

Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the
Oregon
Natural Desert
association



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Volume 12, Number 1



MAITREYA

Wildhorse Canyon on the southeast flank of Steens Mountain. It is unclear whether BLM's proposed National Conservation Area for the Steens would truly conserve its recreational and biological riches.

Conserving Steens Mountain

Would National Conservation Area continue grazing?

In its recently unveiled "Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan," the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recommended that Congress create a 769,000-acre National Conservation Area (NCA) on and around Steens Mountain (see related story, pgs. 6-8). In BLM's "preferred alternative," the Steens NCA would be withdrawn from mineral entry and leasing, and all current management actions would continue unless specifically prohibited by the enacting legislation.

The obvious question: Would livestock grazing continue? Or is this a Trojan Horse—something that looks good on the outside but conceals a destructive threat within? Will the Steens NCA envisioned by BLM merely change the color on the map but not the care of the land?



FROM THE OUTBACK
by Bill Marlett

NCA first proposed in 1991

The seed for the Steens NCA was planted in 1991, when conservation groups proposed national park status for the Steens. In response to this "threat," then Sen. Bob Packwood (R-OR) and Rep. Bob Smith (R-OR), at the behest of ranchers and Harney County, introduced a bill to create a Steens NCA. The legislation sounded good, but allowed BLM to maintain the status quo. Fortunately, that bill died in Congress.

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ONDA wins suit to protect Owyhee River

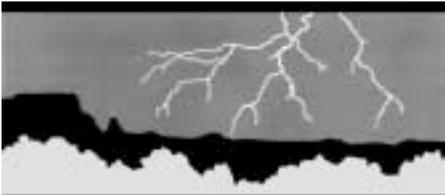
In early November, a U.S. District Court ordered the Vale District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to fully consider the negative impacts of livestock grazing on the Owyhee Wild & Scenic River. The decision, issued by Judge James Redden, is the third ruling in two years that faults the BLM for failing to adequately protect designated wild and scenic rivers in eastern Oregon. Earlier in 1998, a court charged the Prineville District BLM with failing to prepare a plan for the Wild & Scenic John Day River, and in 1997 a judge required the Burns District BLM to consider the adverse impacts of livestock on the Wild & Scenic Donner und Blitzen River.

Background

A coalition of Oregon and Idaho conservation groups filed the Owyhee River suit in early 1998, alleging that the BLM's management plan failed to comply with the federal Wild & Scenic Rivers Act by not fully protecting the outstanding natural and recreational values of the river (see *Desert Ramblings*, Spring 1998).

Congress designated the Owyhee a national wild and scenic river in 1984 and added more river segments in 1988. The BLM management plan covers 186 miles of the Owyhee and its tributaries, including sections of the Main Owyhee, West Little Fork Owyhee, and North Fork Owyhee Rivers. The river system and its canyonlands constitute one of the largest wildland areas in the lower 48 states and includes portions of Oregon, Idaho, and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 ►



FROM THE DEN

by Dave Funk

Permit retirement could ease transition

The New York Times recently ran an article about the conflicts between the old and new ways of thinking around Frenchglen, Oregon, the tiny town that hugs the southwestern corner of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge. This remote outpost, where visitors outnumber locals during spring bird migrations, is a microcosm of the West. Change is coming fast everywhere. Ranchers don't trust environmentalists; environmentalists don't trust ranchers; neither trust the BLM. Are we in for another prolonged spotted owl-type conflict? Or is there another way?

ONDA is committed to two main objectives: The designation of desert wilderness and the restoration of desert ecosystems and clean water. We don't believe you can have true wilderness or clean streams where cows trample. We are trying to find ways to ease the burden on ranch families as we seek to move cattle out of waterways and off sensitive public desert wilderness. One way is for a desert wilderness bill to include a permit retirement provision that pays the permit holder for the fair market value of the permit. A sunset clause could give the permit holder a ten-year period to accept payment for the permit retirement. Perhaps acceptance of this concept will ease potential conflicts alluded to in *The New York Times* article.

On another note, we bid farewell to long-time board member Kathy Myron, who has reluctantly resigned from ONDA's board due to heavy demands in her work and personal life. We'll miss her warm, spiritual commitment to the desert. At the same time we welcome Lee Christie, a long-time wilderness advocate who brings a wealth of talents to the board (see pg. 10).



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
WEBSITE: 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

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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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Desert Conference XXI April 29 - May 2 Malheur Field Station

Join ONDA, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, and the Committee for Idaho's High Desert for an unforgettable week-end of field trips, workshops, and great speakers from throughout the West. Watch your mailbox for a conference brochure in March, or contact Gilly for details at glyons@onda.org or (503) 525-0193.

