

Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the
Oregon
Natural Desert
association

Volume 11, Number 1

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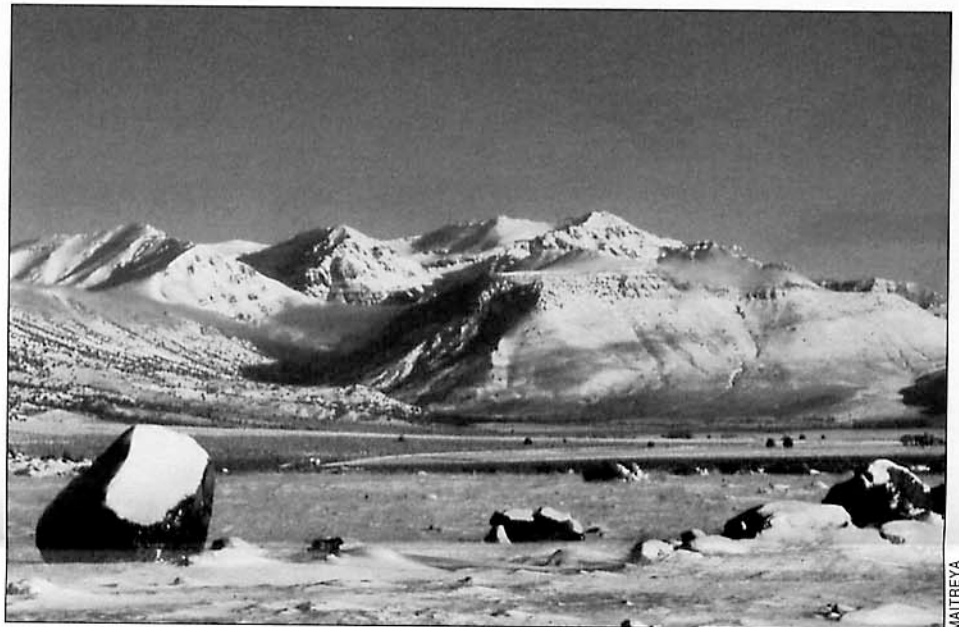
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Rethinking the Steens' future

Should USFWS manage area?

ONDA applauds the unanimous decision by Harney County Commissioners to deny a permit application to build a small resort on Steens Mountain (see article, pg. 1). We have opposed the development and were prepared to litigate to keep it from becoming a reality. Rezoning the isolated high Steens property would have set a bad precedent, opening the way for more commercial development in the heart of this alpine wild area. Also, a year-round resort would have been a further intrusion on the ecological integrity of a landscape that has already been severely compromised by over a century of livestock grazing.

In denying the permit, the county may have wanted to avoid a protracted legal battle with ONDA over the Witzels' development. We'd like to believe, however, that the considerable local opposition was what persuaded the commissioners to turn down the request. The decision is a reminder of the strong sentiments felt by Harney County residents for protecting the Steens. It also begs the question of how best to manage this extraordinary resource for future generations. But more on that in a moment.



Snow blankets Steens Mountain. In November, Harney County rejected a proposed resort on private land on Steens Mountain, which is predominantly managed by BLM.

Harney County nixes Steens resort

By Maitreya

On November 5, 1997, the Harney County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to deny the application of John and Cindy Witzel of Frenchglen to rezone their property near Fish Lake, high on Steens Mountain in southeast Oregon. The stated purpose of the application was to construct a twenty-five room lodge, full service restaurant, gift shop, and fifteen cabins on 12.5 acres of their 320-acre private inholding in Lake Creek Valley.

The Witzels had requested a change from the "Exclusive Farm and Range Use Zone" to the "Commercial Industrial Zone" under Oregon's Statewide Planning Goals and Guidelines (the state's land use law). Such a re-zoning for a site-specific purpose like a resort lodge would have violated this law. Therefore, in order to approve their application, the Commissioners would also have had to grant the Witzels an "exception" from this law, which would have set a precedent, easing the way for



FROM THE OUTBACK
by Bill Marlett

Since the rezoning decision, the Witzels have begun negotiations with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to swap their land on Steens Mountain for property near Frenchglen. In principle, we support the trade. It would be hypocritical for ONDA to advocate that the livestock industry on arid public lands in Harney County be replaced with businesses, including recreational businesses, that have less impact, yet deny the Witzels (who run an outfitting business) the opportunity to lead pack trips

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FROM THE DEN

by Dave Funk

Winter alive!

Desert in winter. The land may seem empty and still. But, look, mouse tracks draw dotted lines between tufts of grass, winter sparrows flit nervously, ravens squawk, and coyotes howl and yip at dusk, many reminders that life in the desert goes on.

