

Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the

Oregon
Natural Desert
Association

Volume 8, Number 1

Spring/Summer '95

ONDA TO SPONSOR 17TH ANNUAL DESERT CONFERENCE

"BREAKING BARRIERS/NEW VISIONS"

Mark April 27 - 30 on your calendars now for Desert Conference XVII, sponsored this year by none other than the fastest growing environmental group in Oregon...the Oregon Natural Desert Association! Yes, our membership has tripled in the past year, and this means more of you will be wanting to attend Desert Conference. And this year's conference promises to be an exciting one, with many influential activists, scientists, and legal and political experts on the agenda.

The theme of Desert Conference XVII is **Breaking Barriers/New Visions**. Of course the biggest breakthrough we all hope for is the introduction of the Oregon High Desert Protection Act. Although last November's elections radically changed the political complexion in Washington DC, ONDA and other sponsors of OHDP are looking forward to a decisive move by members of our Congressional delegation. With luck, Representative Peter DeFazio will be able to break loose from the intensity of politics on the Hill to join us beneath Coyote Butte at Malheur Field Station for a true celebration of the desert.

This year we will be honored with Native American speakers who will share their perspective on how we respect the land. Each morning there will be a blessing offered by Rudy Clements of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Indian Reservation and member of the ONDA Board of Directors. There will also be a Native American Food Preparation workshop (preceded by a Friday gathering trip), as well as ceremonial drumming on Saturday evening.

SPEAKERS

We are extremely fortunate to have **Jim Baca** accept our invitation to speak at

the Desert Conference. Mr. Baca has a long history of involvement with Western environmental issues. In the 1970s he gained high respect in New Mexico

for his political and environmental news reporting. As New Mexico State Land

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PHOTO BY DAN SHERMAN

Morning Mist in Hart Canyon, Hart Mountain

FROM THE OUTBACK

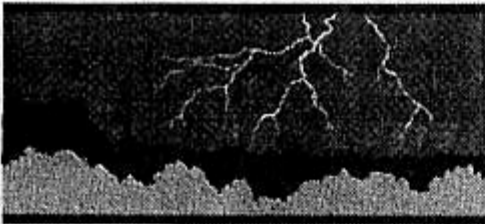
by Bill Marlett

For over 100 years, state lands have been used exclusively by ranchers for livestock grazing. Last year, the State Land Board decided to change the way it manages these lands by allowing competitive bidding on the state's 600,000 acres of land in Oregon's high desert. Further, the Board opened the bidding process to the public who might want to lease state land in order to protect fish and wildlife habitat or restore water quality instead of graze livestock.

In response to the new rule, the Oregon Natural Desert Association planned to bid on 60,000 acres in the Owyhee Canyonlands, a vast desert landscape of grasslands and sculptured canyons located in the remote corner of SE Oregon. The area borders the Owyhee River, one of the state's first scenic waterways and the Bureau of Land Management's proposed Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Area. The Owyhee country is rich in wildlife, home to cougar, bighorn and pronghorn sheep and supports one of the highest densities of raptors in the West. Unfortunately, livestock have razed much of the



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Oregon Natural Desert Association

FROM THE DEN

by Alice Elshoff



Little did we know a year ago, when we chose "Breaking Barriers" as the theme for this year's desert conference how timely it would become. Recent events have elevated the barriers, as in a pole vault competition, until they look pretty formidable.

Should we be despondent? Of course not. The "Takers" have always owned the "Politicos." What we still have is the majority of the American people who show in poll after poll that they support environmental safeguards. After all, we are the true conservatives who understand that in the biological as well as the economic world, it doesn't make sense to gamble away our principle.

To maintain our effectiveness, we simply need to be more creative; hence the evolution of the conference theme into "Breaking Barriers/New Visions." We have some new visions to discuss and would like to hear yours, so let's see you at the conference, especially if you like pleasant surprises.



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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Newsletter

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Bill Marlett

ANNOUNCEMENTS



MARCH 15 EXPLORING OUR HIGH DESERT HOME

With naturalist/herpetologist and local author Al St. John. Al has been delighting audiences for years with his lively slide presentations and live critters (when available). Evening is free. Join us at 6:30 for the social, or 7pm for the show at the Environmental Center (COEC) in Bend.

APRIL 15 WALKIN' JIM STOLTZ "FOREVER WILD: CELEBRATION OF WILDERNESS," EUGENE

Walkin' Jim will be at the Cate Auditorium (in the old Condon School at 18th and Agate) in Eugene at 8pm. This event is sponsored by ONDA and the Eugene Folklore Society. Members of either organization will receive a \$2 savings per ticket. Tickets on sale at Balladeer Music. For information call Dave at (503) 683-6127.

