

From the
 **Outback**

The Wilderness Act, forty years later

by Bill Marlett

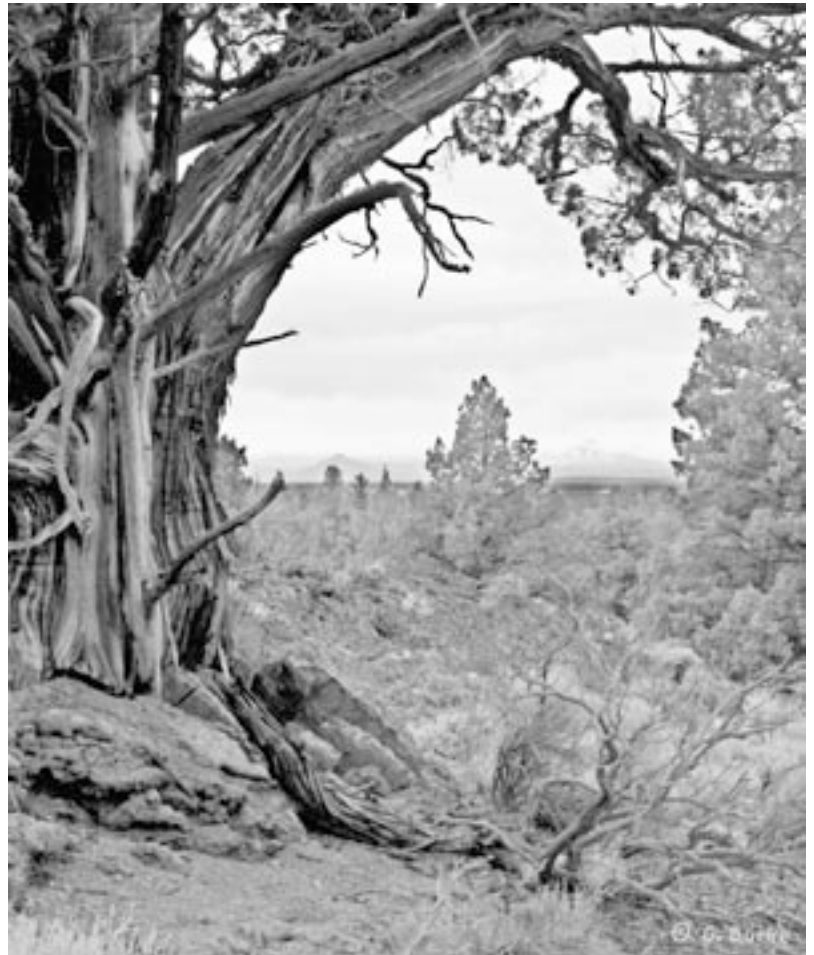
As we approach the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act this year, it's a good time to celebrate how much we've accomplished, but also to humble ourselves at the magnitude of the work that lies before us.

So much has changed since 1964. America has seen civil strife, war, economic turmoil, and staggering political, social, and demographic transformations. Yet, there are some places, wild places, that have remained just as they were forty years ago. That is our heritage—the gift from one generation to the next.

If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it.

*President Lyndon Johnson,
on signing the Wilderness Act,
September 3, 1964*

Oregon's progress in securing wilderness protection falls behind that of our neighbors in Washington and California. Certainly, it is not for lack of eligible lands deserving permanent protection under the Wilderness Act. The Oregon Forest Wilderness Campaign has identified over 4 million acres of forest lands needing protection, while ONDA has identified over 7 million acres of primarily tree-free lands in eastern Oregon that are eligible



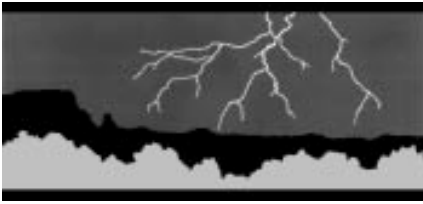
Old-growth juniper in the Badlands

Greg Burke

2003 Owyhee Wilderness Research and Rescue Trip

by Chris Egertson

Tucked away in the southeast corner of Oregon lies the Owyhee Canyonlands. This rugged, expansive area is characterized by deep, narrow canyons, which are home to gorgeous rivers, cinder cones, lava tubes, and spires created by great lava flows. Sagebrush communities blanket the uplands as far as the eye can see. This extraordinary diversity in habitat provides a home to many species of animals, including big horn sheep, pronghorn, mule deer, elk, sage grouse, sand hill cranes, golden eagles, trout, and a plethora of reptiles.



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 Lee Christie, President



With this issue, it is my pleasure to welcome two new board members:

Durlin Hickock and John Sterling (see page 14). I would also like to honor and thank three board members who left at the end of their terms last year: Bob Spertus, Terry Gloeckler, and Ed Backus. It was a pleasure to serve on the board with them. They are still involved with ONDA, at various levels, and so are still very much a part of our team. For this, we are grateful.