After the frenetic efforts expended during last year's Clean Stream Initiative, it may seem that ONDA, too, is relatively still. This also is just illusion. A recent push to protect streams by requiring better rules for grazing on public lands topped our efforts (see alert, pg. 12). Meanwhile, our grassroots coordinator Gilly Lyon is moving to ONDA's Portland office, and Graden Oehlerich has been hired to work out of our Bend office (see article, pg. 10). Graden will coordinate volunteers, review and comment on clean water issues, work on salmon protection programs, and help with many other aspects of administration. Welcome aboard, Graden, and good luck.

Longtime board member Elaine Rees recently announced that she will leave the ONDA board. Elaine, a past board president, has been involved in nearly every aspect of ONDA, including this newsletter. She promises to continue to stay as involved as her time permits. We will miss her steady, knowledgeable and logical presence greatly.

Speaking of the board, ONDA is undergoing an organizational assessment by TREC (Training Resources for the Environmental Community). The objective is to maximize ONDA's effectiveness by identifying and strengthening areas where the organization can be improved. We look forward to seeing the results in the form of a healthier desert ecosystem.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Malheur birding & service

April 5-11 • Malheur Field Station

Join Wilderness Volunteers for a week of birding and sightseeing in and around Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Participants will also lend a hand to the Field Station (long-time home of the Desert Conference) by painting, cleaning, and repairing dorms and classrooms. ONDA's own Craig Miller and Alice Elshoff will present slide shows and lead trips to Blitzen Valley birding hot spots. Contact John Sherman of Wilderness Volunteers via e-mail: 73774,2006@compuserve.com or Tel: (503) 241-9348.

ONDA's wish list

Used items needed for ONDA's Portland office. All donations tax-deductible!

- Office chairs
- Mac laptop computer
- Bookshelves
- Laser printer
- Fax machine
- Photocopier

Call Gilly Lyons at (503) 525-0193.

Desert Conference XX

April 30-May 3 • Malheur Field Station

Mark your calendars now for the 20th Annual High Desert Conference at Malheur Field Station. Help us celebrate 20 years of desert activism with field trips, slide shows, workshops, and great speakers. Watch your mailbox for more information, or call Gilly at (503) 525-0193.

National Wilderness Conference

May 29-31, Seattle, WA

Join over fifty local, regional, and national conservation groups from across the nation (including ONDA) for a weekend of wilderness advocacy, celebration, and education. The conference will equip you with tools to secure lasting protection for America's unprotected wilderness resources. Contact via e-mail wildcon@twisnw.org or call (206) 624-6430.

Oregon Natural Desert Association

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Mission

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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Harney county rejects Steens Mountain resort

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other private property owners on Steens Mountain to develop their land for commercial purposes.

In its written order denying the application the Commissioners cited eight findings, including lack of compatibility of the requested exception with the existing agricultural zoning, lack of a demonstrated need for the proposed use, and the availability of other sites better suited to the proposed activity because they have year-round access.

The County's decision came as a welcome surprise to all of those who voiced opposition to the Witzel application. The re-zoning was opposed by ONDA and other conservationists, the Bureau of Land Management, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and prominent members of the local ranching community. At the hearing before the Commissioners, those who testified in opposition to the proposed resort outnumbered those in favor by 37 to 2.

Much credit for influencing the Commissioners' decision must go to the local citizens of Harney County for their vociferous opposition to the proposed rezoning. It appears that the Commissioners




Kiger Gorge on Steens Mountain in winter.

were also persuaded by legal arguments made by Jack Sterne on behalf of ONDA, by 1000 Friends of Oregon, and by individuals, such as Josh Warburton, myself, and others.

"Lake Creek is a mountain stream with excellent riparian habitat for stream protection and fishery production which contains native Redband Trout," testified James Lemos, ODFW Wildlife Biologist for Harney County. "The excellent riparian habitats of willow and aspen are nesting and brooding sites for neo-

tropical migrant songbirds such as warblers, kinglets, vireos, and flycatchers. Larger wildlife ranging from weasels, beaver, and coyotes to mule deer utilize these riparian zones heavily," said Lemos.

The Commissioners' action helps protect these irreplaceable natural values of Lake Creek Valley on Steens Mountain from being degraded by the proposed Witzel development. The decision, however, does not end the debate over commercial recreational development of Steens Mountain. Tens of thousands of acres on the mountain are in private hands. These private holdings include some of the most scenic and ecologically diverse areas on the mountain—the bottom of Kiger Gorge, Fish Creek Basin, and Whorehouse Meadow, to name but a few. The threat of commercial recreational development to these and other sites on Steens Mountain remains.

