

# Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the  
Oregon  
Natural Desert  
association



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Volume 12, Number 3



ELAINE REES

Most of the proposed Oregon Grasslands Wilderness is grazed by a single permittee. Retiring that permit would eliminate livestock from over half a million acres of public land.

## BLM's proposed policy change risks wilderness

*Facilities, exotic species could degrade WSAs*

By Gilly Lyons

This spring, the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposed revisions of its policy governing the management of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) by changing—illegally and without public review—the portion of its handbook governing WSAs. The Interim Management Policy (IMP) guides BLM managers when they consider development and management proposals on WSAs.

In Oregon, BLM has designated about 2.7 million acres as WSAs and recommended that Congress add about half this acreage to the wilderness preservation system. Congress has yet to act on this contentious issue. Protecting wilderness qualities on these lands is essential to their eventual designation, one of ONDA's primary goals.

The proposed changes allow the construction of "facilities," such as "guzzlers" (watering structures specially designed for watering wildlife). State fish and game agencies could stock, introduce, or transplant any animal or fish species they desire. The new policy would also allow state agencies to conduct such efforts with minimal review by the BLM or the public. These amendments were put forth with the unwritten but clearly implied purpose of increasing hunting

## Grazing lease reform?

### Proposal would lengthen lease terms to 30 years

Livestock grazing on our public lands is far and away the number one issue affecting arid land ecosystems of the Intermountain West. Consequently, the National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, The Wilderness Society, and the Sierra Club have been meeting with a group of western ranchers in an effort to change how livestock are managed on public lands. Cathy Carlson of the National Wildlife Federation presented the emerging proposal at Desert Conference XXI this spring.



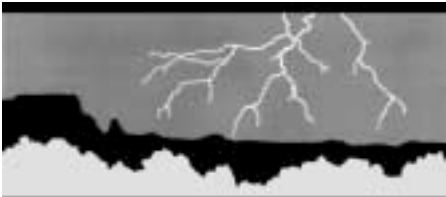
The as-yet-unnamed proposal would allow conservationists to acquire and hold what are now termed "grazing permits" for uses other than

grazing, presumably for conservation of resources. In exchange, ranchers would obtain 30-year leases instead of the current 10-year leases on their allotments.

Since ranchers already "own" their grazing permits (at least as far as the ranchers are concerned), the issue of whether they are for 10 years or 30 years, or even 50 or 100 years, seems irrelevant. So why do ranchers so desperately want the long-term leases? And what would conservationists gain from such an agreement?

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# FROM THE DEN

by Dave Funk

## The miracle of the high desert

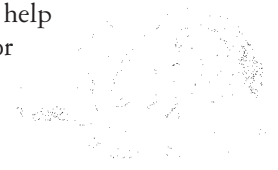
It was nothing short of a miracle. Ten people in a room. Two days at Camp Hancock and another day in Eugene. Complex discussions on science and politics. Gallons of coffee, juice and water. Agreement. Disagreement. And finally, a plan was born.

The miracle wasn't that ONDA's board of directors created a strategic plan, but that it was a simple plan. After re-working and simplifying the mission, we settled on just two goals. Number one: designate desert wilderness. Number two: restore native desert ecosystems and clean water.

These goals are deceptively simple. For each goal, the strategic plan identifies several objectives, each with organizational, legislative, litigation and educational actions. Each action item is assigned to a responsible board committee with target completion dates. However, as difficult as the planning process was, securing the financial resources and successfully completing the actions will be far more challenging.

ONDA now has three standing committees: the finance/fundraising committee, the operations committee, and the membership development committee. The board members have taken on a large responsibility for ONDA's defense of desert lands. Each board member participates on at least one committee, and the workload is tremendous.

Now we need your help. Everyone reading this can help preserve the desert we all love. If you can contribute time or money, we and our children can reap the rewards of clean streams, diverse wildlife habitat and expansive wildlands east of the Cascades. Please get involved. Call ONDA today!