Evenings with Nature

This series takes place at the Central Oregon Environmental Center, 16 NW Kansas, Bend. Refreshments at 6 pm, program at 7. For more info, call (541) 385-6908.

Feb. 17 • Starlight, Starbright. Local astronomer Jerry Niehuser offers an illuminating view of solar systems and galaxies for the layperson.

March 17 • The Elusive Torrent Duck. Slides and stories from BLM wildlife biologist Steven Dowlan, who has studied and tracked secretive Harlequin ducks from their breeding grounds high in the Cascades to their wintering areas around Puget Sound.

April 21 • Birds, Birds, Birds—A Photographic Essay. Join wildlife photographer Frank Cleland for a slide show of birds from around the country.

Thank you!

ONDA gratefully acknowledges the John and Martha Marks Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation for its support.

Would grazing continue on a Steens NCA?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

NCA's: Few precedents

National Conservation Areas have a limited yet evolving history. In general, NCAs have been created to protect nationally significant resources while maintaining multiple use management. Since 1987, NCA designations allow only such uses within them as the Secretary of the Interior finds will further the primary purposes for which the conservation area was established.

For example, the recently designated Red Rock NCA in Nevada was established "...in order to conserve, protect, and enhance for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations the unique and nationally important geologic, archeological, ecological, cultural, scenic, scientific, wildlife, riparian, wilderness, endangered species, and recreation resources." Assuming the language for a Steens NCA would be similar to this, we wonder if livestock grazing would "further the primary purpose" of the Steens NCA? Conservationists would, of course, say "no," but the BLM is likely to say "yes."

It is true that previous BLM managers have exempted some lands from grazing, including the Little Blitzen Gorge, Big Indian Gorge, and the High Steens Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Whether those actions were the result of enlightened ecological thinking or public pressure, they do indicate that BLM can change. But recent and pending actions suggest severe limits to such transformations.

Cattle as restoration tools?

Look at how BLM seeks to "protect" the Wild & Scenic Blitzen River. In its newly revised river management plan (Appendix "N" of the Southeast Oregon RMP), the agency proposes in four of its five management alternatives to put 3,000 cows along the Blitzen River. This proposal follows BLM's loss of a court battle over their original plan, which the judge said failed to demonstrate how continued livestock grazing would protect the river's natural values.



Steens Mountain at sunrise.

ELAINE REES

Adding insult to injury, BLM also plans to use these 3,000 cows to restore the habitat of the redband trout, a species currently under consideration for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Could the BLM manage the Steens exclusively for its biological richness? Only if the agency ends its 60-year love affair with the cow.

Furthermore, the 3,000 cows are to be employed to restore water quality to over 30 miles of streams in the upper Blitzen watershed which currently violate water quality standards because of past abuse by livestock grazing.

BLM continues to mismanage the public lands on Steens Mountain, allowing livestock trespass on the High Steens ACEC. The agency refuses to acquire private inholdings on the Steens that are currently threatened with recreational and commercial development, even though some parcels have been made available to it. In addition, BLM opened a snowmobile play area on the High Steens, enabling snowmobiles to access adjacent wilderness study areas.

One of BLM's likely motivations for proposing a Steens NCA is so this unique landscape won't be transferred to another agency to manage. Can ONDA support a BLM-managed Steens Mountain National Conservation Area? We will consider any proposal that advances protection of this desert gem, although we favor National Park Service management, whether as a national park or under some other designation. Unlike the BLM, the Park Service can be expected to eventually phase out grazing, either directly or through a buy-out of the grazing permits, as they recently did in Nevada's Great Basin National Park.

Can BLM manage the Steens exclusively for its biological richness? The answer depends on whether you believe BLM can end its 60-year love affair with the cow. 

ONDA wins Owyhee ruling

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Nevada. Congress identified the Owyhee's scenery, geology, recreation, wildlife and cultural resources as outstandingly remarkable values that must be protected.

Ruling no surprise

ONDA's Executive Director, Bill Marlett was not surprised by the decision. "The BLM has consistently disregarded the will of Congress to protect wild and scenic rivers in Oregon. The Owyhee is just another example of the agency's inability to stand up to the livestock industry." The court found that ranchers bullied BLM not to take any action that would adversely affect their livestock's access to the river.