APRIL 16 WALKIN' JIM STOLTZ "FOREVER WILD...", BEND

Walkin' Jim will appear in Bend at the Tower Theater at 7pm. Tickets are on sale at the door for \$7, \$4 for seniors and students; children under 12 free. For information call 389-4566.

APRIL 19 BATS IN CENTRAL OREGON

Slides and museum specimens will highlight this informative program which will focus on the Townsend's Big Eared Bat, Central Oregon's most threatened bat species. Mark Perkins is a biologist with over 20 years experience in the Pacific Northwest. Evening is free. Join us 6:30 for the social, or 7pm for the show at COEC in Bend.

APRIL 25-27 PRE-CONFERENCE FIELD TRIP TO SUTTON MT.

Join ONDA Board President Elaine Rees at Sutton Mt. for hiking, birding, photography, and botanizing. Rendezvous at the primitive campground on Bridge Creek one mile north of Highway 26 along the road to the Painted Hills. Call 683-2147.

APRIL 27-30 DESERT CONFERENCE XVII AT MALHEUR FIELD STATION

MAY 17 CENTRAL OREGON LANDSCAPE, THEN AND NOW

Stu Garrett will show a series of historic photographs of early Central Oregon along with modern re-shoots. Important lessons can be learned about our impacts on local ecosystems. Evening is free. Join us 6:30 for the social, or 7pm for the show at COEC in Bend.

AUGUST 24-27 ONDA'S ANNUAL HART MT. FENCE-OUT.

Meet at the Hot Springs Campground on Thursday for a long weekend of exercise and camaraderie with other desert rats. Call ONDA at (503) 385-6908.

Commissioner, he reformed land management practices and took bold steps to protect the state's water supply.



Jim Baca

"Wilderness, Grazing Reform, and Wise Use: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" is the title of Baca's address at Desert Conference. As former Director of the Bureau of Land Management in the Clinton administration, he has a unique insider's perspective on desert wilderness, the aborted effort to reform grazing on Federal lands, and the moneyed interests opposing sustainable land management. This perspective should help us understand behind-the-scenes political forces and help us focus on a course for the ultimate restoration of native ecosystems of public lands in the West.

William Rossi, Jr., Tribal Elder of the Shoshone Indian Nation, is a featured speaker at this year's conference. Mr. Rossi has been a leader in his tribe's efforts to restore ceded lands in Nevada, California, and Idaho that were never ratified by treaty. In a presentation entitled "Desert as Sacred Land," Mr. Rossi will address the spiritual nature of his culture's relationship to the land and how this relationship forms a basis for his recent activism.

Beth Painter, Ph.D., an authority on grassland ecology, will explore paleoherbivory in the Great Basin and how the current understanding of the co-evolution of desert plant and animal communities can be applied to present day management of public lands of the Intermountain West.

William G. Robbins, Ph.D., of Oregon State University, author of "Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West," will address Euro-American history in the West and how our economic and political institutions have brought us to the current realities of life west of the Rockies.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Many panel discussions are planned for the weekend. Experts on resource economics, including Dr. Hans Radke, an independent consultant currently under-

taking a study of the economic effects of the Oregon High Desert Protection Act and Dr. Roy Rasker of The Wilderness Society will address **"Economics of Grazing"**. Participants in our **"Cows Kill Salmon"** panel include Susana Santos, a Tygh-Yakima Traditional fisherwoman, Dr. Hiram Li and Dr. Boone Kaufmann of Oregon State University and Adam Berger of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund.

Drs. Jane and Carl Bock, both grassland ecologists with the University of Colorado, will be offering a panel on **Grasslands Ecosystems**.

"Hanford Lands: Making the Right Decision," will focus on what is to be done with the uncontaminated portions of the Hanford nuclear facility, including pristine grasslands which could serve as important sources of baseline data. Dr. Lee Rogers of Pacific Northwest Labs, Russell Jim of the Yakima Indian Nation, Ann Aldrich of the BLM, and Bob Wilson of the local Audubon Society will address some of the possible scenarios for protecting these lands.



