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From the  
**Outback**

## Steens management plan contracted to mining industry leaders

by Bill Marlett

A recent story published by the *Oregonian* (12/3/03) revealed that Enviroscientists Inc., a Nevada-based company with strong ties to the mining industry, was hired to help the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) draft a management plan for Steens Mountain. The plan, covering 1.6 million acres of Oregon's High Desert, includes not only Steens Mountain, but also the magnificent Pueblo and Trout Creek Mountains—both home to elusive bighorn sheep, endangered Lahontan cutthroat trout, and threatened sage grouse.

The president of Enviroscientists and project manager of the Steens management plan is the treasurer of the California Mining Association. The firm's vice-president and assistant manager of the Steens plan is on the board of the Northwest Mining Association. It may be no coincidence that in BLM's recently released draft plan, the preferred alternative leaves the maximum allowable area open to mining.

Regardless of whether or not there is a conflict of interest related to this contract, the public's perception of conflict is reality. In

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Mann Lake and Steens Mountain

Phillip Bullock

## Steens Mountain

HELP FURTHER A  
CONSERVATION LEGACY

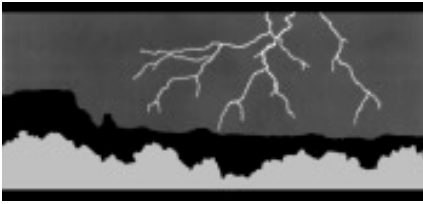
by Tara Rae Gunter

**D**rive southeast of Bend, Oregon, on Highway 20 and you'll find yourself lost in the Oregon High Desert. Look ahead and there will be nothing but a long stretch of highway, edged by telephone poles and makeshift fence posts, pushing through empty basins of sage and rabbitbrush and bunch grasses. This is the northern corner of the Great Basin. Snow-dusted plateaus and gentle mountains rest on all horizons.

At the town of Burns, head south on Highway 205 towards Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. When you crest over a dry, rocky plateau, Malheur Lake will spread below you as if a part of the sky has fallen upon the desert. Other ponds, lakes, and marshes are barely visible in the expanse. Only the light caught from the air distinguishes the water from the rich, muddy tones of the desert below.

Steens Mountain rises above the Blitzen River Valley and the Refuge. The largest fault-block mountain in North America, stretching over 30 miles, Steens climbs to an elevation of almost 10,000 feet and towers a full vertical mile above the Alvord Basin. On the west side, the valley bottoms are lost to sagebrush. The land slopes up gently towards broad plateaus, which darken with juniper and mountain mahogany.

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## Oregon Natural Desert Association

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

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### Newsletter

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## From the Den

by Craig Miller, Vice President



The Oregon Natural Desert Association continues to change and grow in a very positive direction. During this protracted national phase of environmental destruction, ONDA continues to be on the offensive, confounding those who have little respect for the wild and beautiful lands that compose so much of Oregon. From the Steens-Alvord Coalition's "Citizens' Alternative" to the "Wilderness Research and Rescue" project, to the grazing permit buyout option, to advocacy for wilderness designation of the Badlands and Spring Basin, ONDA and its supporters and volunteers are making a real difference in the political and physical landscape. ONDA continues to ensure that governmental agencies at the highest level are held responsible for upholding the law. Through litigation, ONDA is challenging the Secretary of Interior's decision to prevent the public from participating in the protection of BLM wilderness. In the coming year, look for ONDA to spring new surprises, or better yet, join us in our efforts to forever change the way people look at the world and Oregon's High Desert!

## Announcements

### Mark your calendars for the 2004 Desert Conference: September 9-12th, Malheur Field Station, Oregon

The purpose of this conference is to bring together, inspire, and educate those who care about the high desert sagebrush lands of the Great Basin and beyond. On this 40th anniversary year of the Wilderness Act, we will recognize what we have achieved and what we must do to further protect and restore this fragile and extraordinary desert landscape. Desert Conference is being planned by an organizing committee representing: The Wilderness Society, ONDA, Sierra Club, Audubon Society of Portland, American Lands Alliance, Trout Unlimited, and Oregon Trout. For more information please contact Melanie Mercer at [mmercerc@twsw.org](mailto:mmercerc@twsw.org) or 206-624-6430.

### Voluntary grazing buyout bills introduced in Congress

Reps. Christopher Shays (R-Conn.) and Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) have introduced legislation to enact a voluntary federal grazing permit buyout program that would compensate public lands ranchers and could eventually protect 257 million acres of federal public lands. The Voluntary Grazing Permit Buyout Act would allow federal public lands ranchers to waive their interest in grazing permits in exchange for compensation in the amount of \$175/animal unit month. The bill authorizes \$100 million for the program, enough money to retire an estimated 7.8 million acres of federal lands

grazed by domestic livestock. The Arizona Voluntary Grazing Permit Buyout Act is a similar bill that applies specifically to Arizona. The buyout program was conceived by the National Public Lands Grazing Campaign (ONDA is on the steering committee). For more information on the bill and campaign, visit the NPLGC web site at: [www.publiclandsranching.org](http://www.publiclandsranching.org).

### An important ruling

The American Antiquities Act of 1906 gives the President the power to declare national monuments. All but three presidents since the Act's passage have used it, and in doing so have preserved about 120 million acres. The act is not without critics. A challenge was recently filed by the Mountain States Legal Foundation of Denver, a conservative public interest law firm. The firm argued that then-President Bill Clinton overstepped his authority when he created six new national monuments in the final days of his administration. But in October the U.S. Supreme Court effectively reinforced the Antiquities Act by refusing to hear the challenge. That ended the case. Clinton declared nineteen national monuments spanning 5.9 million acres under the act.

short, the contract with Enviroscientists undermines the credibility of the Steens plan, is a questionable use of taxpayers' dollars, and blemishes BLM's integrity as a trustworthy steward of our public lands.

