

Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the
Oregon
Natural Desert
association



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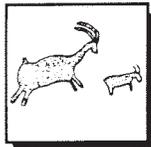
Steens Mountain from the Alvord Desert. Two Oregon Congressmen introduced a bipartisan bill to protect this "crown jewel" of Oregon's high desert.

Plan to protect Steens-Alvord unveiled

On July 12, Reps. Greg Walden (R-OR) and Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) introduced the "Steens Mountain Wilderness Act of 2000" (HR 4828), to protect much of the spectacular Steens Mountain and Alvord Desert. While concepts in the legislation are great, substantive improvements are needed to more fully protect the ecological integrity of this unique, desert landscape.

The good news

Overall, the legislation is a good first step. It would create Oregon's first cow-free desert wilderness on the High Steens, something conservationists have worked toward for years. In addition, HR 4828 would permanently protect 1.1 million acres from mining and geothermal development, including all of the Alvord Desert.



FROM THE OUTBACK
by Bill Marlett

Needed improvements

However, the bill falls short on some very important issues. To their credit, Sen. Wyden, Gov. John Kitzhaber and others in the Congressional delegation have said they will seek to improve it. Now it's time for Oregonians to speak up (see back page).

Given the daunting hurdles the bill faces in the waning days of this session of Congress, ONDA has pressed for a few key but manageable improvements. At this late stage, the last thing we want to do is throw the baby out with the bath water.

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Judge orders cows off wild Owyhee River

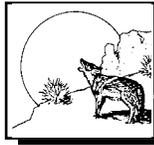
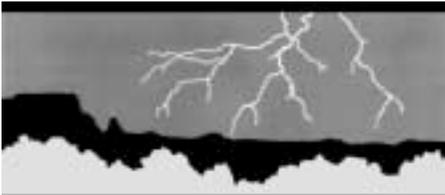
BLM to build fences, water developments

By Stephanie Parent

In November 1999, U.S. District Judge James Redden ordered the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) to permanently eliminate all cattle grazing from all "areas of concern" on the Owyhee Wild and Scenic River.

The opinion followed on the heels of Judge Redden's ruling in November 1999 finding that BLM's management plan for the river failed to fully consider the negative impacts of livestock grazing (*Desert Ramblings*, Winter 1999). Then in April 2000, Redden granted BLM's request to modify his order to allow new fences in Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). The new order continues to ban cows from the 18 miles of the river that the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 ►



FROM THE DEN

by Lee Christie

ONDA's assets

In my two years serving on ONDA's Board of Directors, much has impressed me about the organization, but nothing has amazed me as much as the dedication, hard work, and sheer "gutsiness" of the staff. When I walk into our office in Bend or Portland, I am struck by how much work gets accomplished in such small spaces and by the palpable energy in the room. Desks and walls are overflowing with maps, books, articles, all literally stacked to the ceiling. Each of the staff has created such a high-energy environment around their job and projects that I find myself caught up in their intense enthusiasm!

Each ONDA staff member has the intelligence, motivation, and drive to rise to the top of any organization. Instead, they have chosen ONDA because of their passion for the Oregon High Desert. I would like to say "Thank You!" to them in this second decade of our desert odyssey.



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

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Steens-Alvord Encampment

August 17-21

The Sierra Club High Desert Committee will host its second annual desert encampment, offering inspiring day hikes and service projects, informative evening presentations and lots of fun. Join desert enthusiasts and newcomers and experience one of Oregon's greatest natural treasures. Come learn about the archeological, ecological, and historical wonders of Steens-Alvord. For info, email: andrea.bauch@sierraclub.org or (503) 243-6656.

ONRC's Barbed Wire Round-up & Hike

September 1-4

Klamath Marsh Nat'l Wildlife Refuge
Join ONRC's Wendell Wood for some much needed removal of refuge fences. Then cap off the weekend with a 3-mile downhill hike at Crater Lake National Park along a wildflower-lined creek with numerous waterfalls. For info and reservations, contact Wendell at ww@onrc.org or (541)-783-2206.

Annual Meeting

October 13-15, 2000

Hancock Field Station

Please join us for ONDA's Annual Membership Meeting! Spend an autumn weekend in the John Day Basin of Eastern Oregon at the Hancock Field Station (near Fossil, OR). Cavort with other desert rats as we hike around the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument and surrounding wildlands. Stargazing and evenings around the campfire guaranteed! Watch your mailbox for details, or contact Gilly at glyons@onda.org or (503) 525-0193.

What happened?

ONDA has expended extraordinary efforts in the last six months on several fronts: 1) Steens Mountain/Alvord Desert wilderness legislation, 2) John Day and Owyhee Wild & Scenic River plans, and 3) several scientific publications. To focus resources on these critical opportunities, ONDA skipped publication of our Winter 2000 *Desert Ramblings* and produced this expanded and combined Spring/Summer 2000 issue. We plan to return to our usual quarterly schedule with our Fall 2000 issue.