Jane Belnap on a field trip during the 1994 Desert Conference

FIELD TRIPS

There is a field trip for everyone this year. Would you like to see seldom-visited Harney Lake Research Natural Area? Do you want to demolish unneeded fences on the Malheur Refuge? Maybe you would rather sign up for Tim Lillebo's annual Home Creek Endurance Hike. Or bird with Craig Miller, eastern Oregon's premier pursuer of avifauna. You might choose to visit Borax Lake with The Nature Conservancy's Reid Schuller or to learn new photographic skills from desert photographer par excellence, Ron Cronin. If you can't make the morning departure

time, don't worry. Wendell Wood will be on hand at noon to lead a botany hike to Blitzen River. Sign up for trips in advance to guarantee a spot on your activity of choice!

Kathi Myron will also be conducting a field trip/orientation session for ONRC's Cow Cops volunteers. If you want to adopt an eastern Oregon grazing allotment to monitor, contact Kathi at 503-266-1263 or write to her at P.O. Box 675, Canby, OR 97013.

WORKSHOPS

Scheduled workshops run the gamut of desert issues, including wilderness access for the disabled, media strategies for grassroots activism, protecting native cultural sites, mining reform strategies, legal challenges to animal damage control activities, and threats to the unique ecosystems of Abert and Walker Lakes. See your registration brochure (it should be coming soon, if you haven't received it already) for a complete and updated listing of workshops.

ENTERTAINMENT

Two passionate wilderness advocates will be at center stage with their multi-media extravaganzas this year. On Friday evening, **Ron Cronin** will narrate his elegant production "Poet in the Desert: C.E.S. Wood and the Landscape of Legacy." If you have not yet caught Ron's stunning tapestry of desert images, classical music and poetry, you are in for an inspirational treat! And if you have, chances are you will want to relive the experience where the scent of sage is in the air!

And speaking of poetry, ONDA invites all you desert poets to share your work this year at Desert Conference's **First Annual Desert Poetry Festival**. Inspire your co-activists to share their right-brain responses to the land we are all striving to protect and restore. Humorous, outrageous, sensual, lyrical, mystical — whatever you write or read is OK with us.

Walkin' Jim Stoltz returns to Desert Conference with his multi-media celebration of wilderness, **Forever Wild**, on Saturday night. Folk singer/songwriter/photographer Stoltz has logged over 18,000

PHOTO BY ELAINE REES

Conservationists Challenge BLM on Steens Mountain

ONDA recently filed a lawsuit against Director of the Bureau of Land Management Mike Dombeck for failing to take measures to protect Steens Mountain in Oregon's High Desert. The lawsuit is in response to BLM's failure to take into consideration the impacts of allowing snowmobiles on Steens Mountain, for making major road improvements to the Loop Road on Steens Mountain, and for reopening a part of the Loop Road that had been closed in 1982.

Joining ONDA on the suit are the Oregon Wildlife Federation and the Oregon Natural Resources Council.

Conservationists fear that improvements to the Loop Road on the Steens will result in unwanted conflicts both between people and with the environment. The Steens is a delicate desert ecosystem, home to many unique and highly adapted plant communities and habitat for many species of wildlife. It is a vast and beautiful landscape of national significance and one of Oregon's premier primitive areas, much of which is under consideration for wilderness designation. Conservation groups are calling for Steens to be designated a wilderness national park and preserve, to retain its unique qualities and to protect it from BLM's abusive land management policies that favor cows, mining and uncontrolled visitor use over wilderness.

The Steens is turning into a circus of conflicting uses and this lawsuit is just another result of BLM jumping without looking at the big picture or the long term consequences of increased visitor use. According to the BLM, the Steens Mountain Loop Road is unique because it ascends one of the highest mountains in the Basin and Range Province and provides vistas of some of the most spectacular geography in the country.

The Loop Road is a primitive road, open through summer and fall, and can only be driven with extreme caution. With much of the road work completed in 1994, the thought of hikers and horse riders dodging Mercedes and Audis racing up the Steens seems imminent, although one is still more apt to hit a trespass cow.

In 1993, the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) agreed with conservation groups that BLM failed to consider the impacts of improving the Loop Road. In response to the IBLA decision, BLM expanded the scope of the project beyond the Loop Road improvement, to include snowmobile use, visitor facilities and reopening a section of the Loop Road, known as the Rooster Comb, that was closed in 1982. By expanding the scope of the project, BLM was able to circumvent any further scrutiny by the IBLA.

