

Ramblings

DESERT RAMBLINGS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

WINTER 2005 EDITION VOLUME 18, NO. 3

MALHEUR NATIONAL FOREST
HEALTHY STREAMS

FROM THE
OUTBACK

With rest, streams can recover from grazing damage

By Jonathan J. Rhodes
and Robert L. Beschta

Fish need streams with clear, cold water; stable, well-vegetated banks; abundant cover; frequent pools, and natural sediment levels. Throughout the West, however, native fish haven't had these needs met because more than a century of livestock grazing has left streamside areas bereft of the vegetation that shades streams, provides cover, and stabilizes banks. This has warmed streams, de-stabilized streambanks, and increased sediment levels. Furthermore, cattle also crush overhanging banks that supply the cover needed by fish because cattle exert more than five times of force per square inch than a bulldozer.

Grazing impacts have vastly reduced the geographic range and numbers of native trout across the West. As one trout expert noted over 30 years ago, watershed damage from cattle grazing is likely the greatest contributor to the loss of western native trout.

Unfortunately, streamside conditions on the Malheur National Forest in eastern Oregon

see **STREAMS** page 8



PHOTO: GREG BURKE

Rancher Ray Clarno, left, retired his grazing permit for the Badlands. At a ceremony to mark the occasion, ONDA presented Clarno with a framed photo of the Badlands by Greg Burke. Also participating in the ceremony were, Teal Purrington of the Prineville BLM office, middle, and ONDA Executive Director Bill Marlett.

Retirement of grazing permit becomes reality

By Bill Marlett

It's a rare opportunity to talk about conservation success in the current political climate. With Rep. Pombo at the helm of the Resources Committee in Congress, and Secretary Norton steering the Interior Department, proactive public lands conservation legislation and policy are at a standstill.

So it is on a positive note that I can tell you ONDA and the BLM made history recently with the final adoption of the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan. Admittedly, wading through such planning efforts tests one's ability to remain focused. But with this recent plan, for the first time in history, BLM set out a formal process that gives ranchers the ability to voluntarily relinquish their grazing permits on public lands.

Historically, federal law prohibited the BLM from letting ranchers relinquish their federal grazing permits. If a rancher gave up (or simply did not use) his or her permit, BLM would turn around and give it to someone else. BLM's doctrine: use it or lose it.

see **GRAZING** page 10

IN THIS ISSUE

- ONDA volunteers take inventory of 1.5 million acres of land to determine if its eligible for wilderness protection. Page 3.
- Thank you ONDA volunteers! In 2005, nearly 200 people generously donated their time to ONDA. For a list of their names, see Page 6.





By Craig Miller, President

How does ONDA accomplish so much with so little? Among the important factors are: a dedicated and extraordinarily able staff, a creative and flexible approach to solving problems, an enthusiastic volunteer base, and a highly functional and supportive board.

Several articles in this newsletter issue provide an example of ONDA's resourceful and multi-faceted approach to a difficult problem, that of the ongoing government tolerance for bad grazing practices on Oregon's arid public lands.

On a more sober note, we bid adieu to one of our key staff, Chris Egertson, who helped accomplish one of ONDA's most ambitious programs to date, our photo-documented inventory of more than 7 million acres of unprotected wilderness in Oregon. We also say goodbye to long-time board member Stu Sugarman, and welcome a new board member, Lisa Brown (see articles on page 14).



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

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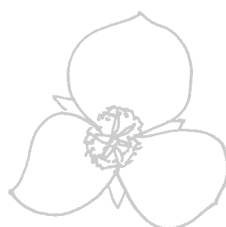
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Paper used to print this edition of Desert Ramblings is 100 percent recycled and 30 percent post-consumer waste. The paper was produced in a process meeting the PCF (process chlorine free) standard as described by the organization Environmental Defense.



The crew on an ONDA wilderness inventory trip: from left, Judd Beck, Carey Miller, Catherine Dickson, Alex Hickok, Francisco Javier Mejia, Tom Sedgwick, Ken Serkownek, Shawn Steinmetz, Chris Egertson and Craig Miller.

Volunteers take inventory of 1.5 million acres

By Chris Egertson

It was a clear, hot day in eastern Oregon, typical for this time of year, as our group came across the deep, rugged canyon. We stopped the vehicle and gazed out on the scene, soaking it up with our eyes, and questioning: Is this thing for real? After coming to the conclusion that this seemingly out of place feature – found surrounded by subtle, rolling hills covered in native bunchgrasses and sagebrush – was indeed existent, we excitedly got out to inventory its inner depths all the while thinking: Ahhh ... isn't it great to be on a wilderness inventory trip!