Steens plan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

- 1) Above all else, HR 4828 must clearly state that the primary purpose of the Act be “to protect and enhance the ecological integrity of Steens Mountain and the Alvord Basin.”
- 2) HR4828 must also provide direction for better management of livestock on the 400,000 acres (80% of the total 500,000 acre management area) outside the cow-free area. Land managers and ranchers must be held to a higher standard if they want to continue to graze livestock on Steens.
- 3) The bill must also allow for voluntary permit retirement, an important tool that would allow conservationists to further reduce grazing pressure on Steens. Voluntary permit retirement would allow ranchers to sell or donate their grazing permits to conservation groups, for example, to protect sage grouse habitat or redband trout streams. Further, the legislation should establish a federal “grass bank” where the government purchases grazing permits near the Steens and redirects grazing from

ecologically sensitive lands on the mountain to other less-sensitive areas.

- 4) Currently, HR4828 would create 143,000 acres of federal BLM wilderness (100,000 acres cow-free). While a good start for Rep. Walden (who once told me we’ve locked up too much of Oregon as wilderness), a bill that claims to be the “Steens Mountain Wilderness Act of 2000” should and can do much, much more. *At a minimum, all Wilderness Study Areas on Steens Mountain must be permanently protected as Wilderness.* These are lands that BLM has already found to be eligible for inclusion in the Wilderness System. Doing so would add roughly another 100,000 acres of wilderness to the bill, a modest but significant improvement. The total wilderness



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Glacier-carved Little Blitzen Gorge on Steens Mountain.

acreage would still represent only 25% of the million-acre boundary that conservationists recommended.

Land Exchanges

Several land exchanges are the linchpin of this bill. Of course, any land exchange that trades public for private land on Steens must be in the public interest. At the same time, conservationists recognize that these land exchanges go beyond mere dollars.

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Private development on Steens Mountain?

Proposed residence within Wilderness Study Area avoided

By Danielle McKay

The timing is uncanny. Congress is working on a deal to protect Steens Mountain and the Alvord Desert. Oregon legislators, ranchers, and the environmental community are pressing to see their interests are taken into account. Some local residents insist the best way to protect the place is to leave it alone. They argue that federal protection, whether as a National Conservation Area or National Monument, will only draw crowds and unwanted development. Yet, in the midst of their protests against any meaningful designation or protection for the Steens, two local residents have applied for permits to develop their land on the mountain.

One proposal is a rerun of a 1997 plan by the Witzel family (owners of Steens Mountain Packers) for a hunting and fishing resort near Fish Lake. ONDA fought the proposal, which Harney County initially denied. However, the proposed resort was resubmitted under the guise of a “guide school.” This time, Harney County approved the development. ONDA has appealed the decision to the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA). The guide school project is currently on hold pending LUBA’s decision.

The second development was proposed on a private inholding owned by Diamond Valley rancher Charles Otley. This parcel is completely surrounded by BLM land in the High Steens Wilderness Study Area (WSA), three miles north of Fish Lake. Otley sold the parcel after he secured approval to build a dwelling on it from the Harney County Planning Department. ONDA prepared to appeal the approval to LUBA. When the new owner learned about the ongoing debate surrounding Steens Mountain, he dropped his development plan and instead sought to exchange his land for Forest Service property near his home in Sisters. If an exchange is arranged, BLM would own the inholding, consolidating its holdings within the High Steens WSA.

These recent development proposals for Steens Mountain highlight the fact that the Steens-Alvord area is in dire need of permanent protection now — protection that addresses not only wilderness designation, mining and grazing issues, but private land development as well. ONDA is prepared to fight any development on Steens Mountain. Fragile alpine areas are no place for resorts or trophy homes.

Steens bill unveiled

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

It's not every day we get a chance to consolidate the entire watershed of the Blitzen Wild & Scenic River into Oregon's first cow-free wilderness. But if ranchers insist on turning this bill into a last-minute land grab on Steens, then they will bear responsibility for killing this deal.

Oregonians like to do things different. It's part of our heritage. Time and time again, Oregonians have stated that they want their wide-open spaces preserved and our wild areas passed on to future generations.

Oregonians want no less for the magnificent Steens-Alvord. Our congressional delegation has a chance to provide a lasting legacy for the Steens, but time for a prolonged debate does not exist. To successfully move this legislation through a Congress eager to finish its business, conservation and other interest groups must be in full support.

Make no mistake, the bill faces considerable hurdles. Rep. Walden and Sen. Smith must compromise if they are going to come to terms with the Gov. Kitzhaber, the rest of the Congressional delegation, and Oregonians. We are at the two-minute warning and the clock is

ticking. Only with a unified Oregon delegation pulling together with Secretary Babbitt and Gov. Kitzhaber can this legislation pass Congress.

At the unveiling of the bill, Interior Secretary Babbitt called the Steens "the most magnificent, unprotected landscape left in the entire West." He's right. And, with modest but substantive improvements, HR 4828 could help protect this special place, forever. 🐾

Sen. Wyden has asked Oregonians to weigh in on this bill. Please do! Turn to the back page for details.

Owyhee River: Judge orders cows to go

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

BLM found to be "areas of livestock concern," but to implement this ban, the court ordered the construction of new fences and water developments within the WSAs that surround the wild river corridor.