*The overarching issue on Steens, of course, is the Bush administration's penchant to outsource federal responsibilities to private companies.*

And no matter what, we'll always wonder about Enviroscientists' role in the agency's decision to dismiss most of our recommendation to add 380,000 acres of new wilderness study areas (WSAs) as part of the planning process. (BLM included less than 2 percent of our recommended WSAs in its draft plan.)

BLM is correct in asserting that much of Steens Mountain was previously withdrawn from mineral entry. But the planning area extends far beyond the previous mineral withdrawal, and includes most of the Pueblo Mountains and part of the Trout Creek Mountains.

BLM is also correct when it asserts that there is virtually no interest in mineral development or exploration outside the mineral withdrawal. But history suggests that current activity is no predictor of future interest.

What if the interest in gold goes up again as it did in the early 1990s? In response to a veritable gold rush in Oregon's High Desert, with literally thousands of new mining claims filed, conservation groups rushed to place a measure on the 1994 ballot that would have forced mining companies to fully restore their mining sites, including reclamation of the open pits associated with cyanide heap leach mining. Mining companies contributed over four million dollars to oppose the measure and, not surprising, the initiative was defeated at the ballot box. It was sheer luck that in the aftermath of the 1994 election, interest in gold fell, and the mining companies left

Oregon. But who honestly thinks they won't be back?

In fact, the BLM's own 1989 Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) supports the notion of future mining development in the Pueblo Mountain WSA, just south of the Steens and in the current planning area. Their proposed action recommended a mere one-third of the Pueblo Mountain WSA as suitable for wilderness designation in order to accommodate future mineral development on lands the agency identified with a "high potential for the occurrence of gold, silver, mercury, uranium, zinc, copper, and molybdenum."

In fact, BLM placed its proposed wilderness boundary along the summit of Pueblo Mountain in order to avoid conflicts with projected mineral developments in the area identified as having high favorability for metals and moderate favorability for the occurrence of geothermal resources. Assuming exploration proved the existence of economically favorable ore deposits, the



*Wildhorse Lake*

BLM's EIS predicts one open-pit silver and mercury mine 2.5 miles north of Pueblo Mountain, and another open-pit gold and silver mine 2 miles south of Pueblo Mountain.

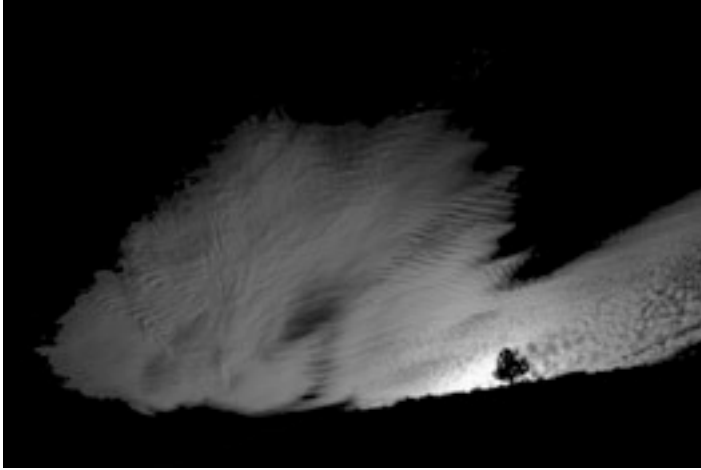
The overarching issue on Steens, of course, is the Bush administration's penchant to outsource federal

*see Outback page 4*

Richard Wilhelm

responsibilities to private companies. The Steens situation suggests that in the future, similar contracts should receive either far more scrutiny, or preferably, be avoided altogether. Yes, BLM has done this before, and perhaps in this case it was innocent. Unfortunately, we may never really know.

So, what to do about the Steens management plan?



Richard Wilhelm

*Juniper on ridge*

Lest you think pigs might fly, it's unlikely Enviroscientists will return to taxpayers the \$670,000 it received under its BLM contract, or that BLM might redo its management plan.

On the other hand, we could just take BLM's word that this is no big deal and move on. But a dark cloud would forever hang over the Steens and BLM.

As a critical first step, the Steens-Alvord Coalition

(the coalition of conservation groups who helped secure the Steens Act) recently asked Oregon's congressional delegation for a formal investigation of the contract between the BLM and Enviroscientists.

In addition to this potential investigation, and regardless of its outcome, there is the urgent need to restore the public's confidence in BLM and the Steens management plan.

While the jury is still out, I believe there are people in BLM trying to do a good job on Steens. With that in mind, we should simply remove the remaining 468,000 acres in the planning area from future mining and geothermal development, as Congress did in the 2000 Steens Act.

This action will lessen the notion of a conflict of interest with the contractor, protect still vulnerable wildlands of Oregon's High Desert, salvage BLM's integrity and commitment to protecting Oregon's natural heritage, and last, but not least, diminish the stigma surrounding the Steens planning process.

If you agree, contact your congressional representative and Senators Smith and Wyden. Too, the BLM is still accepting public comment on the draft management plan for Steens. More than ever, it's critical to tell BLM you want to preserve Oregon's High Desert wildlands for future generations.

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## **Steens** *continued from page 1*

It is a land of startling contrast: dramatic u-shaped glacial valleys, groves of quaking aspen, uplands lush with bunch grass and wild flowers, shear mountain rims falling away thousands of feet to alkali playas. Sage grouse and pronghorn antelope roam the desert lands, redband trout haunt its waters, bighorn sheep climb the rugged rims, mule deer hide in the ravines, eagles and hawks hunt the big skies, and coyotes and owls fill the night with their calls.