### Oregon Natural Desert Association

#### BEND OFFICE

16 NW Kansas, Bend, OR 97701  
VOICE: 541-330-2638 • FAX: 541-385-3370  
E-MAIL: [onda@onda.org](mailto:onda@onda.org)  
WEBSITE: [www.onda.org](http://www.onda.org)

#### PORTLAND OFFICE

732 SW 3rd Ave., #407, Portland, OR 97204  
VOICE: 503-525-0193 • FAX: 503-228-9720  
E-MAIL: [jbelsky@onda.org](mailto:jbelsky@onda.org)

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*ONDA exists to protect, defend and restore forever the health of Oregon's native deserts.*

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Hart Mountain Barbed Wire Round-up August 3-7, 1999

Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge  
Join ONDA members, staff, and friends for pronghorn habitat restoration, gorgeous sunsets, and soaks in the hot springs at our annual fence-pulling bash. This year we've extended our stay at the refuge to a full three days of fence removal (from the morning of the 4th through the afternoon of the 6th). For more information or to sign up, contact Gilly at [glyons@onda.org](mailto:glyons@onda.org) or (503) 525-0193.

### Steens Mountain Encampment August 6-10, 1999

The Sierra Club's High Desert Committee invites desert enthusiasts, media, elected officials, and adventure seekers to

partake of day hikes, service projects, historical and environmental presentations, and wildlife watching on Steens Mountain. Please call (503) 239-8478 for more information.

### ONDA's Annual Membership Meeting October 15-17, 1999 Hancock Field Station

ONDA's Annual Membership Meeting will take place at Hancock Field Station near Fossil, OR. Please join us for an autumn weekend in the John Day Basin of eastern Oregon. We'll take hikes around the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument and float the Wild and Scenic John Day River (water levels permitting). Stargazing and evenings around the campfire guaranteed! Watch your mailbox for more details in August, or contact Gilly at [glyons@onda.org](mailto:glyons@onda.org) or (503) 525-0193.

# Examining a proposal to reform grazing leases

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While ONDA values dialogue with the industry, we do not support the proposal's central tenet which advocates a "new kind of lease creating long-term tenure on the land." The notion of giving ranchers such lengthy tenure contradicts ONDA's position that livestock should not be on the arid lands of the West and that our public lands should be managed for values other than beef production.

## Lease tenure unlikely to change

Certainly one could argue that the land might benefit from new leaseholders, such as those wanting to restore riparian habitat or protect rare plants. But most of the "new" leaseholders will be the same folks who hold the permits today. Under such a scenario, we would be operating from a position of weakness rather than strength. Even if we leveled the playing field by taking away all current grazing permits and awarding them to the highest bidder, we would still come out on the short end of the stick. Let's face it—the interested conservation organizations just don't have enough money to buy up all the leases on sensitive lands that we would like to protect.

## Some good ideas

The proposal does include some good ideas. It would end grazing on allotments in poor condition from livestock grazing (this amounts to about 15% of the public lands in the West) and eliminate the Range Betterment Fund (which steers a portion of permit fees back to range projects benefiting the permittee). However, the proposed new system would inherit the same biases of the old system and would make it even more difficult for conservationists to secure reforms that would truly improve the ecological health of our public lands.

ONDA supports the concept of allowing the public to acquire grazing permits without having to invest in the associated fee title, or base property lands, *only if the permit will be used for conservation purposes*. More preferable would be simply retiring the permit. In fact, having anyone hold a permit for any reason other



ONDA FILE PHOTO

*Cattle meander through the proposed Sheepshhead Wilderness east of Steens Mountain. Retiring grazing permits would give this landscape a much-needed rest. Grazing sensitive arid lands does not make sense.*

than grazing presents a host of legal and policy issues we should avoid. Consequently, we would now suggest that acquisition of a grazing permit by a non-rancher be allowed only in order to retire the permit.

## Federal buy-out appropriate

If legislation were passed allowing permit retirement, the conservation community does not have enough money to retire all grazing permits in need of retirement in a timely manner. With the

average age of ranchers at 60 years, many ranchers who might like to "retire" soon will face the prospect of not getting the best price on his/her permit if the only option is to sell the permit to another rancher. Given that the collective value of public land grazing permits is nearly \$1 billion, it's clear that the federal government needs to step up to the plate and help ranchers out, like it did with the whole dairy-herd buy-out in the 1980s.

