick.

This combination of geology and unusual soils supports the highest concentration of rare plant species in eastern Oregon, five of which are candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Leslie Gulch provides excellent habitat for bighorn sheep, a Category Two candidate listing. These desert beauties have been successfully reintroduced after being extirpated by domestic sheep diseases in the early 1900s.

The 11,900 acre Leslie Gulch Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) was identified in 1983 to protect these three relevant and important values. The proposed draft plan will provide man-

COMMENTS URGENTLY NEEDED BEFORE FEB. 10TH

agement guidance for the next ten to twenty years.

This is a good plan and it is important that BLM gets your support! The ranchers will be organizing to fight this precedent setting decision and will undoubtedly appeal the BLM's decision. ONDA will make sure BLM doesn't back off.

Please write a short letter today:

- Thank them for a well thought-out plan
- Support Alternative D, the preferred alternative, with two additions:

1. that cattle grazing be removed from the entire ACEC as suggested in Alternative A
2. that the entire ACEC be withdrawn from all mineral development

Direct your request for the plan & your comments to:

Ralph Heft, Malheur Resource Area Manager
Vale District BLM
100 Oregon St.
Vale, OR 97918 □

Air Force to Bomb Owyhee River

COMMENTS ARE DUE BY FEBRUARY 9TH

ONDA has joined with our Idaho neighbors, conservationists, ranchers and Native Americans in opposing a new Air Force Bombing Range in southwestern Idaho.

Impacts would include: 25% increase in over flights, exercises of up to 80 aircraft at a time and dropping of 25,000 training bombs annually. The Department of Defense has stated in GAO Report #93-94 that the Big Springs Range is not necessary.

The first step toward securing this project involves a land transfer to exchange parcels of Idaho State Lands with the BLM. This attempt to circumvent oversight by the U.S. Congress did not escape notice by Oregon members of Congress. To their credit, Peter DeFazio, Elizabeth Furse, Mike Kopetski, Bob Smith and Ron Wyden have urged

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to reject the land transfers so that Congress can have a proper discussion of the need for and environmental consequences of an expanded bombing range in the Owyhee canyonlands, which will affect parts of Southeast Oregon.

The Proposed Idaho Training Range Draft EIS is available from:

Public Affairs Office
Mountain Home Air Force Base
Idaho, 83648
ph: (208) 828-6800

A good first step in opposing this project would be a letter to Sec. Bruce Babbitt urging him to reject this land transfer.

Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240 □

Behind National Gold Mining

by Larry Tuttle

Gold production in the United States increased from one million ounces to ten million ounces in 1991. Nearly all of this gold was produced by open-pit cyanide heap leach processes on public land. The equivalent of 1,500,000 pickup loads of earth will be moved at Grassy Mountain, Oregon's first proposed cyanide heap leach mine, to yield one pickup load of gold. An unfilled 100 acre open pit 2,000 feet across and 1,000 feet deep will be left behind when the mine closes after an estimated eight-year life. Tailings and heap leach piles will cover another 400 acres of the 2,000 acre project site on federal land. Eighty-five percent of the gold mined at Grassy Mountain and other similar mines across the West will be used for jewelry manufacture in places like Hong Kong.

The damage from cyanide process gold mining — to land and water, to wildlife, to community stability, to human health — continues despite mining industry assurances that new practices and technologies make the process safe. For example, Colorado's

Summitville Mine, touted as a state-of-the-art operation when it opened in 1986, has already closed because of extensive cyanide leaks and a spill which killed all aquatic life in 17 miles of the Alamosa River.

Concerned Citizens for Responsible Mining, a grassroots organization founded by Gary and Carolyn Brown in Malheur County, Oregon, has documented 130 cyanide spills and leaks in the period from 1986 to 1992. Because spills and leaks are "self reported" by the mining companies, more discharges to the environment are suspected.

Toxic wastes are created during the entire cyanide mining process. In addition to gold, cyanide also leaches out heavy metals such as arsenic, mercury, and cadmium which collect in leach ponds or remain in heap leach piles. Liners under heap leach piles and toxic ponds have frequently torn and leaked

tal damage from the 557,650 abandoned mine sites the Mineral Policy Center estimates already exist.