The Steens Mountain-Alvord Desert region has often been referred to as the "crown jewel" of Oregon's High Desert and was once described by Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt as "the most magnificent, unprotected landscape left in the entire West." That changed with the passage of the 2000 Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act. But today we need your help to make sure that protection of Steens Mountain is lasting.

On October 30, 2000, the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act was signed

into law. This landmark legislation created the nation's first congressionally designated "cow-free" wilderness area; added 29 miles to the federal Wild and Scenic River System; withdrew 1.1 million acres from mining and geothermal development; prohibited the use of off-road vehicles and the construction of new roads and facilities in a 496,000-acre Cooperative Management and Protection Area; and designated the nation's first Redband Trout Reserve. The legislation also directed the Bureau of Land management (BLM) to prepare a management plan for the area within four years.

A draft of the plan has just been released, and the BLM is now accepting public comment until January 5, 2004.

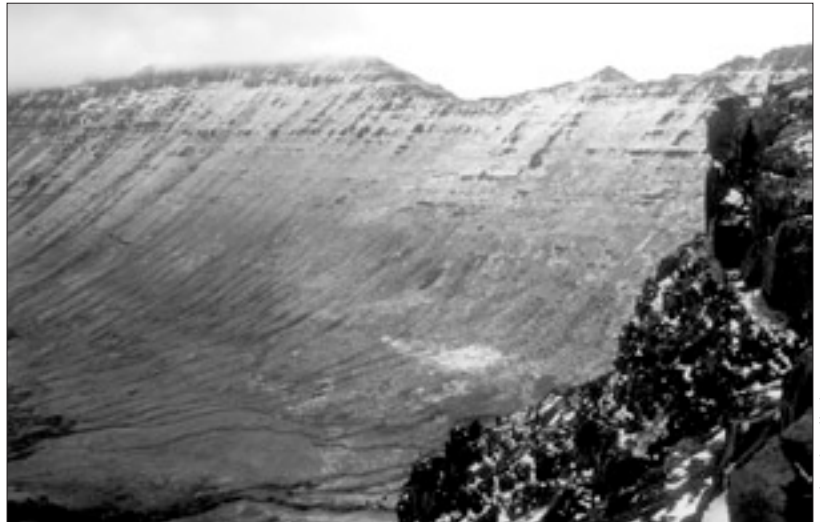
It is vitally important that citizens influence the plan's outcome so that it offers

*see Steens next page*

the highest level of protection to the Steens Mountain-Alvord Desert ecosystem. The management plan, which encompasses the 1.6 million-acre Andrews Resource Management Area, will have direct, on-the-ground impacts and dictate activities for the next ten to fifteen years. We need your help in continuing the conservation legacy of Steens Mountain. This is YOUR chance to play an important role in the future of the Steens.

The Steens-Alvord Coalition, a group of local and national conservation organizations (including ONDA), helped facilitate passage of the Steens Act. By working closely with Oregon's congressional delegation and governor, and negotiating with local ranchers and landowners, the Coalition secured legislation that constituted a huge step toward gaining meaningful protection for Steens Mountain's wildlands and waters. Although the 2000 Steens Act set guidelines and laid the foundation for the management of this ecologically important area, many issues were left unresolved.

The BLM's preferred alternative (alternative D) within the draft management plan does not meet



Kiger Gorge

Richard Wilhelm

conservationists' desire for protecting the area's wilderness values, fish and wildlife habitats, or water quality. Nor does it meet the intent of the Steens Act legislation, which is to preserve the "ecological integrity" of the land.

Consequently, members of the Steens-Alvord Coalition have identified important elements of the draft management plan and grouped them together as the Citizens' Alternative for Steens Mountain and the Andrews Resource Area. Join the Coalition by taking the time to write a letter to the BLM today supporting the Citizens' Alternative. Urge the BLM to adopt this alternative in its final plan. Doing so will help preserve the region's ecological integrity, prevent degradation of wilderness values, protect fish and wildlife, prohibit inappropriate livestock grazing practices, restore water quality, and minimize the impacts of off-road and motorized vehicle use.

For more information on the Citizens' Alternative, or to send an electronic letter to the BLM, visit ONDA's web site: [www.onda.org](http://www.onda.org). Be sure to add a few sentences explaining why the Steens Mountain-Alvord Basin region is important to you and state whether you have personally visited Steens Mountain, Alvord Desert, Trout Creek Mountains, or Pueblo Mountains.

And for more information about Steens Mountain, the BLM's Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, and the Steens-Alvord Coalition, contact Tara at 503-525-0193, [trgunter@onda.org](mailto:trgunter@onda.org).



Willows and Steens

Richard Wilhelm

# WILDERNESS RESEARCH AND RESCUE VOLUNTEERS INVENTORY 2.5 MILLION ACRES!

by Craig Miller

A hardy team of thirty-plus volunteers braved extreme temperatures, flat tires, and spectacular views to inventory an incredible 2.5 million acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered lands during 2003. The focus of ONDA's inventory efforts this year was the Owyhee country in southeast Oregon. The BLM conducted an inventory more than twenty years ago to identify lands with wilderness character; most were declared lacking by the agency. Ever since then, ONDA has maintained that many of the lands omitted do meet the wilderness criteria and should be protected until Congress can make a final decision. Now, using high-tech devices such as digital cameras and geopositional system (GPS) units, ONDA and its dedicated group of volunteers are systematically



Volunteers inventorying along a two-track

ONDA file photo

lands than even the Oregon High Desert Protection Act (OHDPA) and similar proposals have identified.