The court agreed with conservationists that BLM authorized livestock grazing without first determining whether grazing was compatible with the protection of the natural and recreational values of the Owyhee, further stating that the BLM had a duty not only to restrict livestock grazing but to eliminate it where it did not protect or enhance the river's values. BLM had claimed that conservationists must prove harm to the river caused by livestock grazing, but the court disagreed. Judge Redden made it clear



An aerial view of the remote and scenic Owyhee River at "Three Forks."

DAVE STONE

that it is incumbent upon the BLM to prove how livestock grazing is consistent with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

BLM's own draft management plan determined that livestock grazing has had broad, adverse effects on both riparian and upland vegetation throughout the Owyhee River drainage. The draft plan noted that 36% of the river was accessible to livestock, with 18 river miles having noticeable negative impacts from livestock.

Jack Sterne, the lawyer representing ONDA and the other groups, said that what little monitoring BLM has done shows that grazing is impacting the values of the river. "The law requires BLM to address

the impact, not defer action until some unspecified future date," says Sterne.

ONDA believes the Owyhee country, one of Oregon's wildest landscapes, deserves the best protection we can give it. This legal victory is a step toward doing just that. ONDA extends special thanks to Jack Sterne for his tireless efforts on behalf of the Owyhee.

Appeals Court may revisit Clean Water Act ruling

In 1994, ONDA filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service for failing to comply with Sec. 401 of the Clean Water Act when it issued 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, a U.S. District Court agreed with ONDA that ranchers must obtain certification from the state before they can graze cattle on federal lands (see *Desert Ramblings*, Winter 1997). Last summer, however, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the lower court's decision, holding that Sec. 401 applies only to "point" source pollution, such as from a factory pipe, not "nonpoint" pollution (see *Desert Ramblings*, Fall 1998).

But ONDA is not giving up. Through our attorneys at the Western Environmental Law Center, we have petitioned the Ninth Circuit to reconsider its decision. While the Court has not determined whether it will actually reconsider, it has "withdrawn" the opinion and has ordered the opposing parties to file written arguments. We will keep you posted.

High desert family heads to frontier

ONDA bids a reluctant farewell to Jack Sterne and Kris Balliet, who recently moved to Anchorage, Alaska. Since 1995, Jack and Kris have been steadfast and effective advocates for Oregon's high desert. Kris' tireless work with the Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition was invaluable to ONDA's efforts to protect the John Day and the Donner und Blitzen Rivers and native desert fish. As our unofficial "staff attorney," Jack represented ONDA in numerous legal challenges. A mere two days before hitting the Alaska-Canada Highway, Jack argued ONDA's Owyhee Wild and Scenic River lawsuit in district court and achieved another precedent-setting victory for wild and scenic rivers throughout the West.

Thanks, Kris and Jack. We'll miss you greatly, but your legacy will remain with ONDA and the high desert.

Which BLM lands are suitable for grazing?

ONDA petitions Interior Dept. to finally fulfill a 65-year-old mandate

By Elaine Rees

Citing 65 years of ignoring important requirements of the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act, ONDA and 20 other environmental groups have petitioned the Department of Interior to direct its Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to determine the suitability of the lands under its jurisdiction for livestock grazing.

Intent of the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act

Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA) in 1934 to remedy the severe ecological damage caused by continued overgrazing of the West's public lands. Secondly, it was intended to stabilize the livestock industry, which was in dire straits due to depletion of forage and water resources, erosion of soils, and invasion of weeds—not to mention the escalating hostilities between cattlemen and sheepmen over their conflicting uses of the public range.

The TGA withdrew the remaining unclaimed lands in the West from settlement and mandated their evaluation prior to the establishment of grazing districts. These districts were to contain lands determined to be "chiefly valuable for grazing," rather than those lands with important values for flood control, soil conservation, outdoor recreation, wildlife habitat, etc. According to the TGA, livestock grazing is the lowest ranking classification of use.