Steens Mountain is a scenic, recreational and ecological treasure of national significance and should be protected for future generations to enjoy. Harney County's decision to deny the Witzel's resort development will help protect a special part of this national treasure and should inspire us to redouble our efforts to preserve it in its natural state. 

Evenings with Nature

Both events will be held at Central Oregon Environmental Center, 16 NW Kansas, Bend. Refreshments at 6 pm, program at 7 pm.

February 18 — "Coffee Plantations as Tropical Rainforest: The Brewing Controversy of Shade Coffee vs. Sun Coffee as Wintering Habitat for Migrant North American Land Birds," by Dr. David Dobkin of the High Desert Ecological Research Institute.

April 15 — "A Showcase of Hummingbirds," is a slide show by Frank Cleland, wildlife photographer whose special subject is birds in flight. Frank will also discuss hummingbird behavior and migration.

The proposal included a twenty-five room lodge, full service restaurant, gift shop, and fifteen cabins on 12.5 acres in Lake Creek Valley, below Fish Lake.

Steens Mountain wildlife refuge?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

into the Steens. Not that rampant tourism is benign, either. Over 50,000 people visited the Steens last year, and that number will continue to increase. ONDA believes the inevitable tourism increases must be prepared for—not merely reacted to. For this reason, we have argued that

A Steens Mountain National Fish & Wildlife Refuge would blend seamlessly with the adjacent Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

whatever agency manages Steens Mountain, whether BLM, the National Park Service or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), that agency ought to be in the business of managing people, not cows.

Consequently, in crafting the Oregon High Desert Protection Act with other conservation groups in 1992, we included the designation of Steens as a National Park and Preserve. Although a


national park would be good for business in Harney County, we have heard so much concern that perhaps we should look at options other than park status.

President Clinton's recent executive order creating the Escalante-Staircase National Monument in southern Utah placed that area under BLM management rather than under the National Park Service. This provides food for thought. Would such a scenario work for Steens Mountain? Given the BLM's proclivity to support continued livestock grazing and oil and gas exploration in the Escalante Monument, coupled with the agency's position that livestock should graze the Wild and Scenic Donner and Blitzen River (which flows off the Steens), we think not.

The best middle ground between those who want Steens Mountain protected and those who prefer that the area to have a lower profile than national park status affords, may be to place the area under the management of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thanks to a new law signed by President Clinton last fall, this agency has a crystal clear mission to protect fish and wildlife and promote compatible wildlife-based recreation on America's national refuge system. Furthermore, FWS recognizes that livestock grazing is rarely compatible, and has ended grazing on the ecologically similar Hart Mtn. Refuge.

A Steens Mountain National Fish and Wildlife Refuge would blend seamlessly with the adjacent Malheur Wildlife Refuge—currently managed by FWS—which lies immediately adjacent to the Steens. This would allow FWS to manage the Blitzen River, which feeds the Malheur Refuge, as a complete watershed. Perhaps this idea will satisfy the common goal of protecting Steens Mountain.

In any case, the future management of this desert jewel, as well as Hart Mountain and Owyhee Canyonlands, should be examined. Under the present BLM management, destructive grazing is the dominant use.

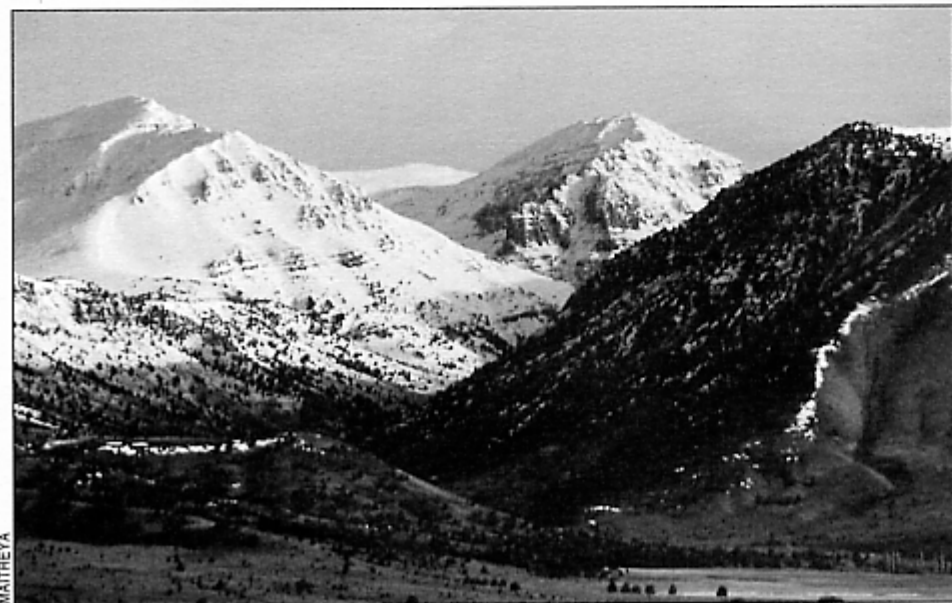
ONDA is advocating that Congress authorize a study to evaluate the comparative benefits of shifting these areas to different management agencies and designations, such as wildlife refuges, national parks, or national conservation areas. ONDA has asked Sen. Ron Wyden and Rep. Peter DeFazio to introduce a bill for this purpose, and their initial response has been favorable. We look forward to reporting on the progress of this proposal in future issues of *Desert Ramblings*. 