What an exciting year this is for ONDA and our members! There are so many opportunities to get involved at the ground level: wilderness inventories, fence-pulls at Steens and Hart Mountain, and Desert Conference this fall.

As for myself, I will be taking a year away from ONDA, the desert, and my Oregon home. I will miss the passion that is our mission and work: to protect and restore our wild deserts.

Announcements

Call for photos!

All you shutterbugs out there: ONDA is in search of photographs featuring eastern Oregon landscapes, wildlife, plants, cultural sites, etc. (photos may include people) for use in our newsletter and a wall calendar we're designing for 2005. Please submit newsletter photos (or desert artwork) via email to trgunter@onda.org. Calendar photos may be submitted in slide format or high quality digital format (at least 300 dpi, 10"x 8" via CD) to ONDA's Bend office.

General Accounting Office (GAO) to conduct study of federal grazing program

The GAO has agreed to conduct a study scope and costs of grazing on our federal lands. This study will help stir the debate over the federal grazing program and will add speed to the passage of the Voluntary Grazing Permit Buyout bills now introduced in Congress. The study would not have been possible without the support of several honorable members of Congress. Special thanks should be directed to Congressman Shays (CT) and Congressman Grijalva (AZ), who really took the initiative. Thanks should also go to Reps. Rahall (WV), Blumenauer (OR), Holt (NJ), and McDermott (WA).

Attend Wolf Advisory Committee Meetings

ONDA strongly encourages you to attend the Wolf Advisory Committee (WAC) meetings taking place in your area. Attendance offers members of the public the opportunity to understand the process and to have input in the development stages of the plan before a final document is finished and sent out for public comment. The committee will meet once a month to discuss the development of a wolf management plan for Oregon. It is history in the making for wolves in Oregon! Upcoming meetings: June 3-4, Salem; June 30-July 1, Pendleton; July 22-23, Salem; August 19-20, to be determined. Contact ODFW for more details on place and time: 503-947-6002. And check out ONDA's web site for more information on wolves: www.onda.org.

WANTED!

ONDA needs a 4WD/high clearance vehicle for use by volunteers doing wilderness inventory. Call Chris at 541-330-2638.

for wilderness designation. As you'll read later on in this issue, ONDA's efforts to scour every nook and cranny for additional roadless wildlands continues. It is truly one of the best opportunities for you to join with our able staff in the field to get hands-on experience inventorying the vast wildlands of Oregon's High Desert.

Bruce Jackson



Wildflowers on Steens Mountain

While this won't be a banner year for wilderness in Oregon, Senator Wyden had already said he wants to have a discussion on 160,000 acres of new wilderness around Mt. Hood. Added to that, of course, are the two areas ONDA has been diligently building grassroots support for: Spring Basin and Badlands. We are optimistic that Representative Walden and Senator Wyden and Smith will add their support to Spring Basin and Badlands this year.

The Badlands proposal recently picked up the endorsement of the local mountain biking group. With over one hundred business supporters and unanimous approval from Bend's City Council, Badlands is easy to support—despite the efforts of a few ORV enthusiasts, who refuse to give up one acre of ground. Unfortunately, a recent incident of theft of some old-growth juniper trees has only underscored the need to give the Badlands additional protection. And while designated wilderness per se won't stop theft and abuse of wilderness values, it can certainly help elevate public awareness of the fact that people care about this place and will hopefully be more diligent about its protection in the future.

The conservation beacon that protected the nation's first nine million acres of wilderness, and established the National Wilderness Preservation System, remains a cornerstone of preservation in America. Spectacular places like Oregon's Eagle Cap, John Muir Wilderness, New Mexico's Gila Wilderness, Glacier Peak in Washington, and Idaho's Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness

were among the first pristine, natural treasures given protection under the Wilderness Act.

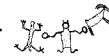
Over the last four decades, concerned citizens have worked to protect special wild places in their own states, building the Wilderness System to its current 106 million acres (still less than 5 percent of the nation's land). President Reagan signed the most laws designating wilderness—forty-three—although the largest amount of land was added under President Carter (more than 66 million acres, most of it in Alaska).

Yet, in spite of a tradition of consistent bipartisan support for wilderness protection, the Bush administration has mysteriously cast itself outside conventional political thinking. Today, tens of millions of acres of our unprotected wildlands are at risk of losing their wilderness quality, a direct result of this administration's anti-wilderness stance.

Regardless, Americans are continuing to push for what many believe is our birthright, and wilderness bills are currently pending in Washington, New Mexico, California, Idaho, and Nevada.

I believe that President Bush's anti-wilderness crusade is a blip on the screen and is inconsistent with cherished values that both Republicans and Democrats hold dear.

This 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act speaks of hope for an enduring American ideal and for one of the unique institutions that defines our character. It's time to raise awareness about the nation's wild lands—public lands that belong to all of us, whether we live in Oregon or Washington, D.C—and what is at stake for future generations.



What did the Wilderness Act do?