## Role of conservation groups

ONDA will continue to advocate for a publicly funded buy-out of grazing permits on a willing-seller basis. Complementing the government buy-out should be the opportunity for conservation organizations to help accelerate the process, especially on high-profile lands like wilderness areas and national parks, where raising the funds would be most feasible. In some cases it would just make good sense to have a nonprofit conservation group act as the go-between in the purchase of a grazing permit, similar to the role The Nature Conservancy plays in acquiring deeded lands.

We do not need to compromise our position in order to get a quick fix, especially since acceptance of a proposal such as this would further ensconce ranchers in the myth that they control our public lands. 🐾

**T**he collective value of public land grazing permits is nearly \$1 billion. Clearly, the federal government should help provide funding to retire grazing permits.

# Desert wilderness at risk

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and fishing opportunities. Yet game animals and fish (including non-native species) could be introduced and managed without considering impacts on other native plant, fish, and wildlife species.

Further, the draft policy alters the definition of what impairs wilderness values by defining anything that increases wildlife as enhancing wilderness values. The new IMP would also allow the construction of any fence that could be construed as beneficial to wildlife habitat (because, according to BLM, increasing wildlife would automatically enhance wilderness values, no matter what the ecological consequences).

**T**he policy change would allow fences in Wilderness Study Areas if they could be argued to benefit wildlife habitat.

Perhaps most alarmingly, the proposed changes to the IMP would turn over crucial aspects of wildlife habitat management from BLM to state fish and game agencies, while relinquishing BLM's legal and traditional responsibilities to manage habitat on *all* lands under its purview, not just WSAs.

Because state wildlife agencies rely primarily on hunting and fishing license fees for their budgets, some fear they could work to enhance habitat for game species, possibly to the detriment of other "non-recreational" species. Also, state agencies are far more susceptible to the whims of local politics than federal agencies like BLM. For example, two state senators recently threatened to cut funds to Oregon Dept. of Fish & Wildlife if it took quick action to protect the endangered

Washington ground squirrel (see pg. 12). The agency backed down.

Thanks to a resounding chorus of opposition from the conservation community, the BLM was unable to quietly usher these changes through the agency's IMP revision process. In response to the uproar from wilderness advocates, Rep. Bruce Vento (D-MN) circulated a "Dear Colleague" letter in May addressed to BLM Director Tom Fry. The letter registered disapproval of the proposed IMP changes. As we go to press, the draft changes had been "kicked upstairs" to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, who has yet to approve them.

It is ONDA's hope that these IMP changes will be decisively rejected and



ONDA FILE PHOTO

*The proposed policy change would allow facilities, such as this wildlife-watering "guzzler," which degrade wilderness qualities of proposed WSAs for the benefit of game animal production.*

that the BLM will think twice before attempting to railroad through management policies that seriously compromise the integrity of millions of acres of wildlife habitat on public lands. 🐾

*Many thanks to Friends of Nevada Wilderness, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, American Lands Alliance, and The Wilderness Society for their excellent work to defend WSAs and wildlife against these proposed IMP changes.*

## BLM, wilderness, and the IMP

*A perspective from a former BLM employee*

*By Scott A. Moore, former Wilderness Specialist, Burns District BLM*

BLM decision-makers have become very clever and have learned how to manipulate or distort wilderness values and sidestep wilderness policies in order to support certain activities; it seems like grazing is often the option of choice. Regarding Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in particular, I see existing problems escalating. I don't believe the Interim Management Policy (IMP, see accompanying article) is capable of adequately protecting, let alone enhancing, wilderness values. The IMP is a good document and it safeguards against major land-use activities such as mining and road building, but it has many loopholes that can also allow other incompatible uses. I do not think it is strong enough to withstand internal pressures, such as additions of fences and water developments to support livestock grazing, and external pressures from motorized recreation (which results in a proliferation of "jeep trails" inside WSAs). I am concerned that wilderness values will continue to be degraded or even lost if present trends continue. ONDA's role as watchdog is extremely valuable if these trends are to be reversed.