Refuge bill passes

ONDA members can be proud of our role in the creation of the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, which President Clinton signed into law last fall.

The new law clarifies the mission of the National Refuge System, directing the Secretary of Interior to manage refuges first and foremost for wildlife while permitting compatible wildlife-based recreation activities, including fishing and hunting where appropriate.

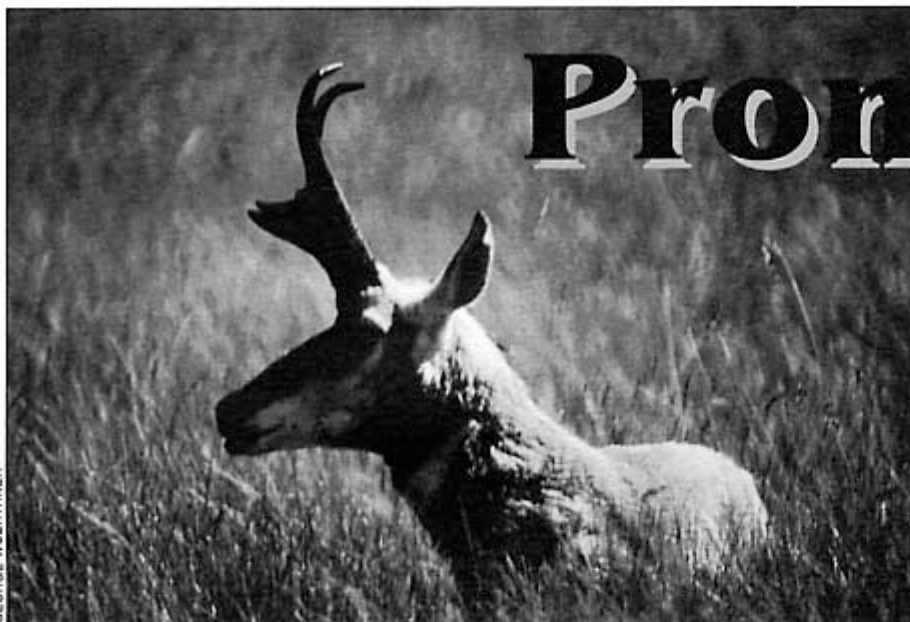
ONDA's lawsuit of several years ago against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) regarding its management of the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge (i.e. allowing livestock to graze the refuge) led to a subsequent national lawsuit against FWS on the same issue of compatibility. That national lawsuit eventually led to the recent statutory clarification of the mission of the refuge system.



Steens Mountain's scenic wonders and rich wildlife might be best protected as a USFWS wildlife refuge.

Pronghorn

GEORGE WUERHNER



In body beauty, few animals equal the pronghorn antelope. The slender limbs and finely sculpted muscles combine the grace of Apollo and the speed of Mercury.

—Arthur Einarsen,

The Pronghorn Antelope and its Management

By Elaine Rees

Indeed, a glimpse of a single pronghorn, and especially an antelope herd, enchants the fortunate viewer. Small yet sturdy, artistically patterned with tan, white, and black, the pronghorn antelope is the most visible and most universally recognizable animal of America's plains and deserts. If you haven't seen one, you haven't seen the West.

Pronghorn country is open—flat, shrubby, often rocky—and dry. *Antilocapra americana*, as it is known in scientific circles, is at home in the grasslands of the Dakotas and Nebraska, the sagebrush expanses of Wyoming and Montana, and the cactus and creosote country of Mexico and the American Southwest.

In Oregon, some of the best pronghorn habitat is in Lake County. This was recognized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935, when he established the Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge (originally Hart Mountain Antelope Range).

Besides its steep west-facing scarp, Hart Mountain encompasses thousands of acres of rolling sagebrush steppe complete with shallow lakebeds which provide important summer feed for pronghorn does and their kids. The high windswept slopes and ridges of the mountain provide relatively snow-free areas where the pronghorn can browse on exposed sagebrush during the harsh winter months. Arthur Einarsen, who studied pronghorn on Hart Mountain in the 1930s and '40s, observed that in January of 1937, "...when the temperature dropped to 40 degrees below zero, antelope herds were found on the refuge in apparent contentment, and no fatalities were reported in the herd during this period of severe cold."