The BLM decision to allow snowmobiles is a complete turn around. In 1990, BLM banned snowmobile use on the Steens, declaring such use incompatible with the need to protect winter deer habitat and fragile alpine plant communities. Further, all snowmobile use would

be adjacent to designated wilderness study areas. It was as obvious in 1990 as it is now that BLM cannot control snowmobilers or their impacts on the environment. The BLM would have absolutely no control over renegade snowmobilers in these wilderness study areas. Why BLM would create a conflict when one doesn't exist is a mystery, especially after the public outcry over the aborted 1990 attempt to accommodate snowmobile groups.

Deer populations would be threatened by snowmobile use, especially in spring when they are already stressed from a long and cold winter.

The lawsuit asks the Court to stop the BLM from engaging in any activities related to this project until BLM prepares an Environmental Impact Statement to assess the cumulative impacts of the Loop Road project, snowmobile use, visitor facilities and related and future projects in the area.

Again we are reminded of the bigger question: How many more chances do we give the BLM to do what's good for the Steens?

MYTHS ABOUT PUBLIC LANDS LIVESTOCK GRAZING

by Joy Belsky, Ph.D., Range Ecologist

Desert Ramblings asked Dr. Belsky to respond to myths we hear constantly from the livestock industry. (Our most recent favorite was "... cows with their cloven hooves gently massage the land.")

MYTH: Livestock grazing does not damage the public lands.

REALITY: Livestock grazing severely damages public lands. The reason range experts testify that public lands are in the best condition they have been in this century, is that *it was impossible for them to get any worse*. Going from 90% degraded to 80 or 75% degraded does not mean that cattle grazing does not damage public lands. Fifty years of rangeland research has shown that livestock (1) devastate riparian zones, (2) pollute rivers and streams, (3) remove the cryptobiotic crust that fixes nitrogen, improves water infiltration, and reduces wind and water erosion, (4) reduce soil organic matter and nitrogen content, and therefore, soil fertility, (5) are the second major cause of endangerment of plants and the fourth major cause of endangerment of all species in the United States, (6) cause the invasion of noxious weeds such as cheatgrass and tumble mustard, and (7) are responsible for the encroachment of juniper and sagebrush species into grassland communities throughout the West.

MYTH: Controlled grazing promotes plant vigor.

REALITY: Grazing does not necessarily damage individual plants if the grazer (1) leaves a sufficient amount of green, photosynthetic surface for regrowth; (2) grazes early enough in the season for the plant to regrow, produce flowers, and set seed; (3) does not return to the same plant too often; and (4) only grazes species that are adapted to being grazed and trampled. *Cows and sheep are rarely that smart*. As a result, native plant

species, rather than becoming more vigorous and healthy, are disappearing from grazed lands throughout the West. In the Intermountain West, plant species are not adapted to being grazed by livestock; they evolved with grazing generally by low densities of elk, deer, pronghorn, and perhaps a few bison. In contrast, plants in the Great Plains, evolved with heavy grazing and severe trampling by large herds of bison. The plants of the Great Plains, therefore, can tolerate disturbance and heavy grazing by cattle better than plants of the Intermountain West without this evolutionary history.

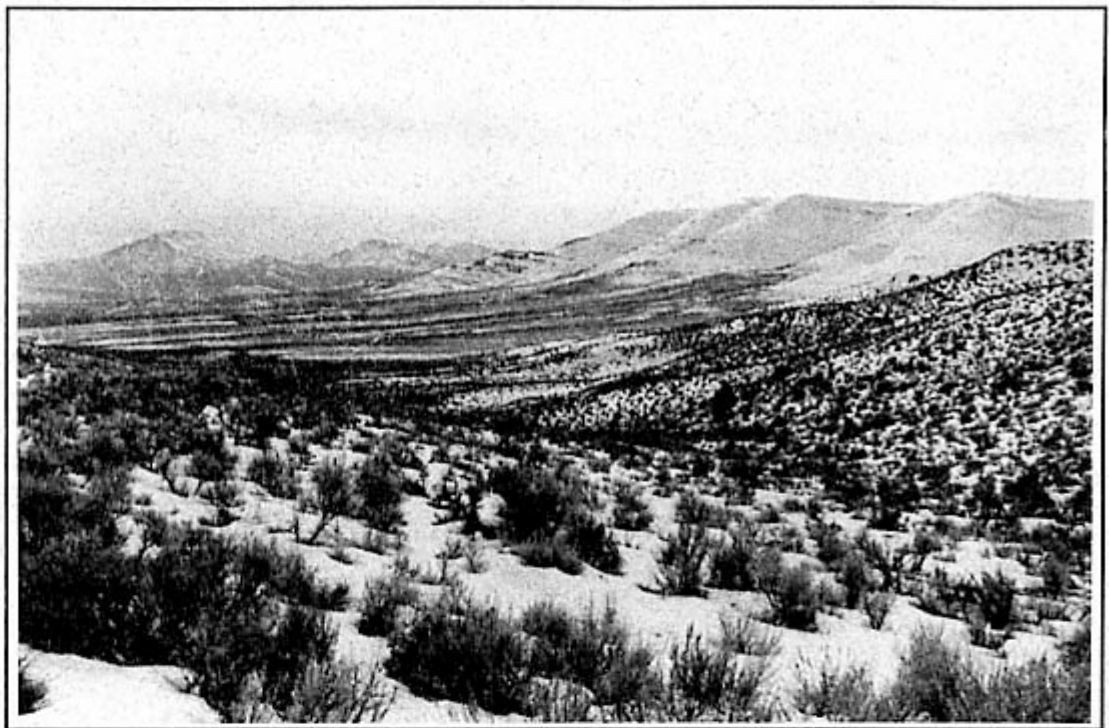
MYTH: Livestock hooves improve soils and increase seed germination by breaking up and aerating the soil.