I would like to say that ONDA, through direct aggressive actions, is a key grassroots organization in preserving wilderness values of our magnificent Oregon High Desert. ONDA is among the most effective groups that are bringing about the most change in how BLM public lands will be managed for uses other than grazing. Thanks for being such a good friend to wilderness and for helping educate me on how to look at our natural world on a different plane. Believe me when I say that ONDA's efforts are making a difference.

# Oregon Legislature puts squeeze on federal Clean Water Act

By Gilly Lyons

Is clean water a partisan issue? The 1999 Oregon Legislature seems to think so. Efforts to undermine the federal Clean Water Act abounded in the Republican-controlled legislature this past spring. Two bills—Senate Bill 675 and Senate Bill 1166—stand out as particularly striking examples of bad legislation; each would seriously compromise Oregon's ability to fulfill its obligations under the Clean Water Act. As we went to press, the House and Senate had passed both bills, which went to Gov. Kitzhaber's desk. ONDA and other clean water advocates hope (but can't be sure) that they'll be vetoed.

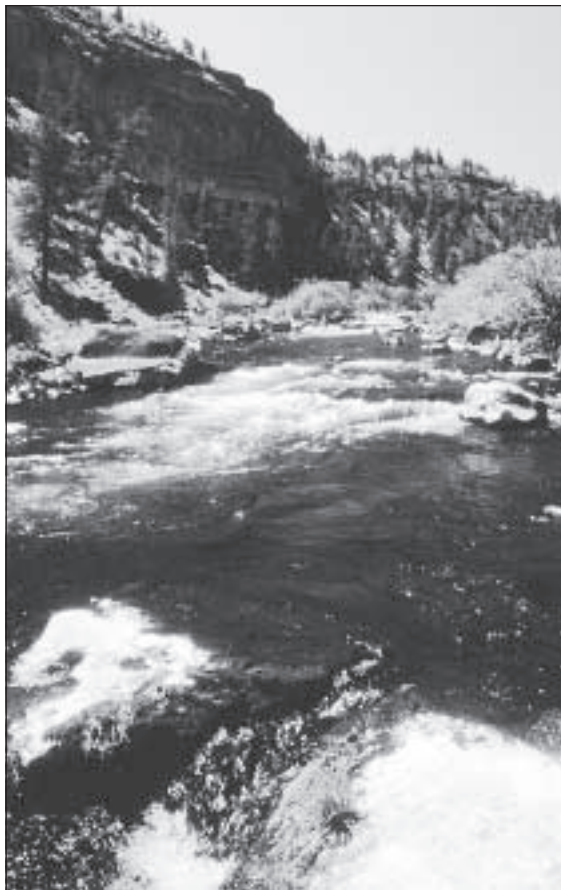
## SENATE BILL 675

Sponsored by Sen. Ted Ferrioli (R-John Day), SB 675 proposes to put the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) in charge of regulating non-point source agricultural pollution, effectively stripping the Department of Environmental Quality of its authority over this type of water pollution. Further, SB 675 would undermine the Clean Water Act by declaring that all agricultural activities conducted on federal lands automatically meet state water quality standards—without any documentation or certification from the state! With the sweep of a pen, all non-point water pollution from grazing on federal lands would be eliminated (on paper, anyway).

Should SB 675 become law, Oregon's water pollution regulation program would be severely hamstrung. This ill-conceived effort to put the ODA, which is sympathetic to the agriculture industry, in charge of regulating water quality could render federal water quality standards totally unenforceable on federal lands in Oregon.

## SENATE BILL 1166

SB 1166 would narrow the definition of outstanding resource waters (ORW), which is a crucial part of the federal Clean Water Act's anti-degradation policy, making it more difficult for the state to provide adequate protections for Oregon's cleanest waterways.




*The Deschutes River in Central Oregon.*

ELAINE REES

Currently the Clean Water Act allows Oregon to designate a wide range of water bodies as outstanding resource waters. SB 1166 would significantly restrict the conditions under which water bodies could be designated, making the bulk of our waters ineligible for this protective status. In fact, under SB 1166, less than 1% of the state's salmon-bearing streams would qualify for ORW designation.

If signed into law, SB 1166 would severely hamper efforts to protect our most treasured waterways and salmon, and also invite federal scrutiny of Oregon's ability to administer the Clean Water Act's anti-degradation policy.