Under the original order, livestock grazing would have been eliminated back to the existing pasture fences, reducing use by more than 24,000 animal unit months (AUMs). The modified order minimizes the impact of the injunction on permittees to a loss of about 1000 AUMs by allowing new fences close to the rim.

In order to allow grazing to continue on the allotments while enjoining livestock from the areas of concern, BLM and the intervenor, Oregon Cattlemen's Association (OCA) proposed extensive fences and water developments in WSAs. ONDA opposed the proposals because, while these modifications will keep cows out of the Owyhee Wild and Scenic River corridor for the most part, they run afoul of the BLM's own Interim Management Policy (IMP) for managing Wilderness Study Areas under the Federal Land Management and Policy Act (FLPMA), 43 U.S.C. § 1701 *et seq.*, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 *et seq.* Each proposal, alone and cumulatively, will violate the BLM's IMP and its mandate to maintain the wilderness characteristics of the WSA and to maintain

the same manner and degree of livestock use. Moreover, these proposals will proceed without the in-depth analysis required by the IMP and NEPA. As a bonus to the BLM, because the projects are court-ordered, BLM avoids its normal environmental review and decisionmaking process, eliminating public participation and the ability to appeal decisions administratively. These environmental reviews, as required by NEPA, the IMP, and other law and policy, are important processes that Congress mandates for the very purpose of making informed decisions.

The court rejected ONDA's argument that if the court were to accept any of BLM's proposals, it must also include certain specific interim grazing management requirements to protect and enhance the Owyhee's values during the six years or more during which BLM completes the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and long overdue comprehensive river management plan. In addition, the court refused to require specific measures to mitigate for the additional impacts created by the BLM's proposed fences and to compensate for the sacrificed public participation, environmental review, and informed decisionmaking.

OCA has appealed to the Ninth Circuit the lower court's initial decision that found the BLM acted unlawfully, arguing that the court did not have the authority to ban the cows from using the river. 🐾



The Owyhee River Canyon (West Fork of the Little Owyhee).

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Supreme Court Ruling: Grazing permits not property rights

Secretary Babbitt's "Rangeland Reform" upheld

By Stephanie Parent, ONDA Staff Attorney

In May, the Supreme Court again affirmed that a federal grazing permit does not confer a property right to the rancher holding the permit. In numerous court cases over the last century, ranchers have tried to establish such a "right." None have been successful.

In 1995, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt finalized amendments to federal grazing regulations as part of the "Rangeland Reform" effort to accelerate restoration of the rangeland health. The amendment sought to make the regulations more compatible with ecosystem management.

The Public Lands Council sued Secretary Babbitt on behalf of ranchers with federal grazing permits (See *Public Lands Council v. Babbitt*, 120 S.Ct. 1815, May 15, 2000). The Supreme Court upheld Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt's amended regulations as well within his authority under the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934.

The grazing industry had challenged certain amendments that: 1) changed the definition of "grazing preference"; 2) permitted permit-seekers who are not "engaged in the livestock business" to qualify for grazing permits; and 3) granted the United States title to all future "permanent" range improvements (such as fencing, watering facilities, etc.)

The ranchers strongly attacked the change in the definition of the grazing preference, complaining that the revision violated the Taylor Grazing Act provision that grazing privileges shall be "adequately safeguarded." However, the Court held that the Act specifically states that granting a grazing permit creates no right to graze; therefore, the rancher's claim to permit stability is not absolute. The Secretary is free to determine the extent to which grazing privileges will be safeguarded in light of the Act's basic



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purposes, which include "stop[ping] injury to the public grazing lands by preventing overgrazing and soil deterioration."

In its opinion, the Court cited the history of grazing in the West to demonstrate that the Secretary has had the power to cancel grazing permits; reclassify and withdraw land from grazing to devote it to a more valuable or suitable use; and to suspend grazing use where the range is depleted. In the end, the change in the "grazing preference" definition will not make a great difference in determining preference to grazing permits. The Secretary has always had the authority to eliminate grazing; it is simply a matter of using that authority where grazing is harming public lands.

The ranchers also claimed that allowing persons not engaged in the livestock business to qualify for grazing permits is a scheme to end livestock grazing on public lands by obtaining permits for conservation use. The Court held this could not happen because the

government has represented that there is a longstanding rule that a grazing permit be used for grazing. Unfortunately, U.S. government lawyers did not ask the Supreme Court to overturn the Court of Appeals decision that struck down the portion of the new regulations that would have issued permits for conservation use.

Finally, the Court held that the United States, like any landlord, can issue regulations making clear that it owns permanent range improvements, even where paid for or constructed by the permittee.

Ranchers claimed that the Court's ruling that a grazing permit does not confer a property right may make it harder for ranchers to obtain loans. Banks have used the value of grazing permits, like real estate, as collateral for loans, and ranchers who are financially struggling may have greater difficulty securing loans. 

The Supreme Court held that the Taylor Grazing Act specifically states that granting a grazing permit creates no right to graze.