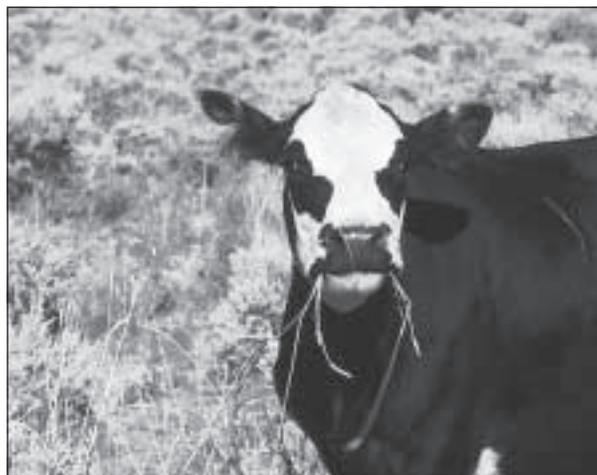
Implemented by livestock interests

The Department of Interior essentially put the creation of grazing districts into the hands of locally elected boards dominated by or exclusively comprised of the landed stockmen who were to be the chief beneficiaries of the new government regulated grazing system. Despite the Congressional mandate to thoroughly inventory and classify the public lands, the Department of Interior itself never conducted such an inventory to determine which lands were "chiefly valuable for grazing." And certainly the stockmen who controlled the boards of the local grazing districts had little interest in reducing the acreage available for grazing by identifying conflicting uses. Within a matter of months of the TGA's passage, virtually all of the public lands were placed into grazing districts created by the local boards.

1976: Congress tries again

Seeking to ensure that the public was receiving maximum benefit from the public lands, Congress created a special commission in 1969 to review public land laws. The commission's report made several hundred recommendations for improving the management of the public lands, including a review of BLM's retention and disposal classifications, because it had found that "...there is no good information available to define and identify that portion of the 273 million acres under grazing permits that are chiefly valuable for domestic livestock."

Subsequently, in 1976, Congress passed the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) as a means of reinforcing the importance of proper land classifications and the protection of ecological values as required by the TGA. FLPMA requires that an exhaustive inventory of public land values and classifications occur prior to the development of land use plans, such as the Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan (see story, pg. 6). Yet with the new millennium approaching, still no comprehensive inventory of the suitability of public lands for grazing has been conducted.



ONDA FILE PHOTO

On Oregon's arid high desert public lands, a rancher may require up to 100 acres to sustain a single cow.

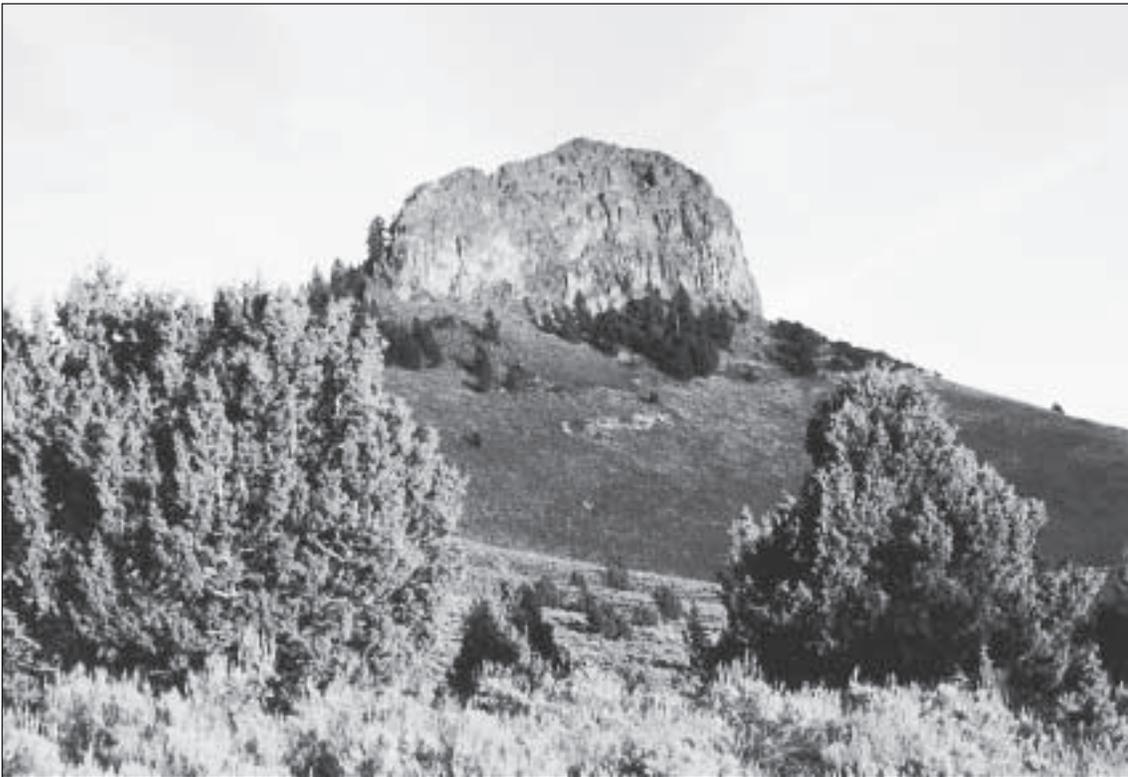
According to the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act, livestock grazing is the lowest ranking classification of use. The law places a higher value on flood control, soil conservation, recreation, and wildlife habitat uses.