By the time you read this article, Gov. Kitzhaber is likely to have decided either to sign or veto these two bills. We'll report on the outcome in our next issue. 

## ONDA to appeal clean water case to U.S. Supreme Court

By Carrie Stilwell

In May, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals declined to reconsider its earlier ruling that Sec. 401 of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) does not apply to non-point pollution, such as sediment and manure-laden runoff from grazing operations. ONDA and other conservation organizations filed a lawsuit in 1994 against the Forest Service for failing to comply with Sec. 401 of the CWA when it issues federal grazing permits. Sec. 401 requires any applicant for a federal permit to first obtain certification from the state that the permitted activity will not violate state water quality standards. In 1997, the District Court of Oregon agreed with ONDA that Sec. 401 applies to non-point pollution and that ranchers must obtain state certification before they can graze cattle on their public lands grazing allotments. The Appeals Court struck down the lower court decision, and then denied ONDA's petition for reconsideration of its reversal. This July, ONDA and co-plaintiffs will petition the Supreme Court in hopes of a favorable ruling.

# CARING FOR OUR PLACES

*Juniper, Guano Creek  
Wilderness Study Area.*



ELAINE REES

*By Kathleen Dean Moore*



*Kathleen Dean Moore is chair of the Department of Philosophy at Oregon State University and author of Riverwalking, winner of a 1996 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award. Her new collection of essays, Holdfast, is published by The Lyons Press. The following is excerpted from a presentation to Desert Conference XXI at Malheur National Field Station, May 1, 1999.*

I tell my students: first, the embrace—the celebration of being alive among all this life. Then, a search for the consequences of that embrace.

It's a good place to start, because no matter where we come from, we can agree on this, at least: that each of us, in some way, cares deeply about the rivers and the land and their natural and human communities. Or (as my students would say) each of us is in a "meaningful relationship" with something that smells of algae or sage.

"Sing our love for the land," Aldo Leopold said, "and our obligation to it." That strikes me as good advice. I want to sing our love for the land first, and then think together about what that means for our obligations. I want to imagine a new ethic, an ethic of connection, built not only on caring for people or caring for the land, but on the intricate and beautiful ways that love for people and love for the land nurture each other and sustain us all.



What is the nature of our obligation to the land? The dominant ethic, the ethic that we swim in, is an ethic of separation—a utilitarian moral view. Utilitarians will say that the primary value of the land is its value to us—its utility. They say further

that therefore our obligation to wild lands—to protect them and heal them—are really obligations to people, to use wild lands in a way that maximizes human benefit. That makes a certain sense. After all, what is a desert landscape good for?

It's a long list, but it will include:

- Desert rivers for irrigation.
- Pine forests for grazing cattle, or for toilet paper, or both.
- Grasslands for fattening cattle.
- Rivers for salmon and potatoes.
- Rivers to flush urine and dead cows into the next county.
- Deer for shooting.

But we don't have to be brutal about this, or narrow-minded. We can acknowledge many other human uses of the land:

- Meadowlarks to jump-start your heart in the morning.
- Junipers for shade as sweet and full of memories as Christmas.
- Shallow lakes for blue-green algae and oxygen and suckers and water striders and wading birds and coots—because these are all puzzle pieces of good health.

And so on, for all the rest – sage, salt flats, sandhill cranes. They all have their uses, because even if they are not resources that we develop, they are resources that develop us (which is equally useful).

So here’s the theory of enlightened self-interest: we have an obligation to assure the well-being of the high desert because our well-being depends on it, and the well-being of our children. All this may be true, but it can’t be the whole story.

First, this utilitarian view of the land has led people to do terrible things in the name of the “greatest good for the greater number.” It is possible to dynamite Celilo Falls on the Columbia River where native people gathered for centuries to fish and pray. And then it is possible to dam the river and bury the rubble and the prayers. You can show on a graph how the benefits soar far beyond the measured costs, irrigating orchards and sending cheap electricity to cities on the Pacific Coast. The hidden costs of human cruelty, the destruction of something beautiful and lasting, the hardening of the spirit—these don’t show up on the chart.