What do we expect the Wilderness Research and Rescue project to accomplish? First,

ONDA hopes to assist our legislators in identifying those lands that deserve protection as wilderness. Secondly, ONDA is using the new information to comment on the BLM's Resource Management Plans in Oregon. ONDA has challenged Secretary Gale Norton's decision that the public has no right to ask the BLM to consider new information that would result in protection for wilderness. We will take this discriminative and illegal action all the way to the Supreme Court if need be. Finally, ONDA is finding a whole new cadre of desert activists who appreciate the ecological importance, stark beauty, and wildness of Oregon's desert lands.

What's next on the inventory agenda? In 2004, we are gearing up to cover the Lakeview and John Day regions. We expect to be able to accomplish most of the work in three field trips. Volunteers will be sent out in groups of two to four from a central location, and each group will be accompanied by at least one seasoned volunteer who knows the ins and outs of the inventory process. For the latest on the Wilderness Research and Rescue project, or to sign up for a field trip, go to the ONDA's site at [www.onda.org](http://www.onda.org).

ONDA and its dedicated group of volunteers are systematically documenting the wilderness character of these lands using BLM's own criteria.



The Owyhee country

Brent Fenty

documenting the wilderness character of these lands using BLM's own criteria.

Our inventory team took more than 3,000 photos, recording the exact location of each picture. Volunteers traversed and documented the condition of thousands of miles of roads and ways. As in the 2002 inventory of the Andrews Resource Area that included the Steens and Alvord Desert, this year's results indicate that there is considerably more wilderness-quality



Desert horned lizard

Al St. John

by Mac Lacy

## MALHEUR NATIONAL FOREST LITIGATION

**E**arlier this year, ONDA and the Center for Biological Diversity filed two lawsuits against the Forest Service, alleging that grazing practices on the Malheur National Forest—in the Malheur and North Fork Malheur wild and scenic river corridors and on the Murderer’s Creek and Blue Mountain allotments—were violating legal requirements under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), and the eastside aquatic conservation strategies, PACFISH and INFISH. The Forest Service asked the court in September to consolidate both these cases in front of a single federal district judge. ONDA opposed the government’s motion, arguing that the cases were factually and legally distinct and that consolidation would actually prove to be more complex and time-consuming than keeping the cases on separate tracks. On October 9th, Judge King sided with ONDA, denying the government’s motion.

On October 10th, the court heard oral argument on the Forest Service’s motion to dismiss the wild and scenic

ivers case. The government argued that ONDA’s claims were not reviewable by the court under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) because they were (1) not “final agency actions” and (2) not genuine “failures to act”—the two types of agency actions reviewable by courts under the APA. ONDA argued that (1) the Forest Service’s issuance prior to each grazing season of “annual operating plans” is a final agency action, and (2) the Forest Service has failed to satisfy several mandatory, non-discretionary statutory duties in its management of grazing practices in these wild and scenic river corridors. These duties include the requirement under the WSRA to “protect and enhance” the rivers’ values, the duty under the WSRA to implement river management plan grazing standards (including INFISH standards), and the duty under the NFMA to manage the rivers consistent with Forest Plan standards (also including INFISH). The court should issue a decision sometime in the next couple months. If ONDA successfully defeats this motion, the case will proceed to the summary judgment phase of litigation (see the briefs online at [www.onda.org](http://www.onda.org)).

## ALVORD LAKE SUBBASIN TMDL

**T**he Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has issued a draft version of the Alvord TMDL. A TMDL is a document that determines the “total maximum daily load” of pollutants (in this case, “heat”) that a water quality-limited stream can handle without violating a State’s water quality standards. In the case of the Alvord subbasin, the main water quality concern is high stream temperatures, which are detrimental to Lahontan cutthroat trout and other native fish present in the basin. Streams in the Alvord basin have become too warm for these fish mainly because of reduced stream shading as a result of livestock over-grazing in these desert streams’ fragile riparian areas. In its comments to the DEQ on the draft TMDL, ONDA takes issue with the flawed and unsupported assumption that riparian vegetation in the subbasin can never return to pre-settlement conditions (despite the fact that there actually are limited stream reaches that still retain such conditions). ONDA also points out various



*East escarpment of Steens rises from Alvord Basin*

Al St. John

shortcomings in the TMDL’s analytical and modeling methods, and its proposed implementation plan, as well as the failure to candidly discuss the serious adverse effects on water quality of grazing in the subbasin (see the full comments online at [www.onda.org](http://www.onda.org)).

**S**teens Mountain is a spectacular and pristine part of Oregon that received protection through wilderness designation as part of the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000. Designation of the Steens Mountain Wilderness was intended, in part, to protect water in the rivers and streams that flow through the new wilderness area. Early drafts of the legislation provided for a federally reserved water right to achieve this goal. However, late in negotiations, this provision was removed from the Act, but only after agreement was reached between representatives of all interests that the State of Oregon would secure the instream water rights needed to protect Home and Threemile Creeks.

This consensus agreement recognized that wilderness values, including the needs of fish and wildlife, would be permanently protected by approval of instream water rights on Home and Threemile Creeks, which flow through the wilderness area. In addition to protecting the wilderness values of these creeks, the flows provide an important sanctuary for native redband trout.

Despite these agreements, the State is now being pressured to allow new development in exchange for approval of pending instream water right applications for these

creeks. These development proposals include legitimizing past illegal irrigation practices upstream from the Steens Mountain Wilderness and proposed dams on Home Creek and its tributaries in order to provide water for new flood irrigation in the Catlow Valley. These developments would threaten not only sensitive



## Preserving redband wilderness on S

by Kare  
Staff Attorney, Wa

fish, but would also flood wetland meadows that provide important habitat for several species of birds and wildlife.

The Oregon Water Resources Department, in consultation with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and Oregon Parks Department, reviewed the instream applications and applications for new storage development. Water Resources Department then issued proposed orders approving instream rights for Home and Threemile Creeks and denying permits for development upstream of the wilderness area.