Today's reality

In spite of repeated directions from Congress to promote the highest use of our public lands, and the statutory designation of grazing as the lowest ranking use, the vast majority of lands administered by BLM are grazed, regardless of other resource values. Wildlife habitat, riparian areas, cultural sites, native plant communities, and important recreational values continue to be degraded by this ubiquitous activity.

ONDA and its allies are requesting through this petition that the Secretary of Interior establish a procedure for BLM to classify the public lands according to their highest use as Congress envisioned when it passed the Taylor Grazing Act over 60 years ago. 

SEORMP: Acronym for Opportunity



ELAINE REES

Castle Rock, a prominent landmark in the northern portion of the SEORMP. ONDA would like to see it designated as a wilderness area.

Imagine trying to hike through 6.3 million acres—nearly 10,000 square miles! That’s the size of Vermont plus a 600-square-mile chunk of New Hampshire. Now imagine you are a part owner of this immense landscape, and you and your co-owners are creating a management plan for its future. How would you manage the natural resources in this vast area? What kind of activities would you allow or prohibit? What would you like your landscapes and rivers to look like in 20 years?

The draft “Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (SEORMP/EIS),” released in November 1998, lays out options for 6.3 million acres or southeast Oregon managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The plan covers almost exactly one-tenth of the state of Oregon, including the spectacular Steens Mountain.

Comments sought

BLM is now seeking input on the draft document. This is a tremendous opportunity for desert enthusiasts to influence the management of an extremely significant portion of the public lands. In addition to Steens Mountain, we’re talking about the Alvord Desert, the Trout Creek Mountains, the entire Owyhee watershed within Oregon, and much, much more. We’re talking about critical habitat for the rare kit fox and for the federally-listed Lahontan cutthroat trout. We’re talking about the home of dwindling populations of sage

grouse, bull trout, and inland redband trout. In short, we’re talking about millions of acres of desert wildlands.

The two-volume, five-pound document asserts that “ecosystem management, multiple use and sustained yield” will be the guiding principles for BLM’s land use decisions for the planning area. It describes five alternatives, ranging from one emphasizing commodity production (Alternative A) to one with the absolute minimal management intervention (Alternative E).

Alternative E: “Minimal Human Intervention”

Alternative E is included as “...a response to issues continuously raised during scoping.” It authorizes no commodity production and would include “only those actions necessary to maintain natural values.” The agency recognizes that Alternative E is not a viable alternative as required by NEPA. It represents a strict, “hands-off” approach to management, ignoring the need for certain restorative measures to bring the damaged ecosystem back to health. It does completely eliminate domestic livestock grazing from the 6.3 million acres of public lands (remember—Vermont plus 600 square miles) and closes the area to mining



CHRISTINE HOLDEN, COURTESY OF ODFW

Townsend's big-eared bat.

At stake: wildlife, wildlands, wild rivers

and energy development. However, it designates no wild and scenic river additions, and there would be no special management areas such as Research Natural Areas (RNAs) and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). There would be no prescribed burns to rehabilitate brush-infested areas, nor would there be any rehabilitation of overused camping sites.

BLM's "Preferred" Alternative C

BLM has put forward Alternative C as its "preferred alternative." The report describes this alternative as "...providing for a high level of natural resource protection and improvement in ecological conditions while providing for commodity production." Nevertheless it differs from the Commodity Production Alternative (Alternative A) only nominally. Item after item in the Table of Objectives and Management Directives refers the reader to Alternative A for the details of the management directives for Alternative C. Or else both A and C refer to Alternative B (the No Change from Present Management Alternative) for the directives. This similarity of alternatives is a major shortcoming of the document.

Alternatives A, B, and C differ primarily in what they would do with the special management areas, such as Wild & Scenic Rivers, ACECs, RNAs, etc. For example, Alternative C includes special protection for at least 14,599 acres (and possibly up to 22,799 acres) at Castle Rock in Malheur County, designates as an ACEC 11,239 acres of rare cotton-

PUBLIC LANDS AFFECTED BY SEORMP



wood gallery forest and other features along the Owyhee River below Owyhee Dam, and adds an 86,973-acre (136-square-miles) Owyhee Views ACEC. In Alternative C, BLM also proposes a significant addition (over 28,000 acres) to the Steens Mountain ACEC to better protect scenic and botanical values on the summit, as well as proposing numerous smaller protective designations for selected native plant communities throughout portions of the planning area.