- ❁ Established the National Wilderness Preservation System, and designated the first 9,140,000 acres in statutorily protected wilderness areas.
- ❁ Established a clear, unambiguous national policy to preserve wilderness, recognizing wilderness itself as a resource of value.
- ❁ Established a specific definition of wilderness.
- ❁ Set out a single, consistent wilderness management directive to apply to wilderness areas in the jurisdiction of all federal land management agencies.
- ❁ Mandated a wilderness review process by federal agencies.
- ❁ Asserted the exclusive power of the Congress to designate wilderness areas.

In short, the Wilderness Act created by law a process to preserve wilderness in perpetuity.

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WILDERNESS... by the numbers

- 9,078,675 = Number of acres of the largest U.S. wilderness—Wrangell-St. Elias, AK
- 5 = Acres of the nation's smallest wilderness—Pelican Island, FL
- 8 = Years it took to pass the Wilderness Act
- 662 = Current number of wilderness areas in the USA
- 44 = Number of states with wilderness areas
- 20 = States with current wilderness bills or proposals
- 43 = Number of laws signed by President Reagan to protect wilderness
- 14 = Laws signed by President Carter to protect wilderness
- 4 = Laws signed by President George W. Bush to protect wilderness
- 66,300,000 = Acres of wilderness protected by laws signed by President Carter
- 500,000 = Acres of wilderness protected by laws signed by George W. Bush
- 106,000,000 = Acres of protected wilderness in America
- 4.7 = Percentage of America's landmass permanently protected as wilderness
- 85,700,000 = Acres of wilderness protected by Democratic presidents
- 19,800,000 = Acres of wilderness protected by Republican presidents



Owyhee continued from page 1

Sound like a great place to hang out? Dozens of volunteers agreed, as they participated in ONDA's 2003 Wilderness Research and Rescue Project and helped protect these fragile lands through an extensive wilderness inventory. Collectively, ONDA's stalwart volunteers and staff logged thousands of hours on this project.

While doing so, volunteers explored remote and scenic areas like Three Fingers Rock, Honeycombs, Leslie Gulch, and Owyhee River Canyon, and felt the solitude offered by wading through a sea of sagebrush or witnessing pastel, desert skies as the sun fell from the horizon. These days were also filled with rougher moments, as volunteers drove and documented the quality of many of the mind-boggling "ways" (some of

documents, and completed photo logs, road logs, and lengthy reports.

Although there were plenty of challenging days, especially when the temperature reached over 100 degrees, volunteers were able to find refreshment and satisfaction in their efforts. Volunteer Helen Harbin was thrilled to have witnessed great horned owls

"Working on the inventory shifts me from 'something should be done' to 'I am doing something'—it moves the issues of Oregon wilderness from abstract to real."

– Volunteer Helen Harbin

swooping over the campsite and a coyote yap like a watchdog because she startled it during her morning walk. Helen commented, "Working on the inventory shifts me from 'something should be done' to 'I am doing something'—it moves the issues of Oregon wilderness from abstract to real. When a map of the 2003 wilderness recommendation was published in the paper, it felt really good to point and say, I documented that area there."

All in all, the efforts of ONDA's volunteers resulted in inventorying over 2.2 million

which led nowhere), sorted through pages of maps, snapped thousands of photos, shuffled though hundreds of pages of BLM wilderness

continued next page



Jim Livermore

Wilderness inventory volunteers in the Buck Gulch proposed WSA

acres along the Owyhee Canyonlands, and culminated in a 400-page report, which recommended that the BLM designate 1.3 million acres as forty-two separate wilderness study areas (see map).

This is an enormous achievement and all involved should be extremely proud of their efforts in helping to protect such an ecologically vital and fragile area. To view the complete report, visit ONDA's website at www.onda.org.

How can we protect wilderness for generations to come?

In 1976, the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) directed the BLM to inventory federal lands for potential wilderness protection.

Since the BLM's original inventory in the 1980's, only 2.6 of Oregon's 13.4 million acres managed by BLM have been given interim protection as wilderness study areas (WSAs), a scant 4.2 percent

of the state of Oregon. Countless roadless areas of outstanding quality were eliminated from wilderness consideration for subjective reasons, and some areas have never been inventoried at all.


Because FLPMA requires the BLM to maintain a regular and on-going inventory of its public lands, ONDA spearheaded the Wilderness Research and Rescue Project. With the help of volunteers, this project will ultimately inventory over 6 million acres of public lands in Oregon's High Desert that we believe merit wilderness consideration but currently have no interim protection of these wilderness values.

The Wilderness Research and Rescue Project organizes and coordinates citizen inventories of publicly owned lands throughout Oregon's High Desert. These inventories document wilderness qualities (outstanding geologic features, cultural values, rare plants and animals, road conditions, man-made obtrusions, and opportunities for recreation and solitude)

on lands throughout central and eastern Oregon.

The project provides the organizational framework, training, and equipment (computers, cameras, maps, and GPS units) to enable volunteers to collect substantive, standardized information that meets the BLM's wilderness inventory criteria. This information is then compiled by ONDA and submitted to the BLM in the form of recommendations for designation of new WSAs, the first step on the way to congressional designation as wilderness.