LIVESTOCK & STREAMS

Findings from a review of the scientific literature

Cattle graze along a stream denuded of riparian vegetation.

Dense streamside vegetation, including willow, cottonwood, aspen, sedges and grasses normally line a desert stream (Chewaucan watershed).



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Grazing by livestock has damaged 80 percent of the streams and riparian ecosystems in arid regions of the western United States. Because riparian and stream ecosystems represent only 0.5 to 1 percent of the surface area of arid lands, they were historically ignored by land managers. In

fact, Western land managers viewed riparian habitats until the late 1960s as “sacrifice” areas, being dedicated primarily to providing food and water for domestic livestock. This attitude began to change as environmental advocates focused national attention on the degraded state of western streams and related losses of biodiversity.

To counter environmentalists working to protect these stream and riparian ecosystems, spokespersons for the livestock industry assert that:

- 1) most of the damage to streams occurred a hundred years ago and is no longer occurring; and
- 2) new grazing techniques, such as rest-rotation or seasonal grazing, actually help streams and riparian zones recover.

Scientific research and reports by dozens of rangeland experts refute these arguments.

Western streams in worst condition ever

Although evidence is undeniable that early grazing practices were highly destructive, current grazing practices remain a key factor in the continued degradation of riparian habitats. As recently as 1990, a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report found that “extensive field observations suggest that riparian areas throughout much of the West are in their worst condition in history”

This article summarized from a peer-reviewed scientific research paper with the following reference:

Belsky, A.J., A. Matzke, and S. Uselman. 1999. Survey of livestock influences on stream and riparian ecosystems in the western United States. *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* 54:419-431.

The full paper contains over 130 references of studies documenting the effects described in this article and accompanying tables. It can be viewed or downloaded from ONDA's website (www.onda.org). Or contact Joy Belsky at jbelsky@onda.org or 503-228-9720; or contact ONDA (see page 2).

(Chaney, et al. 1990; see sidebar for references). In addition, a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) report (USDI 1994) concluded that “riparian areas have continued to decline” since grazing reforms in the 1930s.

No grazing better than “new” grazing

In a new scientific paper published in the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, ONDA staff ecologist Joy Belsky and two ONDA interns, Andrea Matzke and Shauna Uselman, reported on the effects of livestock grazing on western streams and riparian zones. They reviewed over two hundred peer-reviewed scientific papers and reports. Their extensive literature search found no peer-reviewed scientific papers reporting a positive impact (or benefit) of cattle on riparian areas when those areas were compared to ungrazed controls. Most claims of “benefits” resulted from studies comparing reduced stocking rates and/or newer grazing systems to older, more destructive techniques. None of these “new” methods was better than no grazing at all.

Cattle are more damaging to riparian zones than their often low densities on arid public lands would suggest. Cattle evolved in cool, wet meadows of northern Europe and Asia; as a result, they

are a true riparian species, avoiding dry, hot environments and congregating in wet, cool areas where forage is more succulent and shade more available than in uplands. One study found that a riparian zone in eastern Oregon comprised only 2% of the grazing allotment by area, but produced 21% of the forage and 81% of the forage consumed by cattle (Roath and Krueger 1982).

Livestock harm streams, their associated riparian zones, and the fish and wildlife that inhabit them in multiple ways. They degrade water quality by 1) adding fecal matter, 2) increasing sediment loads, and 3) increasing water temperatures. Cattle can also alter stream channel width and shape; increase flood volumes and velocities and degrade wildlife habitat (see Table 1 below and Table 4 on page 11).

Not one peer-reviewed scientific paper reported a benefit of cattle on riparian areas when those areas were compared to ungrazed controls.

TABLE 1

Effects of Livestock Grazing on Stream Channel Morphology

Influence	Causes	Impacts
<i>Stream bank undercuts:</i> Reduced quality and quantity	Stream bank breakdown by livestock and loss of stabilizing vegetation	Fewer hiding spaces and pools for fish
<i>Channel form:</i> Fewer meanders and unvegetated gravel bars	Increased water velocity; removal of stabilizing vegetation; erosion of stream banks	Increased erosion; fewer pools for fish; decreased stream bank roughness

Effects of Livestock Grazing on Hydrology (Stream Flow Patterns)

Influence	Causes	Impacts
<i>Overland flow (runoff):</i> Increased	Reduced water infiltration into soils due to compaction and loss of streamside vegetation	Increase in sheet and rill erosion; increased flooding; reduced groundwater recharge; lowered water table
<i>Peak flows:</i> Increased	Larger volume of runoff flowing directly into channel	Increased stream energy for channel erosion, downcutting of channel bed and gully formation

Stream flows and riparian hydrology

Among the most damaging effects of livestock grazing is their alteration of stream depth and flow. Normally, intact plants on undisturbed uplands and streambanks slow the downhill flow of rainwater, promoting its infiltration into soils. This water gradually moves through the subsoil and seeps into stream channels throughout the year, helping feed year-round flows.

But when livestock consume or trample upland and riparian vegetation and compact hillside soils with their hooves, less rainwater can enter

the soil. During storms, more water flows overland and more quickly enters streams, creating high peak flows.