What the Alternatives Would Do

"A"- Emphasize Commodity Production:

Maximizes grazing. Proposes Steens National Conservation Area (NCA). Maximize tourism.

"B"- Continue Present Management:

Maintains present high grazing levels.

"C"- BLM's "Preferred" Alternative:

Maintains present high grazing levels. Proposes Steens NCA. Proposes 34 new wild and scenic river miles, and Castle Rock, Owyhee, other ACECs.

"D"- Emphasize Natural Values:

Reduces grazing "where monitoring shows need to reduce grazing impacts." Reduces fire suppression. Proposes Steens NCA. Proposes 289 new wild and scenic river miles. Increases overall acreage in ACECs.

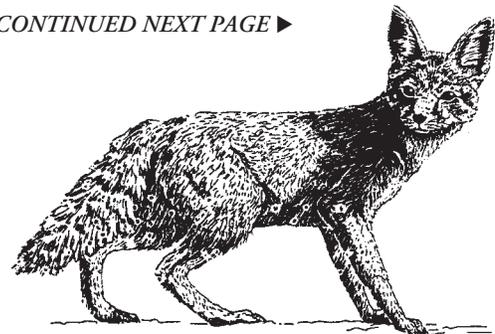
"E" - Minimal Human Intervention:

Ends grazing and other commodity production. No new wild and scenic river or ACEC designations. No ecosystem restoration or recreational maintenance.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Preferred Alternative C proposes that 34 river miles be added to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system, including approximately 17 miles of Dry Creek, 13.5 miles of the Owyhee River below Owyhee Dam, and 3.6 miles of the North Fork of

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The kit fox, a State "threatened" species, lives in the SEORMP area.

CHRISTINE HOLDEN, COURTESY OF ODFW

Plan to guide use of 10,000 square miles

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

the Malheur River. However, many more river and stream miles have been identified as eligible (which would be nominated under Alternative D). It is revealing that BLM would select only 34 of the 289 river miles that meet the criteria for nomination. Perhaps the recent legal challenges to BLM's management of wild and scenic river corridors have underscored the agency's unwillingness to address the damage caused by grazing to other outstanding river values.

Steens National Conservation Area?

BLM proposes a National Conservation Area for Steens Mountain under Alternatives A, C, and D, but does not specify any changes from present management except for the withdrawal of lands for mineral and energy exploration and development (see related article, pg. 1). The logic behind this proposal remains obscure. Conservationists would like to see a detailed plan to manage increasing recreational activity and protect the natural values which make the mountain an extraordinary place.

Adaptive management: Grazing Loophole?

BLM makes repeated references in the document to "adaptive management," a tool the agency uses to manage grazing more flexibly. Granted, flexibility may be necessary to deal with the vagaries of the climate of eastern Oregon. But BLM has cited "adaptive management" to justify allowing ranchers to graze outside the parameters of their permits. Such latitude in a major planning document such as the SEORMP is unacceptable.

Alt. D: "Emphasize Natural Values"

Close examination of the Draft SEORMP/EIS reveals that Alternative D comes the closest to accomplishing the document's primary goal of "develop[ing] management practices that ensure the long-term sustainability of healthy and productive land, consistent with the principles of ecosystem management." Alternative D (the "Emphasize Natural Values Alternative") would de-emphasize fire suppression, emphasize reductions



DAVE STONE

Bighorn sheep in southeastern Oregon.

of authorized livestock use where monitoring shows a need to reduce grazing impacts, emphasize undeveloped types of recreation, and rehabilitate or close sites where resource values are jeopardized by overuse. It would also increase acreage in ACECs (lots of new ones), and propose 289.2 miles of rivers and streams for wild and scenic status.

Still, as good as these features appear relative to the commodity-oriented management we have come to expect from BLM, the Draft SEORMP/EIS does not seriously attempt to satisfy the NEPA requirement to analyze a full range of alternatives. The "preferred" Alternative C does not even call for grazing reductions where resource damage is occurring, and fails to satisfy the stated intent to follow ecosystem management principles. 

Action Alert!

Please write BLM. Tell them the SEORMP fails to explore the full range of alternatives as required by NEPA. Urge them to choose an improved Alternative D that is strengthened to exclude grazing from: 1) riparian areas, 2) critical habitat and sensitive areas, 3) Wilderness Study Areas, and 4) allotments in fair or poor condition.