ONDA's volunteers are making a difference!

Over the past two years, ONDA's volunteers have inventoried over 3.3 million acres of Oregon's High Desert. Of these 3.3 million acres, more than 1.8 million acres were found to have wilderness characteristics and values and recommended to the BLM as proposed WSAs. This coming year we are planning to inventory more than 1 million acres along the rugged John Day River Basin and the scenic lakes and vistas found in the BLM's Lakeview District. These areas are home to rare fish, plants, wildlife, unique geologic formations, and innumerable archeological and historical sites. We hope you will join us! 

Craig Miller



Three Fingers Rock



Legal Docket

by Mac Lacy

LOUSE CANYON LAWSUIT FILED


On March 8, 2004, ONDA and the Western Watersheds Project filed suit against the BLM, alleging the agency's Vale District Jordan Resource Area has "unreasonably delayed" implementation of its Federal Rangeland Health (FRH) regulations grazing assessments. Adopted by the BLM in 1995, the FRH regulations require the agency to assess ecological conditions on the public lands, and then make an evaluation whether rangeland health standards are, or are not, being met in those areas. If standards are not being met, and the BLM determines that existing grazing management is a significant factor for the failure, the regulations expressly require the BLM to implement grazing management changes on those lands no later than the start of the next grazing season.

The Jordan Resource Area (JRA) manages about 2.5 million acres of public land in the southeast corner of Oregon. The Louse Canyon Geographic Management Area includes the Owyhee Wild Rivers, three wilderness study areas comprising over 225,000 acres of public lands, the Toppin Butte Area of Critical Environmental Concern/Research Natural Area, and significant archaeological resources. The area is also home to native redband trout (a BLM special status fish species), one of the highest concentrations of sage grouse leks in the Vale District, and a number of significant plant and animal species.

To comply with the FRH regulations, the JRA in 1998 divided the lands under its jurisdiction into eight "Geographic Management Areas" for FRH assessment, evaluation, and determination purposes. The BLM identified the Louse Canyon GMA as the highest priority of these eight GMAs and therefore the first of these eight areas to undergo FRH regulation assessment and evaluation. Despite the fact that the FRH regulations were adopted nearly a decade ago, and the fact that the BLM is to have all FRH assessments, evaluations, and

determinations complete at least by the year 2008, the JRA has yet to finalize a single GMA process.

In a November 2003 LCGMA evaluation, the BLM documented numerous violations of FRH standards and guidelines in the LCGMA. In the document, the BLM admits that it made final determinations in December 2001 that various standards and guidelines were not being met in a number of pastures throughout the LCGMA, and that current grazing management practices are the cause of those failures. However, the BLM has yet to issue a final decision with regard to changed grazing management that will cure those failures to meet standards, as is required by the FRH regulations. The agency instead has relied upon an interim strategy, changing only season of use, which is not enough to insure achievement of the standards and guidelines. Finally, the BLM has not issued any other FRH assessments for the other seven GMAs in the JRA.

ONDA has asked the court to order the BLM to set and adhere to a schedule for the timely completion of its GMA assessments and determinations, as well as to order the agency to implement a final revised grazing management strategy to address the issues of concern throughout the LCGMA. See the Complaint at www.onda.org. 

MALHEUR NATIONAL FOREST LITIGATION

On February 11, 2004, ONDA received a favorable decision from the federal district court, denying the Forest Service's and Intervenors' motions to dismiss ONDA's Malheur Wild and Scenic Rivers lawsuit. The Forest Service had argued that the case should be dismissed because the agency's actions were not reviewable under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) as either "failures to act" or "final agency actions." (See "Legal Docket" in Winter 2003 issue of Desert Ramblings.) The court rejected the government's arguments, instead determining that ONDA is correct in its assertions that: (1) the Forest Service's issuance prior to each grazing season of "annual operating plans" (AOPs) is a final agency action and thus reviewable by the court, and (2) the Forest Service is indeed subject to several mandatory, non-discretionary statutory duties under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the National Forest Management Act, in its management of grazing practices in these wild and scenic river corridors. The decision is significant because it is apparently the first to rule that AOPs are "final agency action." This decision provides valuable precedent for subsequent litigation

Legal Docket

Chris Christie (both)




Summit Creek Exclosure. This exclosure near the Malheur Wild and Scenic River shows the potential of these streams without the pressure of overgrazing. The banks are fully vegetated and stable, and the stream is narrow and shaded by healthy riparian vegetation.



Malheur Wild and Scenic River, Dollar Basin/Star Glade Allotment. This photo is representative of conditions along the two wild and scenic rivers, with extremely damaged banks, very little residual grassy vegetation, and little to no shade-providing vegetation by the stream banks.

against both the Forest Service and the BLM. See the Opinion at www.onda.org.