Federal land managers claim that they are powerless against abuses. Most agencies interpret the 1872 Mining Law to mean that they cannot say "no" to mining. The Oregon BLM office recently said as much about a

proposed bentonite mine in its environmental analysis: "(We do) not have the right to deny these actions" except when they would jeopardize threatened or endangered species or result in "unnecessary or undue" degradation of federal lands. Unfortunately, the 1872 law does not recognize any damage caused by mining as "undue or unnecessary." Federal land managers are both unwilling and unable to disagree. As a result, states are left with the primary responsibility for environmental protection for public and private lands, water, wildlife, and human health within their borders.

Many states have not adopted laws; or, like Oregon, have found that existing laws fall far short of fully protecting the environment. Federal legislation is pending to improve the 1872

General Mining Law. However, even if the strongest version of the law were passed, most environmental standards will be left to states. Many legislators are unwilling to revisit the mining issue, particularly when the Oregon law is often described "as the strongest in the nation." Additionally, the influence of the "wise use" movement on rural legislators is palpable although more than 90% of Oregon voters support stronger mining standards, such as those described in the proposed mining initiative.

Oregon's mining law is often cited

OUTLINE OF THE OREGON CHEMICAL MINING INITIATIVE

- 1. Prevents harm to the environment, wildlife, and human health.**
 - Insures no release of chemicals to the environment through statutory requirement for an early-warning leak detection and triple liners under cyanide collection pools and pads.
 - Requires containment of all solutions in tanks and the exclusion of wildlife from contact with all chemical solutions and waste waters.
 - Requires use of best available technology for all aspects of mining operation.
- 2. Restores self-sustaining ecosystem following mine closures.**
 - Requires backfilling of mining pits and the restoration of original contours and vegetation.
 - Requires the restoration of surface waterways and subsurface aquifers.
 - Requires posting of financial security for perpetual site care and monitoring following closure.
- 3. Requires benefiting parties to pay full cost of mining.**
 - Repeals tax credit for liners and other devices.
 - Provides for collection of a Chemical Mining License Fee to be paid into trust funds for costs to communities caused by rapidly changing employment following mine closure and for habitat restoration.
- 4. Provides for monitoring and enforcement of mining statutes.**
 - Allows agencies to bring enforcement actions on their own motion.
 - Provides for strict liability
 - Requires state agencies to make a finding, as a condition of issuing a permit, that the applicant's mining history does not pose a risk to the land, water, and citizens.

into the ground. Current federal and state rules do not assure detoxification or removal of hazardous wastes. Furthermore, state and federal regulators have no history of closed cyanide mines to determine what problems may arise 10, 50 or 100 years following closure.

When mining operations cease, mining companies are not required to fill the huge pits or to provide site monitoring. Acids or other toxic materials accumulating in the water at the bottom of pits, or in mining spoils, become part of the continuing legacy of environmen-

as the nation's strongest but its primary strengths are standards such as coordinated permit processing and public comment. Environmental and wildlife protections in the law are general statements.

The implementing administrative rules adopted by five state agencies vary widely and are relatively easy to change or to erode during implementation. Substantive environmental standards such as requiring backfilling of pits, now left unfilled on both public and private land, are omitted from the statute and rule.

Other standards, such as the requirement for triple liners and early-warning leak detection systems under leach pads are not required by the statute.



What You Can Do

66,771 valid signatures have to be collected by July 8, 1994 to get the measure on the November 1994 ballot. What can an activist or voter do to insure passage of the proposed mining initiative? Some straight forward options:

1. Sign the initiative petition
2. Come by the Central Oregon Environmental Center to pick up a petition or call/write STOP'M to have one sent, and gather signatures of 24 friends or relatives who are registered voters.
3. Arrange to have a speaker to explain the initiative at a meeting of a group to which you belong, or at a house party in your home.
4. Make a contribution to the political action committee supporting the initiative.
5. Call Michael Carrigan of STOP'M at ONRC at (503) 223-9007 x206, or Gary Brown, Concerned Citizens for Responsible Mining, (503) 889-5255.