Send comments by March 1, 1999 to:

Ed Singleton, Vale District Manager
Vale District BLM Office
100 Oregon Street
Vale, OR 97918

Send a copy to:

Jim Kenna, Burns District Manager
Burns District BLM Office
HC 74-12533 Hwy 20 West
Hines, OR 97738



ELAINE REES

Simpson's pediocactus is a special status species found in the SEORMP area.



Winter at Malheur

By Alice Elshoff

Long-time ONDA member Alice Elshoff penned this journal entry last winter, after moving to her new position as caretaker at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge's new southern addition.

It is late winter . Life is on hold in the marshy meadows below our window . Water color hues of golden willows, red-osier dogwood, lavender alder , buff grass and cinnamon-br own rushes blur to a softness that betes the reality of the cold. Bits of mist reveal the warm springs, reminding us that this is a rift valley still in the process of stretching, and sobering us with the knowledge of how close the molten magma is beneath us.

To the west, Jack Mountain Ridge recedes northward in undulations of ever less distinct purple. To the east, the Notch, a long-time landmark, cuts into the brilliant whiteness of Steens Mountain. Looking to the unduttered eastern horizon I make a mental note to record the two times that the sun will rise in the Notch and also to note the position of the sunrises at the time of equinox and solstice. Somehow it seems important to know these things.

Above this seeming doze of marsh and meadow , the sky , in contrast, is in frenetic motion. Storm clouds appear over the ridge behind Fremont ranches. From west to east they come and hurl hailstones against our windows. In between these storm cells there is cobalt blue sky and blinding white sunlight.

Alert and patient deer barely acknowledge our presence as they feed. Yearlings squander energy at playing tag—jump, tum, touch noses and run. "No," I whisper. "Conserve. There is much cold to come." They play in spite of my warning...because they are young and foolish. They are fortunate; their first winter has been mild, as winters go. There is food in the meadow and shelter in the willows. They , like all born into good fortune, can afford to be carefree. The does have long since given up worrying about them.

In the far meadow a coyote hunches over a mouse run, and the dark lump in the distant cottonwood I know to be a tough-legged hawk down from the north to escape an even more bitter winter. It seems, looking out on this spare scene, that these hunters cannot possibly survive the long cold, but each new snowfall reveals the meadow's secret richness in myriad small tracks....

The hooting of the great horned owls, first of the local fauna to think of mating, is one of the first indications that winter cannot hold us in its quiet grip forever. Even now the great skins of waterfowl and shorebirds that will come are stirring somewhere to the south. And so this great long willowed valley waits for the symphony of wild songs that welcome.



Ferguson leaves legacy of activism, integrity

By Steve Herman

The western conservation movement lost an articulate warrior with the passing of Denzel Ferguson, 69, who died of cancer on December 13 at his home on the Middle Fork of the John Day River in eastern Oregon.

During his productive and sometimes controversial life, Denzel was a tireless opponent of practices that degraded wild nature; he was a conservation biologist long before the term became part of our vernacular.

After earning his Ph.D. in zoology at Oregon State University in 1956, Denzel taught and conducted research at Mississippi State University. He returned to Oregon in 1970 and, after two years teaching at Portland State University, became the founding director of Malheur Field Station.

Malheur Field Station was Denzel's home and kingdom in the 1970s. It flourished under his direction, and a generation of students was inspired by his teaching and his charismatic leadership.

While at the field station Denzel was introduced to the flagrant abuses of grazing, first on the adjacent Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and later on the surrounding expanses of BLM and Forest

Service land. Along with his wife Nancy, whom he met at Malheur Field Station, he wrote the now-famous book, *Sacred Cows at the Public Trough*. Widely read and respected, this book launched a wider attack on grazing abuses and alerted a largely ignorant public to destructive agency-supported grazing practices.

Denzel ran for Congress in 1992, challenging the incumbent (and federal grazing permittee) Bob Smith. He lost the election, but his campaign further exposed the eastern Oregon coalition between agencies and the livestock industry, and Denzel relished the opportunity to travel the state debunking the cowboy myth and offering voters an alternative to public-land-politics-as-usual.

In the ensuing years Denzel wrote prolifically, challenging forest and range land practices and calling bureaucrats to task for perpetuating damaging policies. His letters and criticisms were crisp and brilliant, like the man himself.

David Brower said of Rachel Carson, "She did her homework, she minded her



RICHARD WILHELM

Denzel and Nancy Ferguson in 1990 in front of the Greasewood Room at Malheur Field Station.