REALITY: *The hooves of livestock are a major cause of deterioration of our western rangelands.* By destroying the living crust of mosses, lichens, green algae, and cyanobacteria (i. e. the cryptobiotic crust), cattle and sheep reduce nitrogen and organic matter input into the soil, compact the soil so that water and oxygen are unable to penetrate, and increase wind and water erosion. No experimental studies have ever shown disturbance by livestock hooves to increase seed germination or improve soil properties. But they consistently show that disturbances by livestock cause increased soil erosion.

MYTH: Grazing helps prevent fires by reducing excess vegetation.

REALITY: *The reduction of fire frequency due to livestock grazing is a major reason our lands are so degraded and that some areas have turned into sagebrush or juniper monocultures.* In addition, the annual weeds spread by cattle disturbance are highly flammable and have increased fire frequencies in other areas. Since livestock are the primary causes of these increases of annual weeds and fires, we should be trying to reduce livestock disturbance, not increase it.

MYTH: Public lands grazing is not bad for wildlife.



View South to Pueblo Mts. from pass on Long Hollow Rd.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ELAINE REES

FROM THE OUTBACK, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

land, degrading fish and wildlife habitat and polluting the river with their urine and feces. I can still remember a trip down the Owyhee several years ago. At times, the stench of cow manure made the river smell more like an open sewer for cows than a wild and scenic river.

Our goal was to simply give the land a rest. But not anymore. In a classic display of political backscratching, the State Land Board last week took the first step to eliminate competitive bidding, in effect killing any attempt to lease state lands to anyone but the ranchers.

Governor Kitzhaber, who cast the deciding vote on the Board, can hardly be blamed. The ranchers have had a sweetheart deal for years and fearing competition, rallied their legislators to gently turn the screws on the Governor. Noteworthy is Rep. Denny Jones, a rancher who runs cows on state land, and Sen. Gene Timms, who represents the heart and soul of cowboy country from Burns. Both are co-chairs of the Joint Ways and Means Committee in the Legislature. Knowing his budget must run the gauntlet led by Sen. Timms and Rep. Jones, the Governor did what I would have done: he capitulated.

But in doing so, the Governor came up with a great idea. He now wants to debate the question of whether any livestock grazing should occur on state lands, given that revenue earned from state grazing lands is no cash cow for the Common School Fund. Count me in. But cows will jump over the moon if anyone thinks the State Land Board will boot bovines off state lands. I welcome the chance to debate the ranchers who run their private cows on public lands under one condition: it must be open, honest and free of the rancher's grip on state politics.

We'll go out on the ground and show the public their streams and rivers where cows spend most of their time trampling vegetation, eroding streambanks, and plopping cowpies in the water. We'll get up close and see how the rancher's cows dry up springs, ruin salmon habitat, and threaten public health by fouling our drinking water.

And when the debate is over, let's have another vote. Not by the State Land Board, but by the people of Oregon, free of the backroom dealing by the landed gentry of this state. And don't forget the federal lands, they are public, too. I know how Rep. Jones and Sen. Timms would answer the following question, how about you?

Should cows be allowed to pollute Oregon's streams and rivers?

HATS WITH DESERT RATS

HAROLD WINEGAR

Widely recognized as one of the pioneers and foremost authorities on riparian recovery in the West, Harold spends his retirement from the Oregon Department



of Fish and Wildlife advocating for healthy streams whenever and wherever he can.