ONDA, Oregon Trout, and WaterWatch of Oregon support the state's position approving the instream water rights and denying upstream development of storage projects or irrigation diversions. Development should only be allowed downstream from the Steens Mountain Wilderness in the Catlow Valley.

The State's current position to approve the instream rights for Home and Threemile Creeks and deny upstream development should be maintained for these and the following reasons:

- ☉ The rights would protect and preserve the wilderness and recreational values of Home Creek, which is accessible to hikers, anglers, bird watchers, naturalists and others from an undeveloped campground adjacent to where Highway 205 crosses Home Creek. Protection of



Home Creek

ONDA file photo





Al St. John

## Redband trout and Steens Mountain

by Russell  
WaterWatch of Oregon

Home and Threemile Creeks' stream and riparian habitat is necessary for fish and wildlife survival and for the recreational, scenic, and aesthetic use of the area.

- Protection of redband trout is an important goal set out by the recent creation of the Steens Mountain Act. This goal has also been formally endorsed by ODFW, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the developer of the proposed storage and irrigation projects, Roaring Springs Ranch, through its partnership in the Catlow Redband Trout and Catlow Tui Chub Conservation Agreement (letter from David McAllister to Paul Cleary, June 13, 2001).
- The BLM supports the instream water rights on Home and Threemile Creeks. The water rights would "positively affect wilderness values, population viability of the Catlow redband trout and Catlow tui chub, implementation of the Catlow Redband Trout and Catlow Tui Chub Conservation Agreement, and water quality in Home Creek...Alteration of the natural flow regime may reduce the wilderness, scenic, and recreational values" (letter from Thomas Dyer to Paul Cleary, August 1, 2001).
- ODFW review of the development applications concluded that the developments should not be allowed due to harm

to spawning, incubation, rearing, passage, and habitat value losses to a state sensitive species. The proposed use would, among other things, "reduce habitat forming energy from storage or peak flow events" and "elevate downstream water temperatures" (ODFW Division 33 Application Review Sheet, April 20, 2001).

- ODFW is opposed to dam building, inundation of spawning habitat and alteration of streamflow in Home Creek on the grounds that Home Creek is the only Catlow Valley stream which still supports a stable (although depressed) population of redband trout due to its relatively pristine condition.

- Governor Kitzhaber has supported full protection of flows in Home and Threemile Creeks: "Preserving the unaltered, natural flow regime in Home Creek and Threemile Creek will provide not only water quality and fish habitat benefits, but will protect the recreational values that are at the center of the Steens Act" (letter from John Kitzhaber to Paul Cleary, June 14, 2001). The Governor acknowledged that instream water rights are necessary for "the long-term protection of the recreational and scenic attraction values which form the basis of the federal wilderness designation" (letter from John Kitzhaber to Michael Carrier, September 29, 2000).

*Instream water rights are necessary for "the long-term protection of the recreational and scenic attraction values..."*

— Governor John Kitzhaber

If cooperative settlements like those reached regarding the Steens Mountain Wilderness are to work in the future, conservation interests and concerned citizens need to know that the State of Oregon and other interests will honor the agreements reached. Backpedaling on this agreement would send a troubling message to conservationists and concerned citizens who have agreed to participate in cooperative processes to address thorny water issues.



## ONDA acquires critical inholdings in Steens Mountain Wilderness

by Tara Rae Gunter

ONDA recently sold 40 acres of land in the Steens Mountain Wilderness to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which automatically became part of the Steens Wilderness upon transfer to the agency. There remains 4,070 acres of private inholdings within the wilderness that still need to be acquired from willing sellers. The transaction was a cooperative agreement between BLM and ONDA and helped resolve potentially continuous management issues, such as motorized inholder access and inappropriate development within the wilderness. The land was purchased by ONDA for \$9,241 and, after appraisal, sold to BLM for \$10,000.

For the third year in a row since the passage of the legislation, the BLM has received no appropriations for land acquisition, even though the Steens Act authorized \$25 million for land acquisition and conservation easements from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This absence of federal dollars is threatening the integrity of the Steens Mountain Wilderness.

ONDA and other groups have lobbied for federal appropriations to purchase these parcels, many of which have willing sellers. As a supplemental strategy to acquiring federal funds, ONDA has also sought and continues to seek conservation buyers to purchase these properties and transfer them to the public.



Elaine Rees

## An Economic Pitch for Steens

by Bob Freimark  
Director of the Pacific Northwest office  
The Wilderness Society

### “HARNEY COUNTY, GATEWAY TO THE STEENS.”

Those are the first words on the county’s Chamber of Commerce web site. The Chamber understands the importance of Steens Mountain and eastern Oregon’s spectacular landscape to the regional economy. Like all good salespeople, Harney County is promoting a product that sells.

Understanding the economics of a region is critical to building the public support necessary to protect the places we hold dear, such as Steens Mountain. Conventional wisdom in many communities is that natural resource extraction and agriculture are primarily responsible for economic well being.

The Wilderness Society did an economic profile of Harney County and found that resource extraction industries continue to be an important part of the economic fabric of this rural county. But personal income and employment data show that other economic sectors are growing significantly, while agricultural and commodity extraction industries are experiencing little or no growth.

Our findings include:

- ☉ In 2000, jobs in resource extraction industries—including lumber and

wood products; paper and allied products; and forestry, mining, and oil and gas production—accounted for 15 percent of Harney County’s total personal income (labor income from current work and non-labor income associated with past work);

- ☉ The Services and Professional sector provides not only the most jobs, it added the most new jobs between 1970 and 2000. This broad category includes auto mechanics, physicians, engineers, architects, computer programmers, stockbrokers, and hotel workers.