STOP'M, P.O. Box 40326, Portland, OR 97240



MINING REFORM AND YOU

by Elaine Rees

In December of 1992 Galactic Resources Ltd., a Canadian mining company, filed for bankruptcy and left the state of Colorado with a polluted mine site that will cost U.S. taxpayers over \$6 million to clean up. This disaster was the result of a poorly constructed mine, a financially unstable company, an inadequate reclamation bond, and a crippled state regulatory agency.

Currently a similar scenario is unfolding in Idaho. The Stibnite Mine near Yellow Pine has already leaked cyanide into a tributary of the South Fork Salmon River. Department of Environmental Quality officials note that the cyanide holding ponds are undersized and that pond liners are substandard. Two major spills of diesel fuel have also occurred since 1988 at this site. The current owner of the mine, the Dakota Mining Corporation, is in a precarious financial situation with a capital deficit of \$23.1 million. If the company goes broke, it leaves a mere \$450,000 bond for cleanup of the site.

The Mineral Policy Center, which has been spearheading the movement to reform the 1872 Mining Law and which reports on the successes and failures of the mining industry in the realm of environmental responsibility, points out emphatically that it is up to the American public to demand higher standards and diligent enforcement of those standards to avoid future mining catastrophes.

That means us, folks; it is not enough to believe mining reform is necessary. We must make it happen. Cyanide heap leach mining is on its way to Oregon's public lands. ONDA is working with STOP'M (Stop Toxic Open Pit Mining) to gather signatures to amend chemical mining in Oregon to ensure that any toxic open pit mining in the state will be safe for the land, the water, and the citizens of Oregon. Do your part — dedicate time or financial support to make mining reform a reality for Oregon and the West. □

ANNOUNCEMENT

Environmental Focus in Signature Drive to change the Oregon Constitution



The Oregon Plan for Environmental Rights (OPER) is now circulating a ballot initiative to amend the Oregon Constitution to require that:

"No state action shall unnecessarily infringe on the right of the people to a workplace and environment protected from pollutants harmful to human health" and "No state action shall unnecessarily infringe on the right of current and future generations to the benefits of sustainable natural ecosystems, free from significant impairment."

The petition drive must submit 89,028 valid signatures of registered

Oregon voters by July 1994.

The amendment would elevate environmental rights to the same status as freedom of religion, free speech, and other constitutional rights. ONDA fully supports the OPER. To obtain petitions or help in any way call Bill Boyer, (503) 548-6544, or Lanny Sinkin (503) 231-9694. Or contact:

Oregon Plan for Environmental Rights
P O Box 14278
Portland, OR 97214

Editor's Note: Bill Boyer and members of OPER are available for gatherings to explain and discuss the initiative. □

Geothermal Threat still Looms at Borax Lake

Portland recently announced its General Electric Company (PG & E) is negotiating with Anadarko Petroleum (the holder of the geothermal lease at Borax Lake) to develop the geothermal springs at Borax Lake into a 21.1 megawatt (MW) power plant.

Developing this facility, besides being financially risky, may cause significant changes to the Borax Lake ecosystem and the demise of the Borax Lake chub.

As you may recall from our last newsletter, the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) rejected ONDA's appeal of the BLM decision allowing Anadarko Petroleum Corporation to drill and conduct flow tests on public land

adjacent to Borax Lake. While disappointing, the IBLA decision did conclude that any further development to enter into production would require an EIS, leaving us in a firm position for future action.

In October, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) announced the purchase of the ten-acre lake and surrounding 310 acres of private land. TNC has a long history of interest in the fish and wildlife of this area.

Two rare snail species as well as the endangered borax chub, *gila boraxobius*, have adapted to the hot mineral water as Lake Alvord receded and vanished over the last 10,000 years. The lake also serves as an important stopover for many uncommon migratory birds.

Geologically, Borax Lake is unusual in that it resides not at the low point in the basin but sits atop a 25-foot mound. Recent studies have concluded that this mound is not a construction of sodium

borate as had been thought, but a consolidation of silica residue from microalgae which bloom near hot springs. Super saturation of this silica hardened into sinter, which is highly resistant to the forces of erosion. The mound, therefore, represents not a construction

but an erosional remnant. This means that the present lake level was once the bottom of Lake Alvord and that 18 feet of old lake bottom has been lost to erosion.