These peak flows are highly erosive, causing channel downcutting (see Figure 1 below). As the channel deepens, water drains from the surrounding flood plain into the channel, lowering the associated water table. The roots of riparian plants are left suspended above the water table in dry soils. Eventually, these plants and their associated wildlife species die out and are replaced by drought-tolerant upland species, such as sage-

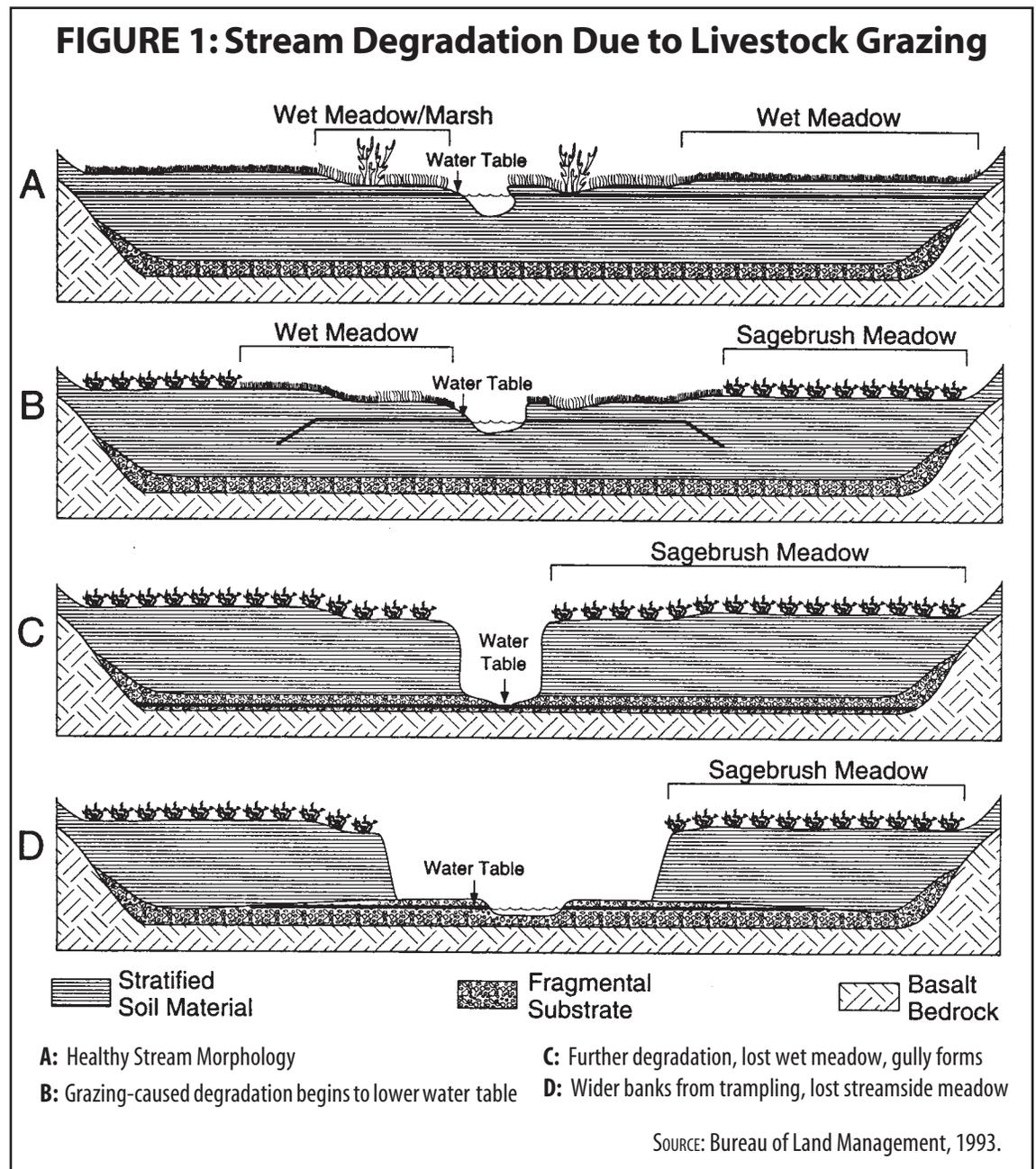


TABLE 2

Effects of Livestock Grazing on Riparian Zone Soils

Influence	Causes	Impacts
<i>Bare ground:</i> Increased	Vegetation consumed and trampled by livestock	Drier soil surfaces; higher erosion and sediment delivery to streams and aquatic habitats
<i>Erosion (water, ice, and wind):</i> Increased	Soil compaction; removal of vegetation; trampling disturbance	Increased sediment load to receiving stream; loss of fertile topsoil; suffocation of fish eggs; loss of pools
<i>Compaction:</i> Increased	Trampling by livestock on wet, heavy soils; reduced litter and soil organic matter	Decreased infiltration rates and more runoff; reduced plant productivity and vegetative cover

brush and juniper. In addition, less water is available in the soil to contribute to late-season stream flows. Consequently, high intensity spring floods are followed by a reduction or complete loss of water flow in late summer, in sharp contrast to ungrazed stream systems.