In ONDA's lawsuit against the Forest Service challenging the Malheur National Forest's management of grazing in steelhead habitat on the Murderer's Creek and Blue Mountain allotments, ONDA asked the court for preliminary injunctive relief on March 19, 2004. Because

one full grazing season already has passed since this lawsuit was filed, and because the Forest Service appears set to continue largely status quo grazing practices on these allotments in 2004, ONDA is left with no choice but to ask the court to halt or limit grazing until the court can reach a decision on the merits. See the briefing at www.onda.org. 

A second chance for salmon

by Erin Barnes, Save Our Wild Salmon



On a notable October day in 1805, voyager William Clark wrote, "The waters of this river is clear, and a Salmon may be seen at the depth of 15 or 20 feet."

He describes the mass of salmon as "incredible." Biologists have estimated that 10-16 million salmon historically returned to Columbia and Snake River Basin each year, but merely two hundred years later, twelve stocks of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River Basin are threatened or endangered with extinction. Though they survived ice ages and volcanoes, the salmon have not been able to withstand the impact of their mismanaged rivers.

The "Federal Salmon Plan," the current plan of actions to recover the waning populations of Columbia and Snake River salmon, is little more than expensive and ineffectual. Accordingly, in May 2003, U.S. District court Judge James Redden ruled the plan illegal and ordered the Bush Administration to improve it by June 2004.

But the Administration seems intent on dismantling the plan's major pillars. This is best illustrated in Bonneville Power Administration's recent proposal to eliminate what is known as "summer spill," an action

widely regarded as the safest means of helping young salmon travel past dams and avoid deadly turbines.

In the last several years, numerous studies have concluded that removing the four dams on lower Snake River must be included in any effective salmon recovery plan. Removing those dams, coupled with smart investments in our regional energy and transportation infrastructures, offers a win-win solution to recover our salmon, strengthen our economy and communities, honor treaties with regional tribes and Canada, and uphold our Nation's laws.

YOU CAN HELP! Send a message during the comment period for the revision of the Federal Salmon Plan. Ask President Bush to restore wild salmon to self-sustaining, harvestable populations by including the removal of the four lower Snake River dams as a mandatory recovery action. Please send your letter to: President Bush, c/o Save Our Wild Salmon, 2031 SE Belmont Street, Portland, OR 97214. Visit www.wildsalmon.org to submit your comments via email. For more information or to get involved, please contact: Joseph Bogaard at SOS at 206-286-4455, ext. 13, joseph@wildsalmon.org.

Pine Creek Conservation Area from cattle ranch to wildlife habitat

by Mark Berry
Pine Creek Conservation Area Manager



Mark Berry

Arch Butte at Pine Creek

Pine Creek flows into the John Day River near Clarno, Oregon, and provides spawning and rearing habitat for one of the few remaining native steelhead populations in the lower John Day River Basin. In 1999 and 2001, as partial mitigation for the impacts of hydropower dams on fish and wildlife, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs acquired the 35,000-acre Pine Creek Ranch through the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program.



Carl Cole

Pine Creek in 1990

The Tribes now manage this former ranch as the Pine Creek Conservation Area to allow recovery of wildlife habitat and watersheds. The Conservation Area is primarily

bunchgrass and sagebrush steppe, with large areas currently dominated by western juniper. It provides important wintering habitat for mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk, as well as habitats for over 250 other species of amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and birds.

The Pine Creek Conservation Area includes about 10 miles of steelhead



Mark Berry

The same location on Pine Creek in 2003 after vegetation recovery

spawning and resident trout habitat on Pine Creek. These habitats were impacted in the past by removing beavers, channelizing the creek, and grazing cattle year-round along the

Conservation Area:

Mark Berry (both)



A Pine Creek culvert that was a barrier to fish, before its removal in 2002



The same area in May 2003 after removing the culvert

stream banks. These impacts, combined with flash floods from summer thunderstorms, caused deep incision of the stream channel into the historic floodplain. The Tribes have removed livestock from the riparian areas, and recovery of riparian vegetation has been rapid. Full recovery of the creek will take decades, but it already is providing better habitat for wildlife and fish, as shown in the photos on page 8, taken from the same location in 1990 and 2003.

The photo on the left was taken in 1990 by Oregon Trout and provided to OWEB to demonstrate that year-round cattle grazing was negating the benefits of an earlier habitat restoration project undertaken by the Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District. A subsequent management change led to better grazing practices and allowed riparian vegetation to recover.

The Tribes have also been working with the Conservation District to remove or replace culverts that were barriers to migrations of adult or juvenile steelhead. One culvert was completely removed in 2002, and a second culvert was replaced

in 2003 with a bottomless arch culvert. A third culvert replacement is planned for 2004. These cooperative projects received funding support from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Wheeler County, and the Bonneville Power Administration.

One of the largest management issues facing the ranch is encroachment of western juniper into grassland and shrub-steppe habitats. This increase in western juniper results in loss of habitat to grassland and shrub-steppe wildlife species, out-competition of understory species such as bitterbrush and bunchgrasses, and major impacts to the

watershed. Juniper woodlands consume more water than bunchgrasses and are active for a longer portion of the year. The resulting decrease in available water for springs and riparian areas is a problem for both wildlife and fish.