English, and she cared." It is a tribute to Denzel's memory that the same can be said of him.

Denzel served on ONDA's Advisory Council for many years, and his presence will be sorely missed. We express our deep sympathy to Denzel's family for their loss.

Welcome Kat!

ONDA extends a warm welcome to Katherine Morrow, our administrative director and newest staff member. Kat joined us in October, bringing her keen interest in western public lands issues, excellent organizational and communication skills, and a love of the high desert landscape. And she has a way with databases, too!

Before moving to Oregon, Kat lived in Kingston, New Mexico, where she helped run a bed and breakfast and also served as editor of "The Last Straw," a straw-bale construction quarterly. Her knowledge of natural building techniques stems in part from her background in engineering; she holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees in this field.

We look forward to working with Kat, who will manage our new database and assist with membership development



COURTESY OF KAT MORROW

Kat Morrow (and her dog Seth) at Smith Rock.

and fundraising efforts. If you'd like to get in touch with Kat, contact her at kmorrow@onda.org or call the Bend office at 541-330-2638.

Christie joins board

We're honored to welcome Lee Christie of Corvallis to ONDA's board of directors. Lee has a wealth of non profit management experience, a terrific sense of humor, and a great love for the Great Basin.

Lee is president of the Chintimini Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Corvallis. She is also a co-founder and past president of the Corvallis Environmental Center and has served as president of the Fund for Wild Nature Foundation for three years. Lee's professional background is in social services and environmental education.

Lee is eager to work on ONDA's strategic planning and capacity building efforts, as well as on membership and grassroots outreach activities. ONDA is fortunate to welcome Lee to the world of high desert protection!

MARKETPLACE

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

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 in Upland
Forests of the Interior West”
by Joy Belsky and Dana Blumenthal \$1 (for postage)

T-Shirts

- ONDA T-shirts (short sleeve)
Specify size (L or XL only) and color (sage or natural) .. \$12
- “Boycott Beef” T-shirt (short sleeve) \$12

Bargain Sale!

- Clean Stream Initiative T-Shirts (w/salmon art)
Specify sleeve length. Color is salmon only.
- Short sleeve (XL only) \$5
- Long sleeve (XL only) \$8

Etc.

- Stunning 18"x 28" color poster of Big Indian Gorge \$10
- Road Map to OHDP lands \$5
- “Cows Kill Salmon” bumper sticker \$1



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				x	=
				x	=
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Annual membership levels:

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 \$250 Patron
 \$15 Living Lightly

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High Desert Defense Fund monthly membership levels: (enclose a signed, voided check)

- \$5
 \$10
 \$25
 \$50
 \$100

Add my name to the Clean Stream Net (for communicating to state legislators)

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Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

E-mail address (for electronic action alerts) _____

Mail this form with check to ONDA, 16 NW Kansas, Bend, OR 97701

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(SEE PG. 1)



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USFWS seeks (again) to kill Hart Mountain coyotes

By Joy Belsky

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has again announced its intention to kill coyotes on Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge (NAR). ONDA and other conservation groups blocked two earlier attempts, in 1996 and 1997, to shoot coyotes on the refuge. This time, FWS proposes to write a "Pronghorn Management Plan" that will justify killing coyotes in order to boost the Refuge's pronghorn population—despite the fact that the Refuge's own 1994 Comprehensive Management Plan explicitly rejects reliance upon predator control and single-species management.

Agency officials claim the public is demanding larger and more visible pronghorn populations at Hart Mountain. Killing coyotes, FWS asserts, is the best way to achieve that goal. But predator control has failed in the past at Hart Mountain, and according to the most prominent pronghorn biologists in the West, it won't work now. The refuge currently hosts about 900 pronghorn, which experts say constitutes a viable population.

Letters needed!

Please write or call the FWS. Urge them to:

- manage the Hart Mt. NAR for healthy, natural ecosystems, not for artificially high populations of pronghorn;
- maintain emphasis on ecosystem management as described in their current management plan, rather than shift to old-fashioned single-species management;
- implement its plan to improve pronghorn habitat by reintroducing fire to low sagebrush communities, the vegetation type most preferred by pronghorn; and
- base the Pronghorn Management Plan on rigorous, peer-reviewed scientific evidence, not on a few studies selected to support the agency's stated preference for predator control.

Mail your letters as soon as possible to:

Pronghorn Management Plan
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
P.O. Box 111
Lakeview, OR 97630
Phone: (541) 947-3315 Fax: (541) 947-4414