Impacts on biodiversity

These changes in water quality, quantity, and seasonal flow have enormous impacts on biodiversity. Those species that can tolerate dry soils and seasonally dry stream beds increase in number. Those that depend on year-round water flows; cool, clean water; deep, shaded pools; and moist soils decline in abundance or disappear. These species include riparian plants such as willow and sedges that rely on wet soils; salmon and trout that require cool, clean water to spawn and feed; and 80% of wildlife species in southeastern Oregon (Thomas et al. 1979), which are dependent on riparian ecosystems. Consequently, a recent U.S. Forest Service report found livestock grazing to be the fourth major cause of species endangerment in the United States and second major cause of endangerment of plant species (Flather et al. 1994).

Conclusion

Nearly all scientific studies refute the claim that livestock grazing benefits streams. Previously denuded streambanks may revegetate and erosion may decline with improved livestock management, but recovery will take longer than if grazing were terminated completely. New studies suggest that new grazing systems only slow the rate of degradation, but do not reverse it.

BLM riparian expert Wayne Elmore and Oregon State University riparian specialist Boone Kauffman (1994) best summed up the available evidence by stating that “livestock exclusion has consistently resulted in the most dramatic and rapid rates of ecosystem recovery.” Other riparian specialists point out that 2 to 15 years of total livestock exclusion may be required just to initiate the recovery process.

Livestock grazing ranks as the fourth biggest cause of endangered species in the nation, and the second leading cause of endangered plants.

— U.S. Forest Service, 1994



Although some streams may recover while still being grazed, Professor Robert Ohmart of the University of Arizona is concerned about this approach. He questions whether degraded ripar-

ian communities throughout the West can “hang onto their thread of existence for another 30-50 years” while waiting for grazed systems to recover slowly.

Dense mats of algae in the Chewaucan River. Runoff transports nutrient-rich manure into streams, which can stimulate “algae blooms.” When the algae dies, its decomposition can starve the stream (and fish) of available oxygen.



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ONDA prepared and published this review of the scientific literature because we believed that the public was being misinformed by federal agencies and the ranching industry about the current impacts of cattle grazing in the arid West. Our review of the scientific literature sought to answer the question: “Is livestock grazing ever compatible with healthy streams, abundant wildlife, and riparian zones?” The answer, backed by scores of scientific studies, is an unequivocal “No.” 

TABLE 3

Effects of Livestock Grazing on Streambank Vegetation

Influence

Herbaceous cover, biomass, productivity, and native diversity: Declined

Tree and shrub biomass and cover: Declined

Species composition: Altered

Causes

Grazing and trampling by livestock; selective grazing on palatable species; loss of vulnerable species; lowered water table; drier, warmer, more exposed environment

Browsing by livestock on shrubs and tree saplings when they are most vulnerable

Lowered water table; warmer, drier environment; livestock selection of palatable species; compacted soils

Impacts

Less detritus (food inputs) for stream and aquatic organisms; higher water temperatures in summer and cooler temperatures in winter; degraded habitat for fish and wildlife; reduced biodiversity; loss of moisture- and shade-dependent species

Decline in streambank stability; increased erosion; reduced stream shade and higher water temperatures

Replacement of riparian species by upland species and exotic weeds; reduction in riparian area

Effects of Livestock Grazing on Instream Vegetation

Influence

Algae: Increased

Higher plants (submerged and emergent): Often decline in abundance.

Causes

More sunlight; higher temperatures; higher concentrations of dissolved nutrients

Often trampled; buried in deposited sediments; uprooted by strong flows

Impacts

Low levels of dissolved oxygen especially when algal blooms collapse

Reduced trapping of sediments; less food for aquatic organisms; higher water velocity and erosive force.

Grazed Stream



Fifteenmile Creek, a tributary of the Columbia, before cattle removal. Cattle destroyed streamside vegetation, making poor habitat for salmon, steelhead and trout. Photo taken 9/16/74.

**Seven
years
rest
from
grazing**



Recovering Stream



Seven years after livestock removal, streamside vegetation has returned, shading and cooling the stream and trapping sediments and pollutants from uplands. Photo taken 9/22/81.

TABLE 4

Effects of Livestock Grazing on Water Quality

Influence

Bacteria/protozoa: Increased

Water temperature: Increased

Causes

Direct fecal deposition into water; fecal material in runoff; sediments containing buried microorganisms churned up by hoof action

Increased solar exposure due to reduced shade from streamside vegetation and loss of undercut streambanks

Impacts

Higher human and wildlife disease-producing potential from pathogens; human health endangered by swimming and other contact

Increased evaporation and salinity; poor to lethal environment for salmonids and other temperature-sensitive, cold-water species

Effects of Livestock Grazing on Aquatic and Riparian Wildlife

Influence

FISH – Diversity, abundance and productivity: Decreased

BIRDS- Diversity, abundance and species composition: Altered

MAMMALS - (large and small) Diversity and species composition: Altered (sometimes but not always)

Causes

Higher water temperatures increase salmonid mortality and negatively affect fish spawning, rearing, and passage; greater water turbidity, increased siltation and bacterial counts, lower summer flows; less protective plant cover; fewer insects and other food.