The Tribes are working with the Prineville District BLM to plan and conduct prescription fires to restore the bunchgrass steppe and watershed. The first project is

The Tribes have removed livestock from the riparian areas, and recovery of riparian vegetation has been rapid.

see Pine Creek next page

Pine Creek Conservation Area

Pine Creek continued from previous page

Mark Berry



Bunchgrass steppe with encroaching young, western junipers within a planned prescription fire area

planned for 2004 in the Rattlesnake Canyon area, near the John Day River. The photo above shows a portion of the fire area, with young junipers encroaching into bunchgrass steppe south of Amine Peak. The Tribes are currently seeking additional funding to conduct a second fire in 2005 that would benefit the Pine Creek watershed.

ONDA has also been working with the Tribes to help facilitate a land exchange between the Tribes and the BLM, in association with legislation that would designate the Spring Basin Wilderness. The Spring Basin Wilderness Study Area borders the northern portion of the Pine

Creek Conservation Area to the west. The Tribes are interested in the land exchange to consolidate their property and facilitate management. After the land exchange, tribal members and the public would have improved access to the Conservation Area, neighboring public lands, and the John Day River.

The Tribes have a successful public access program, including regulation of hunting on the Conservation Area. The Tribes provide a limited number of permits to hunt the Conservation Area, both for tribal members and the general public. Permit recipients have the opportunity for a solitary hunting experience in the backcountry. The Conservation Area is also open to hikers all year, though users are required to sign in and out when visiting the ranch.

Over the long term, the Pine Creek Conservation Area has the potential to serve as a model for watershed recovery and wildlife habitat management in the lower John Day Basin.

For more information, contact Mark Berry, Pine Creek Conservation Area Manager, by mail at 39067 Highway 218, email at pinecreek@bendnet.com; or phone at 541-489-3477.




Discover the National Landscape Conservation System

Ready for a trip to some wild and beautiful public lands? Check out www.discoverNLCS.org!

Steens Mountain is part of the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS)—26 million acres of spectacular western lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Created in 2000, the NLCS is comprised of national monuments, national conservation areas, wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, wild and scenic rivers, and national historic and scenic trails.

ONDA is part of a coalition of more than fifty groups that came together in 2001 to support, protect, and build a stronger NLCS. The coalition has created a new web site, www.discoverNLCS.org, dedicated to this

goal. The site contains a wealth of information about the system and each of its units. Steens Mountain is featured on the site, along with other Oregon BLM lands. Whether you're interested in helping to protect BLM lands, thinking about planning a hike, or looking for facts and figures, this new site has something to offer. 



Steens Mountain

Al St. John

Steens Mountain aspen assessment and monitoring

by Danna Lytjen and Nick Otting,
Duckfoot Survey Company

Steens Mountain supports the most extensive aspen forests in Oregon. Many aspen stands on the mountain have two distinct layers, a mature overstory and a cohort of younger understory stems. Are the aspens in the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA) healthy? Is livestock grazing associated with current-day aspen stand structure? To address these questions, the Steens-Alvord Coalition, Burns District BLM, and Duckfoot Survey company entered into a cooperative partnership to quantitatively assess aspen stands in the CMPA. The full project report can be viewed at ONDA's web site: www.onda.org.

In October 2002, we surveyed 129 aspen stands in the CMPA, assessing cover and level of senescence (decline in health) of the overstory, and cover and age of the recruitment layer (trees greater than 6 feet tall but not yet fully grown). The available historical information on grazing levels, big game populations, yearly precipitation, and fire history on the mountain was gathered. We found that in over a third of the stands, the overstory is entering senescence, and that in two thirds of the stands the recruitment layer covers more than 25 percent of the stand. Thus, over much of

Steens Mountain, a new cohort of trees has sprouted from the roots of the overstory and will eventually replace the overstory.

The key to successful recruitment of sprouts into the overstory is the level of browsing they endure before they reach 6 feet in height. The recruitment tree layer on Steens Mountain originated mostly between 1984 and 1993, a period when livestock



Aspen stand with understory regeneration

Nick Otting

grazing levels were declining. Deer populations have dropped to one third of peaks in the 1950's and early 1960's. Historical grazing patterns may also influence current-day stand structure. After the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, a sharp decline in sheep grazing likely caused a huge pulse of aspen regeneration on Steens Mountain.

Now, as the overstory trees of that generation reach maturity, the next pulse of sprouting is occurring. Lastly, the extraordinarily wet years in the mid-1980's probably enhanced sprout growth and relieved browse pressure because other forage was plentiful.

Based on the findings of this study, we believe that reduced herbivory by livestock and deer has resulted in the release of a

crop of root sprouts into the recruitment layer, and that this release was probably aided by the wet years of the 1980's. This regeneration is a hopeful sign, as many aspen forests in the western United States are in poor health. Some stands on the mountain are not yet regenerating and may need active management to protect them. Continued monitoring will be needed to track the health and vigor of aspen stands on Steens Mountain.