We have provided our profile to the Steens Mountain Advisory Council and the Bureau of Land Management in hopes that as the management plan for Steens is developed, an accurate portrayal of the economic factors driving Harney County will lead to good decisions. To download the profile for Harney (and other counties in Oregon and the West) go to: [www.wilderness.org/Library/Documents/county\\_econ\\_profile.cfm](http://www.wilderness.org/Library/Documents/county_econ_profile.cfm).

## Is dam removal on the Blitzen River scientifically justified?

by Jason Miner  
Conservation Director, Oregon Trout

**M**ore than 30,000 small dams in Oregon hold water for irrigation, flood control, wildlife habitat, or flow measurement. Many are relics, forgotten structures in need of maintenance that block the passage of native fish, juveniles or adults, and impair the recovery of healthy aquatic ecosystems. Others still serve their original purpose. On the margin between purposeful and purposeless, the gauging station dam on the Blitzen River will soon be the subject of a serious discussion about the benefits of small dam removal.

The Steens Act of 2000 specified that “[t]he Secretary [of the Interior] shall remove the dam located below the mouth of Fish Creek and above Page Springs if removal of the dam is scientifically justified and funds are available for such purpose.” The draft management plan expands on this directive, with

*Impeding passage has limited the life history diversity of native redband trout in the basin.*

each of the alternatives recommending: “coordinate with appropriate agencies, groups, and individuals on removal or modification of the Page Springs gauging station weir to facilitate migration of redband trout and other aquatic species in the Donner und Blitzen

River system, while limiting the migration capabilities of non-native fish.”

The ecological issues surrounding dam removal are complex. Arguments can be made for removal, notching, or leaving the dam in place.

Constructed early in the 1900s, the dam functions as a substantial passage barrier to all fish species, though at extreme high flow events it may be surmounted by some fish species. Though it is a short concrete plug, only 4 to 6 feet in height, an “apron” of concrete below the dam that extends downstream for several feet to provide stability effectively blocks the development of a plunge pool which fish need to develop the velocity to jump a short structure.

Impeding passage has limited the life history diversity of native redband trout in the basin. Historically, redbands spawned in the Blitzen’s headwaters in the spring. Some juveniles migrated

downstream to Malheur Lake and spent adulthood among ubiquitous food, growing to legendary sizes coveted by anglers. Adults would return upstream to spawn, completing what is called an “adfluvial” life cycle, spawning in stream but maturing in lake water. With passage cut off, both adult and juvenile redband trout are limited from pursuing their full life history. This leaves the population more susceptible, eliminates diversity in the population, and limits the genetic interaction of upper basin and lower basin fish—all arguments for removing the dam.

One counterargument that may hold merit is the concern that non-native fish may be kept out of the upper basin by the dam, effectively protecting upper Blitzen redbands. The introduction and proliferation of carp in the lower basin is



Little Blitzen Gorge

Richard Wilhelm

one of the primary reasons enormous redbands are no longer found in the Blitzen. Through competitive pressure and alteration of the ecosystem, carp destroyed the conditions necessary for adult redbands to thrive. Legitimate concerns raised to the Bureau of Land Management have indicated that carp may be enabled to move upstream if the dam is removed, arguing either for notching or leaving the dam alone.

With the adoption of the resource management plan, this issue will be brought to a science committee for resolution. The position of the Steens Alvord Coalition and its member groups has been supportive of dam removal for ecological and wilderness reasons. The canyon of the Blitzen above Page Springs campground curves in a sweeping “S” that carries an angler or a hiker’s imagination further upstream. Currently, as you break through the willows and follow the banks you come to a concrete plug run through with rusting metal rebar. With luck, in the future we will sponsor a volunteer project to pack the fractured remnants of this outdated structure down river to the campground for disposal somewhere far from the Blitzen.



# Thanks for supporting ONDA in 2003!

☺ A special thank you to everyone who generously made **contributions to ONDA in memory** of Harold Winegar and Robert Biggs.

## ☺ **Thank You Monthly Donors!**

A hearty thanks is in order to all of our members who make monthly donations to ONDA! The consistency and stability of these gifts helps ensure the ongoing health of ONDA and our ability to effectively advocate for desert protection.

☺ Thank you **ONDA members!** We couldn't do it without you...

☺ And thanks to the following **foundations** for generously supporting ONDA's work in 2003:

Wilburforce Foundation • Foundation for Deep Ecology • Charlotte Martin Foundation • Patagonia, Inc. • Foundation of Greater Memphis • Mazamas Conservation Committee • The Lazar Foundation • American Lands Alliance • The Bullitt Foundation • The Mountaineers • Peradam Foundation • Brainerd Foundation • Sperling Foundation • Musicians United to Sustain the Environment • Wyss Foundation

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## ONDA's stalwart volunteers: Desert defenders extraordinaire!

by Heather Sterling

One of the most gratifying and tangible ways you can help support ONDA is by volunteering your time and talents. Oregon's High Desert benefited this year from the efforts of many dedicated volunteers who inventoried wilderness, pulled barbed wire, sweated under the sun, and enjoyed



Volunteers dismantle a spring development at Steens.

the company of other desert rats during ONDA's wilderness inventory and fence pull trips. Other folks generously spent their time leading interpretive hikes, helping out around the office, distributing educational materials, creating GIS maps, and working on ONDA's web site. A couple of volunteers even utilized their science background by surveying butterflies.

And if you're worried about all work and no play, just ask any of our volunteers—most of the opportunities we offer have a healthy balance of both.

So, whether you'd like to get out in the field and learn first-hand about the places we're trying to protect, or are a GIS genius, scientist, or consider yourself a really enthusiastic

database entry expert, there's a place for you as an ONDA volunteer.

If you're interested in volunteering with us in 2004, please contact Heather at (541) 330-2638 or [hsterling@onda.org](mailto:hsterling@onda.org).