Reduction in food, water quality and water quantity; loss of perches, nesting sites, and protective plant cover; loss of complex vegetational structure

Loss of riparian habitat and food sources; warmer, drier, more exposed environment; behavioral characteristics such as avoidance of livestock

Impacts

Loss of salmonids and other cold-water species; loss of avian and mammalian predators; replacement of cold-water, riparian species with warm-water species

Reduction in biodiversity; replacement of riparian specialists by upland species and generalists; loss of some neotropical migrants

Habitat-use shifts by wildlife; suboptimal nutrition for females and offspring; lower beaver activity with their creation of wetlands; riparian species replaced by upland species and generalists

ONDA, others sue to protect public lands

Key provision of 1934 Taylor Grazing Act was never implemented

On May 22, ONDA and a coalition of conservation groups filed a lawsuit against Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt for failing to respond to a 1998 petition requesting the Secretary to determine which public lands are chiefly valuable for livestock grazing as required under the Taylor Grazing Act. The petition affects over 177 million acres of public land in the western states and are administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Passed by Congress in 1934, the Taylor Grazing Act requires the Secretary to declare which BLM lands are “chiefly valuable for grazing” before they are included within grazing districts. According to conservation groups, Babbitt and his predecessors never made the



ONDA FILE PHOTO

How can land such as this be considered “chiefly valuable for grazing”?

The 1934 Taylor Grazing Act required BLM to identify lands deemed “chiefly valuable for grazing.” It was never done.

required findings. After Congress passed the Act, the federal government, bowing to strong grazing interests in the West, allowed ranchers to decide which lands to include in districts, even putting a former stockman in charge of overseeing its implementation. Predictably, lands not “chiefly valuable for grazing” were included in grazing districts.

Conservationists want the Secretary to recognize that in the intervening 66 years since the Taylor Grazing Act was passed, much of the public lands are no longer chiefly valuable for livestock grazing, but are more valuable for wilderness, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation and other similar values.

“The American public values its public lands more for clean water, wildlife and wilderness than it does as forage for livestock,” said Bill Marlett, Executive Director of the Oregon Natural Desert Association. “We merely want Secretary Babbitt to acknowledge this fact as the law requires.”

Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act to reverse the ecological destruction that uncontrolled grazing had caused throughout the Western by the beginning of the 20th century. Grazing had so severely denuded the land of vegetation that wind storms from the west rained soil upon our nation’s capital while Congress debated passage of the Act.

Conservationists contend that the Secretary’s failure to abide by the Act has contributed to the continued degradation of our public lands. Further, it has limited BLM’s ability to manage the public’s land, which now includes national monuments, national conservation areas, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas, research natural areas, areas of critical environmental concern, riparian areas, and critical habitat for endangered and threatened species. Despite the obvious fact that these special places are not chiefly valuable for livestock grazing, the BLM continues to include

them within grazing districts.

Lead by the ONDA, plaintiffs include the Committee for Idaho’s High Desert, Forest Guardians, Center for Biological Diversity, Hells Canyon Preservation Council, Oregon Natural Re-

By 1934, grazing had so severely denuded the land of vegetation that wind storms from the West rained soil upon our nation’s capital while Congress debated passage of the Act.

sources Council, Idaho Watersheds Project, and American Lands Alliance.

The complaint can be viewed at www.onda.org. 



Benedicto

by Edward Abbey

May your trails be crooked, winding,
lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view.
May your rivers flow without end,
meandering through pastoral valleys tinkling with bells,
past temples and castles and poets' towers
into a dark primeval forest where tigers belch and monkeys howl,
through miasmal and mysterious swamps and down into a desert of red rock,
blue mesas, domes and pinnacles and grottos of endless stone,
and down again into a deep vast ancient unknown chasm
where bars of sunlight blaze on profiled cliffs,
where deer walk across the white sand beaches,
where storms come and go
as lightning clangs upon the high crags,
where something strange and more beautiful
and more full of wonder than your deepest dreams waits for you —
beyond that next turning of the canyon walls.



© ELAINE REES

Volunteer Profile

Scears Harper

You may be familiar with the Patagonia clothing company through their comfy fleece pullovers, sensible shorts, and festive surf-wear. But in addition to making quality clothes in exciting colors such as paprika and azure, Patagonia also lends a hand to grassroots conservation groups—through financial support and its innovative employee internship program.

ONDA benefited immensely during the summer of 1999 when Atlanta-based Patagonia employee Scears Harper was granted a two-month paid leave of absence to volunteer for ONDA.

Scears pulled into Bend in mid-July, ready to tackle any task we were able to rustle up for him. His enthusiasm, generosity, and environmental ethic were immediately apparent. Scears' arrival coincided with news that the Clinton Administration was considering giving Steens Mountain federal protection. For the next eight weeks, Scears received a crash course in "Steens 101."