But something else is wrong. I simply don’t believe the utilitarian premise, the arrogant and dubious idea that human beings are the center of the moral universe—human beings, imagining that rivers were made especially for them, the way ticks must think that hikers are their special gifts from God. The temptation is to design arrogant policies and to undertake dubious projects, and then we end up doing to rivers what ticks do to us, except ticks have the good grace to drop off when their stomachs are full. And there’s another problem with this view. It sets us apart from the natural world—we make ourselves outsiders, a kind of mass auto-alienation. From that separation comes a kind of sadness we can’t explain, and a longing for a place that feels like home.

Finally, consider a third problem with the view that the only value of the land is its value to us. It doesn’t distinguish between higher and lower uses. It’s possible to dam Glen Canyon and use the impoundment for fraternity parties in houseboats,

but the canyon can do better things than this, and fraternity boys are easy to amuse. It is possible to use a desert canyon to graze cattle, but who would think that the highest use of a desert canyon is as a breeding ground for flies?



In a hydrology class, I was invited to do the one obligatory class on ethics. I asked the students to tell me the names of their home rivers.

Grand Ronde. Umatilla. Klickitat. Malheur. White Salmon. Wallowa. Mollala. Nestucca. Sweet Home Creek. And then suddenly, it was as if a cloud had passed across the sun. The saying of the names had become a drum roll for what was lost—the culture, the free-flowing rivers, the clear water, and the salmon. Snake, dammed and dammed again. Willamette, dammed and poisoned. Klamath, dammed. Santiam, clearcut. Umpqua, dammed. Tahkenitch, dammed. Siletz, clearcut. Owyhee, dammed

and dispersed over forty thousand acres. Willow Creek, poisoned. The Columbia River, dammed, poisoned, dammed again, poisoned, until all the river otters in the lower river have skin tumors, and any radiologist in this country can tell who has grown up along the river, by the radioisotopes in their bones.

*Diablo Mountain Wilderness Study Area.*

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

I want to imagine a new ethic of connection built on the intricate, beautiful ways that love for people and love for the land nurture each other and sustain us all.




ELAINE REES



Mabogany Butte.

ONDA FILE PHOTO

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If a river could think, it would think big. No political boundary or lot line makes the slightest bit of difference to a river; have you seen what a river can do to a barbed-wire fence, or a line drawn in the sand? If a river had logic, it would be inductive. A river grows by the accumulation of many small things: water rolling off a million hemlock needles, seeping through mossy banks into a thousand feeder streams. The life histories of herons, the bones of spawned-out salmon, the silt of failed dreams, boulders cracked off mountains, used-up automobiles—the river gathers it all. There is a kind of wisdom here, and a recommended curriculum. 

*Copyright 1999 by Kathleen Dean Moore. Reprinted by permission of the author. Thanks to Lizzie Grossman for excerpting this presentation from Desert Conference.*

## Why mollusks matter

By Wendell Wood



Mollusks—snails, clams, freshwater limpets, etc.—provide an incredible but largely under-appreciated part of the rich diversity of fauna in the Pacific Northwest. At Desert Conference XXI, Dr. Terry Frest described his studies around this region and showed slides of many beautiful snail species.


Frest holds a Ph.D. in paleontology and is a specialist on North American land and freshwater mollusks, particularly those in the West. He is co-author Clinton's Northwest Forest Plan and Eastside Forest Plan documents on mollusks.

Mollusks fill a key role in the food chain as primary herbivores in freshwater aquatic ecosystems, Dr. Frest explained. In some pristine waters, they are more numerous in total biomass and have greater species diversity even than insects! In turn, mollusks serve as food for a variety of freshwater fish. Larger aquatic predators such as ducks, geese, herons, and cranes also commonly consume snails and smaller freshwater bivalves. Historically, Native Americans have utilized larger freshwater clams and some snails extensively for food, tools, and ornaments.

In the Pacific Northwest, with its abundance of oligotrophic (nutrient-poor/oxygen-rich) mountain streams and springs, a number of species are

specifically adapted to these cold-water conditions. These species are of special concern because, as a group, they constitute some of our region's most threatened and endangered species. The preservation of adequate habitat for this cold-water biota is a designated major goal of water quality regulations.