We would like to express gushing gratitude to the following committed ONDA 2003 volunteers: (Wow! So many!)

Connie & Julian Battaile • Alex Berlin • Edie Black • Kalman Brauner • Amy Carlson • Gene & Pamela Carpenter • Jennie Chaiet • Jeremy Chignell • Chris Christie • Joyce & Don Clarke • Catherine Dickson • Alia Dietsch • Linda Driskill • Chris Egertson • JR Estes • Paul Ferro • Fred Goff • Alan Grogan • Lizzie Grossman • Helen Harbin • Curt Harvey • Sybil Hebb • Joe Hessler • Amanda Hetrick • Matt Holmes • Greg Holmes • Debbie Kennedy • Dennis Kenny • Mary Ann Kruse • Christel Lane • Jim Livermore • Art McEldowney • Ellen Mendoza • Jeff Merrick • Michael Merrill • Marilyn & Craig Miller • Bill Mull • John Nangle • Jeneé Nash • Norman & Susan Noble • Andrew Orahoske • Tom Ponte • Dave Predeek • Tom Pringle • Gerritt Rosenthal • Erika Ross • Loraine Rubin • Fred & Eric Sawyer • Tom Sedgwick • Ann Sexton • Terry & Harold Shepherd • Karen Siegel • Bob & Tommie Speik • Kirsten Stade • Shawn Steinmetz • John Sterling • Janet & Laura van Fleet • Phil Warner • Erik Westerholm • Dave Whitehall • Tim Withee • Jake Woodmansee • Dave Worthington.

And a special thank you to Molly Connors for countless hours spent working to ensure that ONDA's web site and database run efficiently.

John Neeling

## *A Certain Slant of Light*

by Alice Elshoff

In a previous newsletter, ONDA board member, longtime desert activist, and Frenchglen resident Alice Elshoff wrote of looking back on winter and forward to the promise of spring on the Malheur Wildlife Refuge. Now with winter on its way, she remembers the fullness of summer.

*“There is a certain slant of light*

*On winter afternoons*

*That oppresses like the weight*

*Of cathedral tunes.”*

To borrow a line from Emily Dickinson, “there is a certain slant of light” on summer afternoons in the Blitzen Valley. Rather than evoking feelings of oppression, this light is filled with the fullness of life.

This is how it happens. By August, the nourishing snowmelt from Steens Mountain has been used up, and the shallow marshes dry. The grasses turn golden and the cattails and tules turn various shades of copper and cinnamon. Afternoon thunder clouds arise from the heat and blanket the sky to a deep blued and polished gun-metal gray.

Then, just before the sun—already on its southward course—sets over the western rim rock, it finds a slim opening beneath the clouds and for a few moments throws its heady light horizontally across the marshes, burnishing the richly colored stalks until they appear lit from within. The green willow meanders, defining the river, only intensify the contrast between earth and sky.

An unearthly quiet descends. For a few moments life stands perfectly still. The teeming marsh sounds of spring are remembered only as ancient history. Caught up in this tableau, one finds it impossible to move, and the heart hurts with fullness. The only worthy response is humble thanks for the enabling consciousness that acknowledges the moment.

# Harold Winegar passes away

## Oregon's "Father of Riparian Protection"

by Bill Marlett

**F**riends of healthy streams lost one of our champions on November 5th: Harold Winegar. Harold, a member of ONDA's advisory board for many years, put the word "riparian" on the map in the 1960s with his pioneering work on Camp Creek, near Prineville, Oregon. As a career fish and wildlife biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Harold was years ahead of the curve, calling attention to the devastating effects of livestock grazing on public lands.

Harold had been dealing with the debilitating effects of diabetes over the past year and it finally caught up with him...he was 80. In 1995, Harold received our annual "Desert Conservation Award" at the Desert Conference at Malheur Field Station. Denzel and Nancy Ferguson were scheduled to present the award, but their truck broke down in transit. Not deterred, Denzel and Nancy faxed their eloquent testimonial, which was then read to the conferees. An excerpt from that testimonial captures the essence of Harold's work:

*"The recipient of tonight's award didn't look at all this environmental devastation and say we have to change*

*our grazing system here! Instead, our honoree reasoned that if livestock had brought on all this mayhem, what would happen if they were booted out? The result was a classic demonstration project that was to change the thought processes of most Westerners."*

On a personal note, I had been visiting Harold over the summer and watched his physical condition slowly deteriorate (he was functionally blind). One of his small pleasures was when Terry (my spouse) read from "Welfare Ranching," and he took immense delight in our field trips to several cow-free streams he fenced off years ago. Our last field trip was, of course, to Camp Creek, where his ashes will be spread next spring.

The last time I saw Harold was a few weeks before he died, and he asked me to bring him a copy of Denzel and Nancy's Desert Conference letter, even though he could no longer read. We talked about cows...the status of our lawsuits against the Malheur National Forest, etc. He was pleased with our efforts, knowing that we were keeping up the good fight, which is what mattered most to Harold.

✍

# Farewell, Brent Fenty, ONDA's Wildlands Coordinator

by Craig Miller

**I**t is with great sadness that we bid adieu to Brent Fenty, ONDA's outstanding Wildlands Coordinator. Brent recently relocated with his fiancée, Anne Aurand, to Anchorage, Alaska. His talents were too numerous to count, but most importantly, he was and continues to be a tireless advocate for Oregon's High Desert. Brent is one of those rare souls who is comfortable in any forum. Whether talking to ranchers, BLM, or congressional staff, he represented ONDA's mission with unwavering zeal and passion. He was adept in public presentations and exhibited genuine warmth on a personal level with everyone he worked around.