To be or not to be

The pronghorn antelope, strictly speaking, is not an antelope at all. True antelopes (that is, Old World antelopes such as gazelles and wildebeest) do not shed their horns; pronghorn do. Further, our pronghorn "antelope" is strictly a North American animal. Fossil evidence recovered from what is now California and eastward to the Mississippi River shows a lineage back to 25 million years ago. Before the Pleistocene Era (10 to 13 million years ago), at least 13 genera of pronghorn roamed the West, but only one—*A. americana*—survived the Pleistocene Ice Ages that recurred over a period of three million years.

Being a truly American-grown animal is only one of many of the pronghorn's unique characteristics. It is arguably the fastest land mammal in the world, exceeded only by the cheetah in the sprint. In a race of a half-mile or more, a pronghorn would leave a cheetah in the dust. Researchers have recorded whole herds of pronghorn maintaining a pace of 40 miles per hour for five to ten minutes. Several incidences of a buck crossing in front of a vehicle traveling 60 mph have been documented (see sidebar, page 6).

Speed by design

How can the pronghorn accomplish such a spectacular feat? Anatomy. Its heart and lungs are larger than one would expect for an animal its size. In fact the pronghorn's heart is twice the size of that of a domestic sheep, although the two animals have equivalent body mass. The windpipe is also enlarged, and the pronghorn runs with its mouth open to take in as much air as possible.

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In a race of a half-mile or more, a pronghorn would leave a cheetah in the dust.

Pronghorn

"The grace of Apollo and the speed of Mercury"

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How does it maintain its astonishing speed on such rough terrain as the cobbly uplands of the Great Basin or on Great Plains, where the grasslands may be pocked with "gopher holes"? Nerveless cartilaginous padding on the animal's hooves proves to be an excellent shock absorber. In addition, the leg bones are quite dense and are


"laminated" with an additional layer of bony tissue to enable them to endure tremendous force. One of Einarsen's colleagues in the Engineering Department at Oregon State University tested the pronghorn foreleg bone. It withstood over 45,000 pounds of pressure per square inch!

Eyes sharper than a hawk's?

Speed and agility alone cannot ensure the pronghorns' survival in the flat, treeless landscapes of the West. In order to avoid becoming a meal for a coyote or a wall decoration in a local cafe, the pronghorn must be able to spot danger at great distances. Their eyes, as large as those of a horse, protrude quite visibly from the normal ungulate skull contour. This gives them a particularly wide angle of vision. Wildlife biologists have observed that moving objects three to four miles away will attract the attention of an individual animal, and soon the entire herd will be riveted on the object. The animals' reaction will then be in accordance with whether the object is benign (like a fluttering piece of paper) or potentially dangerous (a car or a carnivore).

Fluctuating populations

Pronghorn numbers at the time of European settlement of the West are estimated to have been 40 to 50 million. By the 1920s, populations were down to a mere 13,000. Habitat destruction from overgrazing and agricultural development, indiscriminate slaughter by greedy market hunters, and hunting pressure by hungry homesteaders and starving Native Americans took a tremendous toll. A campaign against coyotes in the 1880s resulted in the slaughter of countless pronghorn for use as poisoned bait. In addition, millions froze during bad winters when fences strung by cattlemen prevented them from escaping deep winter snows.

Since then, conservation measures have restored pronghorn numbers across the West to around 750,000, but the lack of quality habitat limits their further recovery. Oregon's pronghorn population is estimated to be 15,000, with the Hart Mountain/Beatty Butte herd currently at 5,200 animals. Still, it is frightening to contemplate that in a few short decades, humans nearly obliterated a species as beautiful and unique as the pronghorn. 



RACING PRONGHORNS: 1936

"On August 14, 1936, I was with a group that paced many pronghorns on the dried bed of Spanish Lake [on the Hart Mt. Refuge].... This lake bed was as hard as adobe. It was a clear, breezy day, ideal to stir the racing instinct of the pronghorns, and as we rolled along the lake edge we had many challenges. Small groups here and there raced beside the car, until five, led by a magnificent buck, ran parallel to us, pressing toward the shore from the feeding area in the lake center while we drove on a straight course. As they closed in from the right the buck took a lead of about 50 feet and [the driver] increased speed to keep even with the animal.... The buck was now about 20 feet away and kept abreast of the car at 50 miles an hour. He gradually increased his gait, and with a tremendous burst of speed flattened out so that he appeared as lean and low as a greyhound. Then he turned toward us at about a 45 degree angle and disappeared in front of the car, to reappear on our left. He had gained enough to cross our course as the speedometer registered 61 m.p.h. After the buck passed us he quickly slackened his pace and when he reached a rounded knoll about 600 feet away he stood snorting, in graceful silhouette against the sky as though enjoying the satisfaction of beating us in a fair race. No sprinter could have posed in victory with a greater show of gratification."