Aspen stand with sparse, declining overstory and dense understory

Nick Otting

ONDA desert field trips are good and plenty!

by Heather Sterling

Spring has finally arrived here in eastern Oregon, and along with it, plenty of opportunities to get out in the field and help protect desert wildlands! ONDA has a full schedule of trips this spring and summer, and there's surely something for everyone. Volunteering for work trips is an excellent way to get to know some of Oregon's off-the-beaten-path wild places, work to secure protection of these places or improve the quality of wildlife habitat that they offer, and spend time with fellow desert rats. This year, ONDA is offering two types of work trips.

Wilderness Inventory trips:

The goal of our inventory trips is to determine which desert public lands in the state qualify for federal designation as wilderness. ONDA is in the process of creating a comprehensive report that includes thorough, well-documented data that covers all of the qualifying desert lands in the state. This report is the backbone of our efforts to secure wilderness protection for these areas through congressional designation. Inventory trips are the source of the crucial report data, and the work includes hiking, driving, photographing, mapping, and writing. This year, our inventory work will take place mainly in the Lakeview District, which includes areas such as Hart Mountain, Summer Lake, Lost Forest, Abert Rim, and Lake Abert.



Volunteers break for lunch at Steens Mountain fence pull

Fence-pull trips:

The definition of instant gratification, fence-pulls offer a tangible way to help improve wildlife habitat by removing

obsolete and dangerous barbed-wire fencing from areas no longer grazed by livestock. The work itself is fairly easy (although the amount and level of hiking required varies—for full details about individual trips, please see contact information below), and it's a great feeling to watch miles of fence disappear over the days of work. These trips are also a fantastic way to get out into some of the few cow-free desert wildlands in the state. This year they take place in the spectacular Steens and Hart Mountain areas.



Tara Rae Gunter

ONDA board member Greg Holmes demonstrates excellent barbed-wire rolling technique

Trip Schedule

Wilderness inventory trips:

June 25-28, August 1-3, September 29-October 5

Steens Mountain fence-pull trips:

June 28-30, July 7-9, July 12-14, July 17-19, July 24-28, August 8-12, August 16-20, August 28-30, September 5-9

Hart Mountain annual barbed-wire round-up:

August 4-7

For more information visit www.onda.org

Now, just in case you're worried that these trips sound like all work and no play, rest assured that although you're going to earn a good night's sleep, there is never a shortage of fun on ONDA trips! Just ask anyone who has ever attended these trips in the past ...

For full details about individual trips, please visit our website at www.onda.org/events, check the yellow events flyer we sent out in the mail last month, or contact us directly: Chris, 541-330-2638 or cegertson@onda.org

trgunter@onda.org for fence-pulls.





Wild Goose Chase

by John Sterling

Richard Wilhelm

*I*m not a great birder. I have trouble identifying anything smaller than a Cooper's hawk and tend to classify all diminutive avians as "tweeter birds." And I don't keep track of the birds I've seen. For me, birding is about the miracle of migration, the wonder of flight, the dazzling color and plush of feathers.

As winter gave way to spring, I ventured out to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Without a calendar, you would know spring was near. Flocks of snow, Canada, and white-fronted geese gathered in wetlands and agricultural fields, their masses creating a cacophony of what Sibley calls whouks, heenks, ho-leeleeks, and hronks.

Parked on the side of a road next to a dilapidated lumber mill, I marveled at the congregation of ducks, geese, and swans that dominated the marsh before me. Through binoculars, I took in the elegance of trumpeter swans, the oversize bill of a shoveler, the burning iris of a goldeneye. A bald eagle passed over the gathering, surveying prey before settling onto a fencepost perch.

In the distance, an enormous flock of snow geese grazed, each bird honking calmly to the others. The resulting chorus was a steady burble of nasal barks, almost soothing in its constancy. Then—and I still wonder what triggered it—one of the geese bolted from the group, honking loudly. That's all it took for the entire flock—2000 birds, 4000 wings—to erupt from the marsh. With the flash of a wingbeat, the satisfied chorus became a panicked squall. The flock took to the air, white wings, catching sunlight, dazzling against blue sky. The cluster circled counter-clockwise above the marsh, honking wildly for a minute before eventually alighting back to the exact same spot from which it fled moments before. The crescendo of alarmed honking gradually eased back to a soothing murmur.

Soon, the same flock of geese will erupt again, but just keep flying north, making room in the Malheur for late-spring birds. Year after year, this ritual repeats itself. These transients pass through Oregon's High Desert, staying only a short while, but lingering in our thoughts.

ONDA welcomes two new board members

John Sterling joined ONDA's board of directors this spring. He is a Bend-based consultant working to help businesses and environmental organizations work together more effectively. Before moving to Bend, John was Director of Environmental Programs at Patagonia, Inc., an outdoor clothing company that supports many grassroots environmental initiatives. John returned to his native Oregon, with his wife Heather, after an eighteen-year exile in California that took him from college at UC Berkeley, to a stint on the staff of Earth Island Institute in San Francisco, then seven years at Patagonia—where, in his free time, he put too many miles on his car driving to climbing and skiing destinations in the Sierra Nevada and the California desert.