In Idaho, five such taxa from the middle Snake River have recently been added to the federal Endangered Species List. These unique animals require exceptionally well-oxygenated, clean water. They are currently restricted to areas with unpolluted, cold, clear flowing water and are intolerant of impoundments, turbidity, slack water, or substantial amounts of dissolved herbicides, pesticides, nitrates, or phosphates.

The majority of freshwater mollusk species are sensitive to pollution regardless of source. Relatively few North American species tolerate warm waters, low dissolved oxygen, or seasonal fluctuations. Dr. Frest expressed his strong opinion that many species of both aquatic and terrestrial mollusks in the forests and deserts of the Northwest deserve federal threatened or endangered species status to protect their habitats from thoughtless development and manipulation. 







# THE GREAT BASIN:

## A view from an early explorer...

The interior of the Great Basin, so far as explored, is found to be a succession of sharp mountain ranges....They are thinly wooded with some varieties of pine, cedar, aspen, and a few other trees, and afford an excellent quality of bunchgrass, equal to any found in the Rocky Mountains. Black tailed deer and mountain sheep are frequent in these mountains; which...may be called fertile, in the radical sense of the word. Sterility, on the contrary, is the absolute characteristic of the valleys between the mountains—no wood, no water, nor grass, the gloomy artemisia [*sagebrush*] the prevailing shrub....

Such is the Great Basin, heretofore characterized as a desert, and in some respect meriting that appellation, but already demanding the qualification of great exceptions, and deserving the full examination of a thorough exploration.

– John Charles Fremont,  
*Geographical Memoir*, 1848



ELAINE REES

## ...and from an American writer

I find most interesting the conspiracy of life in the desert to circumvent the death rays of the all-conquering sun. The beaten earth appears defeated and dead, but it only appears so. A vast and inventive organization of living matter survives by seeming to have lost. The gray and dusty sage wears oily armor to protect its inward small moistness....those animals which must drink moisture get at it second hand—a rabbit from a leaf, a coyote from the blood of a rabbit.

...the desert, the dry and sunlashed desert, is a good school in which to observe the cleverness and the infinite variety of techniques of survival under pitiless opposition. Life could not change the sun or water the desert, so it changed itself....The desert has mothered magic things.

– John Steinbeck  
*Travels with Charley*, 1962

*Both excerpts as quoted from The Sagebrush Ocean: A Natural History of the Great Basin, by Stephen Trimble.*

# Feedback on Desert Conference XXI

*Comments from some participants at Desert Conference XXI:*

“The talks here are always terrific.”

“A great balance of technical and inspirational talks.”

“A terrific conference again this year!”

“Thanks for the emphasis on organic products (organic coffee and organic cotton T-shirts).”

“It was great to meet so many talented people from such varied backgrounds who share our dedication to protecting and rehabilitating our public lands.”

“The conference rekindled a dead fire in me.”

“The speakers, field trips, and entertainment were all wonderful.”



MATREYA

*Desert Conference XXI participants on a field trip enjoy the view from Alvord Peak.*

## Thanks, Desert Conference Volunteers!

*(We couldn't have done it without you!)*

The hosts of Desert Conference XXI—Oregon Natural Desert Association, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, and the Committee for Idaho's High Desert—extend hearty thanks to the following volunteers who helped make this year's conference such a success:

Constance Albrecht

Diane Alves

Harry Anderton

Peter Barry

Alex Berlin

Evelyn Brown

Jon Cain

Lee Christie

Candy Cobb

Colleen Cole

Alice “Lupus” Elshoff

*(who distinguished herself in the name-tag category)*

Matt Holmes

Mark Hubbard

Ernie Jones

Tom Keffer

Kit Kirkpatrick

Craig Lacy

Connie Lonsdale

Xanthe Miller

Laura M. Ohanian

Dave Stone

Brenda Schweitzer

June Tillman

Stephanie Welch

Special thanks to **Richard Wilhelm** for the wonderful T-shirt design; to our audiovisual technician (read “wizard”) **Trygve Steen**; to outstanding Kid's Program volunteers **Daisy Hethcoat**, **Beth Hoezee**, and **Brett VandenHeuvel**; and to phenomenal Hospitality Room hosts **Emily Thomas** and **Jason Sievers**.