From The Pronghorn Antelope and its Management by Arthur Einarsen. Published by The Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, D.C., 1948.

Pronghorn in winter

Excerpted from: The World of the Pronghorn, by Joe Van Wormer, J. B. Lippincott Company (Philadelphia and New York), 1969.

Sometime in early December, after the breeding season is over and the horns have been shed, pronghorns gather into large bands. In former times, these were quite large and on occasion numbered in the thousands. Today, only fifty or a hundred animals are likely to be seen together. It has been suggested that pronghorns feel defenseless after shedding the horns and gather into large groups for mutual protection. The developing horn sheaths are of little value as weapons during the early stages of growth, but horns are seldom used for anything but fighting or threatening other pronghorns. The animals' sharp hoofs are their best defense against coyotes, the chief pronghorn predators. I am inclined to think that large winter bands form as a result of a natural gregariousness, which is not overpowered at this season by the demands of the rutting period or a crop of new fawns.

Pronghorns are not basically migratory and remain within a relatively small area if food and weather conditions permit. However, they are not stubborn about staying on a home range if it does not meet their requirements. Their movements to better food and watering areas follow no set pattern but seem to be controlled by range conditions and the whims of the herd. Usually, such movements cover comparatively short distances.


In most of the northern range, winter is always enough of a factor to cause some migration to lower altitudes, with a spring migration in the opposite direction. Snow depth, more than temperature, influences winter migrations. A snow



ELAINE REES

cover of ten to twelve inches is usually enough to start pronghorns moving. Unlike some other ungulates, they do not use their forefeet to paw through the snow for food. [Pronghorn expert Jim Yoakum refutes this assertion -ed.] If the snow is only a few inches deep, they eat the forage plants that protrude above it or they may push the snow around with their noses to get at food underneath. But a foot of snow is probably too much for the nose. The animals may travel just far enough to get away from the deep snow; at times, these moves may take them where it is even colder. For example, during extreme winter weather the pronghorns of Carlow Valley, in southeastern Oregon, move to the high ridges on the Hart Mountain Range, where temperatures may stay below zero for long periods of time. But since winds keep the ground free of snow, the animals can find food there.

Pronghorn on Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge, on the Oregon-Nevada border.

Pronghorns I have seen feeding on exposed plateaus in zero weather seem rather poorly dressed for the occasion. As a matter of fact, they looked as if they should freeze solid right where they were standing....[Yet] in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming, where over three-fourths of them live, sub-zero winter temperatures occur every year. Extreme cold alone does not seem to affect a healthy pronghorn; disease or lack of nourishment along with the cold causes the casualties. 



COURTESY USFWS

Refuge resurrects, reburies coyote shoot

Agency backpedals after ONDA sues

By Elaine Rees

In an abrupt pre-Christmas announcement, Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge manager Mike Nunn revived U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) proposal to shoot coyotes on the refuge, this time in the form of a "recreational hunt" that was to begin on January 31, 1998.

In December 1995, the FWS had announced plans to embark on a three-year program of aerial gunning of coyotes to address a decline in pronghorn numbers on the Hart Mt. refuge. Coyotes, the agency maintained, were eating most of the fawns, and therefore the coyotes ought to be shot. ONDA and


Contradictions?

Based on data collected in 1996 and 1997, the staff concluded that pronghorn fawns and does are in excellent health and that habitat conditions on the refuge are "better now than at any time in the recent past." Fawn recruitment, however, was still below the long-term average of 39 fawns per 100 does, and "fawn mortality that can be attributed to coyotes is 75% at a minimum...."

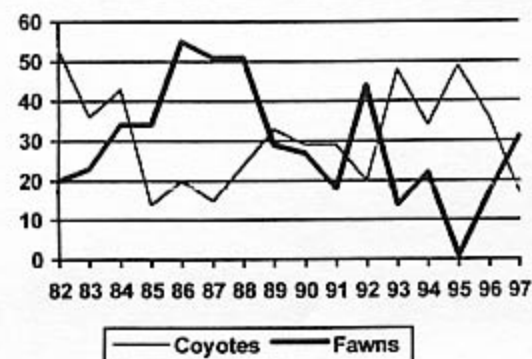
It was the record low fawn survival rate of 0.8% in 1995 that prompted Nunn to propose the aerial gunning of coyotes. The following year, however, the survival rate increased naturally to 16%. By 1997, the survival rate climbed to 31%, again without any measures to reduce the coyote population. While this is a tremendous improvement over the previous two years, Nunn now believes that the herd is in jeopardy because of its demographics. Since recruitment for the past five years has averaged only 17 fawns per 100 does, the age structure of the herd is being skewed toward a preponderance of older animals. Nunn asserts that most of the breeding does are seven or more years of age.