Harold began his illustrious career as a conservationist with the U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Service in the 1950's. After two years with that agency, he spent the next 29 years with ODF&W, primarily in Central Oregon.

Harold was the first person to point out that flow recovery and flow maintenance of riparian ecosystems can most effectively be accomplished by the complete removal of livestock from riparian corridors. You can expect cleaner and more reliable water with natural recovery," said Harold in 1978. In 1995 he is more certain than ever that it is not necessary to resort to expensive structural methods of rebuilding stream function.

► COW MYTHS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

REALITY: It is ludicrous to think that native wildlife can thrive on lands where 90-95% of the forage is reserved for cattle. Years of scientific research show that wildlife are seriously reduced in numbers by competition with livestock for forage, by diseases transmitted by domestic animals, and by destruction of their habitats. When cattle are removed, wildlife numbers nearly always go up. This is true not only for deer and elk, but also for fish, migratory birds, game birds, rodents, lizards, beetles, and butterflies. Grasshoppers and weedy species associated with disturbance, however, do increase with livestock grazing.

MYTH: Cattlemen have vastly improved our western watersheds by building watering sites on public lands.

REALITY: By building tens of thousands of watering sites on public lands, cattlemen have spread cattle to areas previously inhabited only by wild species. Today, less than 1% of BLM lands in eastern Oregon and Washington are still in pristine or excellent condition. As a result, seed sources necessary for natural regeneration or for rangeland restoration projects are sparse; intact ecosystems necessary for research on rangeland problems are nearly non-existent; and habitat for species that cannot tolerate degraded conditions or disturbance by domestic livestock are rare. Rather than being a boon to wildlife, watering sites promote local degradation and loss of habitat. Eventually, loci of degradation around waterholes coalesce to form even larger, desertified areas. As has been found in Africa, watering sites encourage the overstocking of ranges beyond the carrying capacity of the land, which eventually reduce its productivity and restorative capacity.

As a result of his research and ongoing involvement in both the scientific and political arenas, Harold has received widespread recognition, including merit awards from the American Fisheries Society, the Robert K. Potter Award from the Oregon Wilderness Coalition, and an award identifying him as the Father of Riparian Recovery from the Ochoco Elk Hunters. ONDA is fortunate to have such a distinguished and respected scientist on our Advisory Council.

Alan D. St. John

Bend resident Al St. John, a native Oregonian, is a freelance interpretive naturalist who uses writing, photography, and pen-and-ink drawings to teach about the natural world. The author of the book, *Eastern Oregon: Portrait of the Land and its People*, his work appears frequently in the regional magazine, *Northwest Parks and Wildlife*. On the national level, he has been published in such periodicals as *National Geographic*, *Natural History*, *Nature Conservancy*, and *Ranger Rick*. Al



specializes in herpetology and is currently working on a field guide to Oregon's native amphibians and reptiles.

"Although I enjoy all of Oregon's large variety of natural ecosystems, the expansive, haunting beauty of the High Desert has a special pull on me. I keep returning again and again to its arid basins, towering fault block ranges, and rocky canyons. Despite nearly 30 years of poking about in this intriguing region, I still can't get enough of it. Hopefully, through my writing, photography and drawings, I can entice others into exploring, appreciating and protecting the Oregon High Desert."

► DESERT CONFERENCE PAGE 3

miles on foot through the wild country of North America. His love and respect for the earth emanates from his music and his personality, as well as from his slides of the wild places he has experienced. Ed Abbey once said that Walkin' Jim Stoltz "...has more to say in one song than Frank Sinatra ever managed in a whole bloody concert." Enough said.

FOOD

This year's desert conference will feature gourmet meatless meals in keeping with the philosophy that walking lightly on the land includes eating lower on the food chain. Tofu haters, be at ease; it's in not on the menu! Tofu lovers, BYOT!

REGISTRATION

Be sure to register in advance if you plan to attend all or part of Desert Conference XVII. Space is limited. If you have not yet received a registration form, call 503-389-4566. No pets allowed. Camping is allowed on nearby BLM lands, but not at the Field Station or on the Refuge.

SPECIAL REQUEST

As a gesture of support for the Malheur Field Station, ONDA suggests that you bring a roll of toilet paper to donate to your dorm or trailer. A donation of several rolls might help the station cut down on expenses for this fiscal year. (Some folks also like to bring their own water, too.) Please be generous—this is the only facility of its kind in eastern Oregon and we'd sure like it to be available for at least seventeen more Desert Conferences!