## Thank you, Foundations!

ONDA would like to offer our sincere thanks to the following foundations for their generous support of and commitment to ONDA's work:

### **Mazamas Conservation Committee**

for backing our desert wildlands mapping efforts

### **Patagonia, Inc.**

for funding public education about the John Day Wild and Scenic River Management Plan

### **Wilburforce Foundation**

for supporting ONDA's membership development program

Your support helps us protect Oregon's desert wilderness and waterways.

# M ARKETPLACE

## Books

- The Sagebrush Ocean: A Natural History of the Great Basin*  
by Stephen Trimble ..... \$24
- Waste of the West: Public Lands Ranching*  
by Lynn Jacobs ..... \$28
- Sacred Cows at the Public Trough*  
by Denzel & Nancy Ferguson ..... \$9
- Hole in the Sky*  
by William Kittredge ..... \$20
- Oregon's Outback: An Auto Tour Guide to Southeast Oregon*  
by Donna Lynn Ikenberry ..... \$15

## Scientific Papers

- "Survey of Livestock Influences on Stream and Riparian  
Ecosystems in the Western United States"  
by Joy Belsky, A. Matzke, and S. Uselman ..... \$5
- "Effects of Livestock Grazing on Stand Dynamics  
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by Joy Belsky and Dana Blumenthal ..... \$1 (for postage)

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## Etc.

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  \$100 Advocate   
  \$250 Patron   
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This gift is a:   
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*Mail this form with check (or voided check for automatic withdrawals) to ONDA, 16 NW Kansas, Bend, OR 97701*

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*Desert Ramblings*  
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## INSIDE:

- ***GRAZING LEASE REFORM?***
- ***DESERT CONFERENCE XXI HIGHLIGHTS***



# Agro-industrial project threatens rare squirrel

ONDA, along with the Northwest Environmental Defense Center and Defenders of Wildlife, have challenged a proposal by Boeing (Airlines) Agri-Industrial Company and Inland Land Company that would plow up over 20,000 acres of rare native grasslands to grow row crops. In the mid-1970s, Boeing leased but never used these state-owned grasslands in north central Oregon for \$2 per acre. More recently, Inland Land Co. subleased the land from Boeing. The State of Oregon must approve the grassland conversion proposal.

Due to extensive conversion of the Columbia Plateau to croplands, the Boeing-leased lands, along with the adjacent Boardman Bombing Range, comprise the largest and best remaining example of sand bunchgrass and open sand dune habitats in the entire Columbia Basin. Once-widespread species, such as Washington ground squirrels, burrowing owls, loggerhead shrikes, and sagebrush lizards, depend on such habitat for their survival.

In an attempt to save these native grasslands from destruction, ONDA and the other groups filed a petition for emergency listing of the Washington ground squirrel under the state's

Endangered Species Act. Remaining colonies of the ground squirrel declined 71% in the 1980s and a further 69% in the 1990s. Except for the state lands leased by Boeing, Washington ground squirrels survive only on small fragments of their increasingly rare habitat. In fact, it's likely that over 90% of Oregon's remaining Washington ground squirrels live on the Boardman Bombing Range and the state lands leased to Boeing. Further reduction and fragmentation of this last remaining squirrel habitat is likely to result in the extinction of the species.

In spite of overwhelming testimony at public hearings in favor of emergency listing, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) opposed the emergency listing after conservative state legislators, led by Republican Sens. Ted Ferrioli and Lynn Lundquist, threatened to halt funding for Oregon's Endangered Species Act. The Fish and Wildlife Commission subsequently declined an emergency listing, but did direct ODFW to undertake rulemaking to permanently list the species as endangered. Unfortunately, that process can take up to a year. Since the Commission's decision, Inland Land Co. has continued to convert more of the squirrel's native habitat to agricultural use.

### **What you can do:**

Urge ODFW and the Fish & Wildlife Commission to immediately list the Washington ground squirrel as an endangered species. Write to:

Claire Puchy  
ODFW  
P.O. Box 59  
Portland, OR 97207