Nunn says fawn survival rates must average 25 to 30% per year over the long term to maintain the herd on Hart Mt. While the average for the past 5 years has been only 17%, the average for the past 15 years has been 29%, well within the parameters Nunn quotes. And, according to FWS figures, coyote numbers are now decreasing, probably as a result of a natural fluctuation in population (see graph).

ONDA sues, agency backpedals

ONDA, the Predator Defense Institute, and other groups filed a temporary restraining order in January which stopped in its tracks this unnecessary intervention in the natural fluctuations of the predator/prey populations. After reviewing affidavits filed by ONDA and others, FWS attorneys advised Nunn to cancel the hunt pending a more comprehensive environmental review. "This coyote hunt would have destroyed the natural experiment on recovery of an arid ecosystem which has been going on at Hart Mountain since the removal of livestock in 1990," says ONDA's staff ecologist, Dr. Joy Belsky. 

COYOTES AND FAWNS • 1982-1997



A fluctuating predator population is a common occurrence. The data on coyotes to surviving fawns indicate a trend toward fewer coyotes and more fawns in the immediate future. Source: USFWS.

other groups opposed the plan, as did one of the nation's leading experts on pronghorn, who said that the agency lacked the data to justify such drastic measures. Under pressure, FWS postponed the coyote shoot pending the outcome of a two-year study of factors affecting pronghorn on the refuge—including fawn survival, doe and fawn health, nutrition, and habitat condition.

BELOW: Pronghorn doe and fawns on Hart Mountain.



DANIEL A. SHERMAN



What Good is a Desert?

By Ann Zwinger

From "What Good Is a Desert?" *Audubon*, March-April 1996, Vol. 98, no. 2.

What good is a desert? It's good because it's so starkly, stubbornly beautiful, a respite to the eye, a surcease for the mind, a beginning on a beginning. It fills my head, my heart, my psyche. It is a bare-bones image, unforgiving, realistic, uncompromising, a resonant jumble of flat and form. A desert is good because it holds the mountains apart....


The desert is good because it tells me what was and what will be again and nudges me into the bigger rhythms of millennia and eons. The desert clues me in to the infinite adaptability of living things and gives me cause for hope: The hirsute leaves and salt-tolerant plants survive because they adapt, and in their solutions may be answers for us. In the desert the clarity of these processes is washed with the brightness of desert light in a way it is not elsewhere: The means are sparser, the adjustments sharper. Food chain relationships, although still complex, are easier to see and understand in this environment, as if the clearer, harsher light of the desert also illumined processes and concepts.

The desert tells you what was and what will be again. It whacks your sense of time, makes you pay attention to eons instead of the next stop sign, tells you about lakes and water sluicing down the mountains, of times when there was more wet than dry. When I sit in the summer sun, baking like a giant tortilla, the desert



ALAN D. ST. JOHN

reminds me that it was not always thus. Sitting in the chill of this autumn afternoon, the desert warns me not to believe in always or never.

I am amazed at the strength of my conviction of the "good" of the desert. But in the end, each of us has to decide what good a desert is or, by extension, what good a natural world is. Because we're humans, it's logical to look to nature for food, for cures for our ills, but we must also recognize that there are less easily identifiable values that lie in another dimension, a worth that is more, much more, than what is obvious. There is something in the desert that grabs us, hangs on to our hearts, speaks to some atavistic, long-forgotten connection, and hallows us with this healthy, soul-searing desert light—unadulterated, unshuttered, a full-spectrum light that restores, invigorates, and blesses. 

Jon Gelbard: Powerhouse intern

By Joy Belsky

In August, ONDA intern extraordinaire Jon Gelbard packed up his computer and departed for Durham, North Carolina to begin graduate studies at Duke University's School of the Environment.

Jon, a whirlwind of energy and enthusiasm, first appeared at ONDA's Portland office in Fall 1996, offering to help research environmental issues. Originally he was most interested in native Americans, law school, and landscape ecology. By the time he left, Jon had become a certified desert rat and an expert on desert fish, livestock grazing, cryptobiotic crusts, and exotic weeds.

As an ONDA intern, Jon wrote the petition for Endangered Species Act protection of Great Basin redband trout (see *Desert Ramblings*, Fall 1997) and a report on the major causes of the spread of introduced weeds into the arid West (see *Desert Ramblings*, Spring 1997).