New ONDA board member John Sterling

Durlin Hickok first became involved with ONDA through his daughter, Laurel, who worked with ONDA as an Assistant Wildlands Coordinator. A physician by training, he practiced for eighteen years before joining Adeza Biomedical Corporation as vice president of clinical and regulatory. He retains a position at the University of Washington as clinical professor of epidemiology, obstetrics, and gynecology. Durlin and his family spend extensive time in central Oregon and have had a second home in Bend for over fifteen years. He has previously served in leadership roles for a number of medical organizations, and, currently, is a trustee of Outward Bound West.



New ONDA board member Durlin Hickok

Welcome Durlin and John!

Welcome Chris Egertson, ONDA's new Wildlands Coordinator!

Chris joined ONDA as Wildlands Coordinator in December 2003. He now heads the Wilderness Research and Rescue Project and is allowed to spend his summers working with many great volunteers inventorying the deserts of eastern Oregon.

Originally from Minnesota, Chris spent his days playing in the lakes, camping in the forests, and skiing the river valleys. After graduating with a B.S. degree from Minnesota State University, where he majored in Biology and Environmental Science, he ventured off to Boulder, Colorado. In Boulder, Chris managed the field and lab operations for the Center for Limnology at the University of Colorado. He was in charge of sampling and analyzing water from over forty reservoirs and streams in the Rocky Mountains. Chris then went to Iowa State University to get his Master's Degree in Animal Ecology. While there, he wrote his thesis on the "Impacts of Eutrophication on

the Flora and Fauna in Agriculturally Enriched Lakes" and published two papers in scientific journals. After finishing his degree he promptly moved to Bend in order to get back to the wide open spaces he loves.



Chris Egertson

Chris enjoys hiking, bicycling, camping, fishing, canoeing, skiing, and playing guitar. He especially loves exploring the many different ecosystems found throughout Oregon and working to protect these ecosystems so future generations can enjoy them as much as he does. Welcome Chris!

Full sails ahead for Lee Christie

By the time you receive this newsletter, our stalwart board president, Lee Christie, will be second mate sailing through the wild waters of Tahiti on an extended "vacation." It is hard to list the contributions Lee has made to ONDA. Most recently, helping chart ONDA's course through the difficult seas non-profit groups have been sailing through over the past few years. Her unending passion for saving Oregon's high desert lands

is part of an on-going tradition on our board. Lee's helmsmanship will be sorely missed, but we understand this is only a temporary respite from her, and her spouse Tom Keffer's, on-going desire to protect as much of Oregon's wild as possible for future generations. We expect that Lee will be truly refreshed and ready to hop back on board upon her safe return. Until then, we wish both Tom and Lee full sails!

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		=
		X		=
		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: \$ _____

Charge my Credit Card: Visa MC Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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

OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION
 Desert Ramblings
 16 NW Kansas Street
 Bend, Oregon 97701
 Address Service Requested

Nonprofit Org
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Permit # 2358
 Portland, OR



Greg Burke

Inflated lava and wildflowers in the proposed Badlands Wilderness

Action Alert ➤ The Badlands Needs Your Help!

Located just 20 miles east of Bend are the Badlands—a 37,000-acre high desert gem where one can find prolific desert wildflowers, dry river canyons, castle-like lava formations, ancient juniper trees, and pictographs that speak to us of another time and culture.

With Bend's booming population and encroaching development, this wondrous place has become prone to illegal garbage dumping, pictograph defacement, and old-growth juniper theft. The Badlands needs wilderness designation to help thwart these illegal activities and ensure protection of its valuable resources for future generations.

Now is the time to call or write your Representative or Senator and urge them to protect the Badlands as wilderness. You can use the contact information provided here, or visit our website at www.onda.org where we have a sample letter that you can personalize and send directly to our delegation. Your phone call or letter does make a difference!

Mailing Addresses

For all Senators
 The Honorable _____
 US Senate
 Washinton DC, 20510

For all Representatives
 The Honorable _____
 US House of Representatives
 Washington DC, 20515

Phone, Fax, & Email Addresses

Senator Ron Wyden
 Phone: (202) 224-5244
 Fax: (202) 228-2717
 Email: www.wyden.senate.gov/contact/

Senator Gordon Smith
 Phone: (202) 224-3753
 Fax (202) 228-3997
 Email: www.gsmith.senate.gov/webform/htm

Rep. David Wu (1st District)
 Phone: (202) 225-0855
 Fax: (202) 225-9497
 Email: www.house.gov/wu/issueform.htm

Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District)
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 Email: www.walden.house.gov/contactgreg

Rep. Earl Blumenauer (3rd District)
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 Email: www.house.gov/blumenauer/contact.html

Rep. Peter DeFazio (4th District)
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