Scears undertook the Herculean task of drafting ONDA's Steens Briefing Book, an educational backgrounder on the area for use by desert advocates, the media, and congressional aides. Scears' heartfelt commitment to wildlands protection was evident in the care and attention to detail that he brought to this project. The result was a well-crafted document that ONDA staff have been using throughout the Steens campaign.

We extend our warm thanks to Scears for his terrific work last summer, and we congratulate him and his wife Kori on their recent nuptials. Mazeltov!



Scears Harper, ONDA intern.

Foundations support ONDA

ONDA extends our warm thanks to the following foundations for their generous support of our programs:

Bullitt Foundation

The Conservation Alliance

Fund for Wild Nature

Mazamas Conservation Committee

Northwest Fund for the Environment

Rogue Wave Foundation

Wilburforce Foundation

Wyss Foundation

Thanks, members!

Hearty thanks to the more than 240 ONDA members who contributed so generously in response to our Badlands Wilderness letter in December. This was our most successful year-end appeal ever. Your donations are helping to secure protection for Oregon's first desert wilderness.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

Desert Conference Volunteers!

The hosts of Desert Conference XXII—ONDA, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, and the Committee for Idaho's High Desert—extend hearty thanks to the many volunteers who helped make this year's conference a success.

Pre-conference preparations: *Marilyn Miller, Roma Morthland, Elizabeth Quinn*

Name tag creator: *Elizabeth Quinn*

Official t-shirt designer: *Richard Wilbelm*

Registration: *Lee Christie, Alice Elshoff, Greg Holmes, Tom Keffer, Connie Lonsdale, Joan Marie Michelson, Roma Morthland, Laura Obanian, Elizabeth Quinn*

Meal ticket gatherers: *Lee Christie, Anita Cook, Alice Elshoff, Greg Holmes, Tom Keffer, Connie Lonsdale, Laura Obanian, Kiri Sailiata, Lori Sailiata, Melia Sailiata, Heather Stevens, Jean Wyman*

Audiovisual technician and saviour: *Trygve Steen*

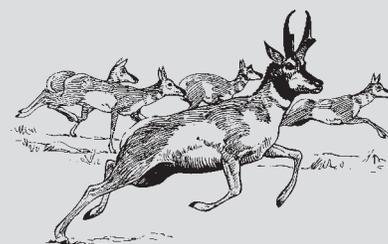
Keg schleppers: *Glen Vancise, Dick Vander Schaaf*

Coffee conveyor: *Laura Obanian*

Hospitality Room hosts: *Jason Seivers Emily Thomas*

Clean-up crew: *Lee Christie, Alice Elshoff, Lauren Esserman, Jon Kart, Tom Keffer, Chuck Wells, Sally Wells*

Our apologies to anyone we may have left out!



Thank you, Elaine

Since 1995, Elaine Rees has helped guide the production of *Desert Ramblings* as volunteer managing editor. During most of that time, Elaine also served on ONDA's board of directors, assisted with the Clean Stream Initiative, and played other significant roles in the organization. This issue is the first since 1995 produced without Elaine's assistance. We will miss her sensitive articles, constructive feedback, and moral support. We wish you many long days wandering in the deserts and birding hot spots of the West.
— *Chris Orsinger, Editor.*

Books

- The Western Range Revisited* **NEW!**
by Debra Donahue \$17
- 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
in Upland Forests of the Interior West"
by Joy Belsky and Dana Blumenthal \$1 (for postage)

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INSIDE:

- *STEENS-ALVORD WILDERNESS BILL IN CONGRESS*
- *RULING BANS COWS FROM WILD OWYHEE RIVER*



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Protect Steens-Alvord!

Your letters & calls urgently needed!

On July 12, Reps. Greg Walden (R-OR) and Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) introduced the "Steens Mountain Wilderness Act of 2000" (HR 4828—see page 1). The bill contains positive features—including Oregon's first explicitly cow-free wilderness area, a one-million-acre area withdrawn from mineral and geothermal development, and modest limits on private land development. Nevertheless, HR 4828 must be improved to ensure the long-term protection of Steens Mountain.

Please call, fax, or e-mail Sen. Ron Wyden, Sen. Gordon Smith, and your Congressperson! Thank them for supporting protection for the Steens-Alvord. Encourage them to improve HR 4828 by:

- **Making ecological protection the bill's primary purpose.** Currently, H.R. 4828 places equal emphasis on the protection of Steens Mountain's ecological, social, and economic values. In order for this bill to work, ecological protection must be its long-term over-arching purpose.
- **Designating more Wilderness.** Currently, HR 4828 would create 143,000 acres of federal Wilderness. All BLM Wilderness Study Areas (an additional 100,000 acres) on the Steens must be permanently protected as Wilderness.

- **Requiring better livestock management and allowing voluntary permit retirement.** The designation of a 100,000-acre cow-free wilderness is great, but accounts for only 20% of the bill's proposed 500,000-acre management boundary. To improve the ecological health and allow for long-term grazing reductions throughout the Steens-Alvord area, HR 4828 should allow voluntary permit retirements and require a higher standard of ecological protection for ranchers who continue to graze on Steens Mountain.

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