Please write to PG & E President and CEO Dick Reiten, and let him know that PG & E shouldn't be involved in a project that threatens the extinction of a species. Send a copy of your letter to Congressman Peter D'Fazio and Senator Mark Hatfield as well.

PG & E
121 SW Salmon St.
Portland, OR 97204



'PG & E is negotiating...to develop the geothermal springs at Borax Lake into a 21.1 MW power plant.'

ANNOUNCEMENTS continued from page 2

MAY 6-9

John Day River Float Trip. Enjoy four days and three nights drifting through wild canyons included in the Oregon High Desert Protection Act. Learn about the natural history of this river, fish for small mouth bass and do something good for ONDA. Craig Lacy, owner of Whitewater and Wild Fish, is offering this fully catered trip as an ONDA fundraiser. Everything provided. \$595 adult and \$495 for 18 yrs. or younger. Call 389-4566 for information. Limited to first ten reservations.

MAY 21, 22

Malheur Refuge Work Weekend. Join ONDA and Central Oregon Audubon for a joint work weekend to remove fences that are unneeded and hazardous to wildlife. Some work, some play, lots of fun. Call 389-4566 for information.

JUNE 22- 26

Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge Work Week. Reserve the date now, call 389-4566 for details.

WANTED

Do you have an old computer (Mac preferred, but PC okay) you're not using anymore? ONDA would love to take it off your hands. Call Bill at 385-6908. □

Animal Damage Control Changes its Spots

ADC is now wanting to be known as Wildlife Services. Don't be fooled. The 30+ million tax dollars that fund this federal program still go for killing predators, primarily to protect the livestock industry.

One glaringly bad example of discrimination against wildlife species based on what they eat is the use of airplanes to shoot wolves in Alaska. Wolves are paying the price for hunters' desires for artificially increased caribou numbers.

To his credit, Peter DeFazio has introduced HR 1391 which would amend the Airborne Hunt Act to prohibit the use of aerial hunting except for protection of threatened and endangered species (T & E) and unless authorized by the Secretary of the Interior, and certain congressional committees. The Bill has been referred to the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee.

Please write asking for support and for hearings this year on HR 1391. Copies to your congressional delegation are always helpful.

Direct letters to:

Gerry Studds
Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee
1334 Longworth House Building
Washington DC, 20515 □

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Gerry Studds
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1334 Longworth House Building
Washington DC, 20515 □

ONDA Membership Form

YES!! PLEASE SIGN ME UP WITH ONDA

High Desert Defense Fund monthly contribution amount: (enclose a voided check)

\$5 \$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 other _____

Annual contribution amount:

\$25 \$35 \$50 \$100 \$250 other _____

**MAKE CHECKS
PAYABLE
AND MAIL TO :**

**ONDA
16 NW Kansas St.
BEND, OR 97701**

- \$25 donation: receive the map: A Visitor's Guide to Oregon's High Desert
- \$50 donation: receive a Ron Cronin's High Desert poster (Steens Mountains)
- \$100 donation: choice of books: *The Sagebrush Ocean*, *Waste of the West*, *Hole in the Sky*
- \$250 donation: receive a lithograph print of the desert bighorn sheep



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Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

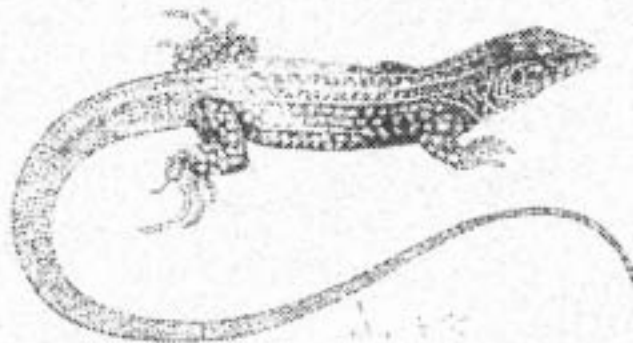
Phone # _____ Signature _____

ONDA Order Form

ITEM DESCRIPTION	COLOR (1st & 2nd choice)	SIZE	QUANTITY	ITEM PRICE	TOTAL
TOTAL					

CHECK MAILING LABEL FOR YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION DATE

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16 NW Kansas
Bend, OR 97701



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