Jon's efforts, enthusiasm, and love of



Jon Gelbard, former ONDA intern, is now pursuing graduate studies at Duke University.

western ecosystems are sorely missed by ONDA and its staff. Unless Duke is able to "reprogram" Jon to East Coast interests, perhaps he will return to once again advocate for protection of Oregon's deserts and grasslands.

Farewell, Jon, and thanks for your dedication to ONDA's mission. We wish you the best in all your endeavors.

Elizabeth Claman: "Proof" is in the pudding

By Elaine Rees

Lots of steps go into producing a newsletter besides the obvious writing and layout. One important final step is the proofreading that assures that principles aren't dangling and infinitives aren't split. *Desert Ramblings* is fortunate to have an outstanding proofreader in Elizabeth Claman (who, incidentally, has just received her doctoral degree in Comparative Literature, for which we congratulate her!).

Elizabeth's volunteer work for ONDA is born of her love for desert landscapes. "I have always loved the desert—the beauty of it, the subtlety of it—ever since I was a kid," she explains. "The desert is so full of contrasts between delicacy and harshness. It's never predictable or simple. I've loved a lot of deserts over the years, each one so different: southern California, New Mexico,



Elizabeth Claman, volunteer proofreader.

Mexico, Morocco, and now, eastern Oregon."

As proofreader, she appreciates the opportunity to learn what ONDA is doing to protect the desert as she carefully edits each issue before we go to press. And we appreciate the time Elizabeth takes away from her publishing business, Queen of Swords Press, to help make *Desert Ramblings* one of the best little newsletters in the West.

Many thanks...

ONDA gratefully acknowledges the following foundations for their recent generous support.

True North Foundation
Environmental Support Center
Brainerd Foundation
Patagonia, Inc.

Renew your ONDA membership

ONDA's members are our greatest asset. Your support is crucial to our efforts to protect Oregon's desert wildlands and waterways. On the back of this newsletter, your address label includes your renewal date. If that date has come and gone, please renew your membership today using the form on page 11. You'll help save mailing costs and paper while supporting the only group working exclusively to protect Oregon's high desert. Send dues to: ONDA, 16 NW Kansas Ave., Bend, OR 97701.

Movement afoot in ONDA office

ONDA welcomes Graden Oehlerich, our new Wild Rivers Coordinator. Graden recently migrated to Bend from Helena, Montana, where she served as development director for the Montana Environmental Information Center. She brings ONDA her excellent fundraising and organizing experience, including her work on a campaign to hold mining companies responsible for cleaning up their water pollution. As ONDA's Wild Rivers Coordinator, Graden will focus on wild and scenic river management, the Healthy Streams Partnership, and ONDA's other efforts to protect desert streams. Graden can be reached at gradeno@onda.org or at ONDA's Bend office: (541) 330-2638.

Meanwhile, Gilly Lyons, ONDA's Grassroots Coordinator, has relocated to ONDA's Portland office, alongside staff ecologist Joy Belsky. Gilly will continue to focus on organizing, events, and membership services. She'll also head ONDA's efforts to secure permanent protection for Oregon's desert wildlands and rivers. Reach her at ONDA, 732 SW Third Ave., Suite 407, Portland, OR 97204. E-mail her at gilyons@onda.org or call (503) 525-0193.


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ACTION ALERT

Help clean our streams

*State should strengthen rules for federal
land grazing along polluted streams*

Comment deadline extended to Feb. 19

There's still time to weigh in on DEQ's proposed water quality rules that will regulate grazing on federal lands along polluted ("water quality limited") streams. Your letters can help clean up polluted rivers that flow through federal lands!

The Dept. of Environmental Quality has extended the comment period for its "Draft Water Quality Rules for Certifying Federal Grazing Permits" to February 19, 1998. If you haven't already sent in a comment, please take a moment to tell DEQ how crucial it is to protect Oregon's streams and rivers from the impacts of livestock grazing.

In your letter, tell DEQ to:

- 1) require that polluted streams impacted by livestock grazing be rested from grazing until water quality standards are met; and
- 2) require water quality monitoring data before certifying a federal grazing permit.



GREG BURKE

Send your letter to:

Department of Environmental Quality
811 SW Sixth Avenue
Portland, OR 97204-1390
Attn: Debra Sturdevant
E-mail: sturdevant.debra@deq.state.or.us

If you'd like a copy of the draft rules, call DEQ at (503) 229-5695 or (800) 452-4011. You can also read the rules on-line at DEQ's web site: <http://www.deq.state.or.us>

To all who've already submitted comments, thank you! And to everyone else, you still have time to write a letter in support of clean water and wild fish.

For more information, call ONDA in Bend at (541) 330-2638 or in Portland at (503) 525-0193.