Brent joined ONDA right after the Steens Act was passed in 2000 and was a key player in keeping tabs on implementation of the Act. But he will be remembered most for leading efforts to inventory over one million acres of the Owyhee Canyonlands and for his leadership in preparing ONDA's recommendation to add over 500,000 acres of proposed wilderness to the Steens and surrounding lands (now part of the Citizens' Alternative for the BLM's Draft Steens Plan).

More recently, Brent was instrumental in bringing the Warm Springs tribes, private landowners, Wheeler County, and the BLM together in support of the proposed Spring Basin Wilderness, as well as making the Badlands Wilderness proposal a reality. Too, we can thank Brent, who was a real computer whiz, for upgrading ONDA's present web site.

From all our volunteers, board, and staff, we thank Brent for everything he did and wish him the happiest of trails!



*Brent fishing the Chewaucan River*

✍

# Remember ONDA in your will

Gifts to ONDA through your will are not subject to federal estate and the inheritance taxes of most states. Such gifts, or bequests, can take different forms:

**Specific Bequest:** You designate ONDA to receive a specific dollar amount or percentage of your estate, whether in cash, securities, or other property.

**Residuary Bequest:** You name ONDA to receive all or a specified percentage of the assets remaining in your estate after other expenses and bequests have been paid.

**Contingent Bequest:** You direct that a specific amount or a percentage of your estate be paid to ONDA only if your other

beneficiaries do not survive you. (A contingent request can be made without taking away from your family in any way).

**Remainder Bequest:** You direct that a sum be placed aside and invested to pay income to a surviving spouse or child. Afterwards the remaining principal goes to ONDA.

**Memorial Bequest:** You establish a fund in the memory of your spouse, other family members or friend.

ONDA recommends that you consult an attorney to prepare or revise your will.

For more information about bequests to ONDA, write, call, or e-mail Heather Sterling: 541-330-2638 or hsterling@onda.org.

## Marketplace

### CLOTHING

ONDA T-shirts *White w/logo Specify size (M, L or XL)*  
 (short sleeve) ----- \$12  
 (long sleeve) ----- \$15

### OTHER ITEMS

"Boycott Public Lands Beef" bumper stickers ----- \$1

### BOOKS

*Netting the Sun: A Personal Geography of Oregon's Desert*  
 by Melvin Adams ----- \$15

*Flora of Steens Mountain*  
 by Donald Mansfield ----- \$30

*Sacred Cows at the Public Trough*  
 by Denzel and Nancy Ferguson ----- \$9

*Oregon's Outback: Auto Tour to Southeast Oregon*  
 by Donna Lynn Ikenberry ----- \$15

ITEM DESCRIPTION	SIZE	QTY	ITEM PRICE	TOTAL
		X		=
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		X		=
GRAND TOTAL				=

## Yes! I Support the Oregon Natural Desert Association

### Contribution:

\$35                       \$60                       \$100                       \$250                       \$\_\_\_\_\_ Other

This gift is a:     Special contribution     New membership     Membership renewal

### Monthly Giving Option:

Automatic bank deductions are an easy and helpful way to give. Deductions from your account may be stopped at any time by simply contacting ONDA.

Please enclose a voided check, deposit slip, or credit card number. Monthly amount to deduct: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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### Add my name to the SageNet (ONDA's Action Alert listserve):

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with check (or voided check, deposit slip, or credit card number for automatic withdrawals) to:  
 ONDA, 16 NW Kansas, Bend, OR 97701

# Thank you to those who contributed through Earth Share of Oregon

If you count yourself among the thousands of Oregonians who donated to Earth Share of Oregon (ESOR) this fall, thank you! Employees in over seventy-five businesses and public agencies committed their support for Earth Share's sixty-six members who work to protect human health, preserve wildlife habitat, and promote alternatives that will reduce the effects of global warming. ONDA is strengthened by our membership in Earth Share and by support from donors like you.

If your workplace is not currently involved in an ESOR giving program, this is how it works: ESOR works with employers to set up a program that allows employees to support environmental programs through

payroll deductions. Through this program, employees can choose to support Earth Share as a whole, enabling all of ESOR member groups to benefit, or to designate their support for one or more specific groups. In this way, even a small gift of a dollar or two per paycheck adds up to a generous contribution. It's easy and it makes a difference! For more information, please contact Ron Shoals at ESOR: 503-223-9015 or [rrs@earthshare-oregon.org](mailto:rrs@earthshare-oregon.org); or visit [www.earthshare-oregon.org](http://www.earthshare-oregon.org).



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## Action Alert

### You can shape the future of Steens!

On October 30, 2000, the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act was signed into law. Among other accomplishments, this landmark legislation created the nation's first congressionally designated "cow-free" wilderness area and added 29 miles to the federal Wild and Scenic River System. The legislation also directed the Bureau of Land management (BLM) to prepare a management plan for the area within four years.

A draft of the plan has just been released, and the BLM is now accepting public comment until January 5, 2004 ([www.or.blm.gov/steens](http://www.or.blm.gov/steens)). It is vitally important that citizens influence the plan's outcome so that it offers the highest level of protection to the Steens Mountain-Alvord Desert ecosystem. The management plan, which encompasses the 1.6 million-acre Andrews Resource Management Area, will have direct, on-the-ground impacts and dictate activities for the next ten to fifteen years. We need your help in continuing the conservation

legacy of Steens Mountain. This is **YOUR** chance to play an important role in the future of the Steens.

The Steens-Alvord Coalition, a group of local and national conservation organizations, helped facilitate passage of the Steens Act. Join the Coalition today by supporting the "Citizens' Alternative." Your comments will make a difference. Visit ONDA's web site ([www.onda.org](http://www.onda.org)) to find out more information and email your comments to the BLM.



Melting Snow, Steens

Richard Wilhelm