This past year, ONDA's Wilderness Research and Rescue Project again ventured into eastern Oregon's wild landscape to inventory unprotected lands for wilderness values and characteristics. Over 40 volunteers joined us as we explored areas such as Dry Creek Canyon, Merlie Table, Iron Mountain, Rim-rock Lake, South Fork Crooked River, Buzzard Canyon, Cottonwood Creek, and Silvies River. Each place brought about new discoveries for everyone and gave each of us a deeper appreciation for the beauty found in unexpected areas. Volunteer Ken Serkownek agrees: "My favorite part of the inventory trip was getting off the beaten path and seeing some remote, beautiful, raw country. I also really enjoyed meeting a variety of different people dedicated to the same cause."

When all was said and done, these hardy volunteers inventoried nearly 1.5 million acres of unprotected public lands to see if they meet BLM wilderness criteria. These criteria are: 1) the area needs to be a roadless area of 5,000 acres or greater; 2) the area needs to appear primarily affected by the forces of nature, and 3) the area must offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. Of the 1.5 million acres, 1.1 million met the criteria, and are being recommended to the BLM to be protected as Wilderness Study Areas. This is quite a feat and I congratulate all those involved ... we couldn't have done it without you!

If you would like to learn more about ONDA's wilderness inventory trips, please visit www.onda.org or call us at 541.330.2638.

"My favorite part of the inventory trip was getting off the beaten path and seeing some remote, beautiful, raw country. I also really enjoyed meeting a variety of different people dedicated to the same cause."

KEN SERKOWNEK

WILDERNESS

INVENTORY VOLUNTEER

Calendar debuts at Mirror Pond Gallery event

ONDA would like to thank everyone who came to the opening party for the 2006 Oregon Wild Desert Calendar at Mirror Pond Gallery in Bend this October. It was wonderful to connect with everyone who made the calendar possible as well as new folks who had never heard of ONDA. The framed, original photographs looked spectacular hung side by side in the gallery. The calendar has been one of our greatest outreach tools for informing the public about ONDA's mission and the places ONDA works to protect.

Calendars make great gifts! What better way to mark the passing of time than with a calendar of all of your beloved high desert landscapes? Oregon Wild

Desert calendars are currently on sale at more than 20 Bend locations, as well as several in Portland. We are always looking for new locations to sell our calendars so if you know of a business in or outside Bend that supports ONDA and would like to sell our calendars, please let us know. For a complete list, please see our website.

If you can't make it to the store you can always buy the calendar on our website (it's convenient and secure) – www.onda.org – or see the Market Place section of this newsletter. The framed, original photographs are for sale as well. Please call the ONDA office 541.330.2638 for prices and availability.

Thanks again to all who made the calendar possible and supported ONDA by purchasing a calendar.



DESERT RAMBLINGS / LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Desert Ramblings now welcomes letters on all desert and wilderness topics but gives preference to those commenting on issues raised in previous newsletters. Please limit letters to 150 words. Our readers' opinions and comments are important to us. Send letters via mail, or email them to ebarnholdt@onda.org.

Not completely to our surprise, we received a few comments about the article "The Environmental Road Less Traveled" in our summer issue. The comments ranged from, "This looks like an ORV newsletter," to "How is this helping to protect the desert" – both making reference to photos of some ghastly tire ruts made in the desert floor during a wilderness inventory trip.

It's true that the photos don't reflect ONDA's sensitive approach to treasured desert habitat. However, in an effort to bring a little levity to the newsletter, the article tells the adventures and lessons of three college interns who came to ONDA for a summer of

Thank you ONDA business members!

This year ONDA created a new category of giving specifically for businesses. We would like to thank the following businesses for their support.

- **Grove Insight Ltd.**, Portland. Employees: Lisa Grove, Ben Pat inkin, Stephanie Schwenger.
- **J.B. Davis Construction**, Bend. www.jbdavisconstruction.com
- **McLaughlin Upholstery**, 23549 Rickard Road, Bend. 541.388-3262
- **Mockingbird Gallery, Inc.**, Bend.
- **Neo Software Inc.**, Bend.
- **Pine Mountain Sports**, 255 sw Century Drive, Bend. www.pinemountainsports.com
- **Shevlin Commons LLC**, Bend. www.shevlincommons.com
- **Wheeler Jewelry**, 139 Main St., Kalispell, MT 59901; 406.752.6809; wheelerjewelrymt.com
- **Wild Birds Unlimited**, Forum Center, 2680 NE Hwy 20, Suite 310 Bend; 541.617.8840; www.wbu.com/bend

If you have questions or are interested in becoming an ONDA business member, please contact Kelly O'Brien or Pete Hickok at 541.330.2638 or visit us on the web at www.onda.org.

Pine Mountain Sports supports community



ONDA would like to say a special thanks to Pine Mountain Sports for including ONDA in its Pine Mountain Sports Club Card program. Thanks to Pine Mountain's commitment, 1 percent of all club purchases will go to support nonprofit organizations in Bend, including ONDA. Plus, club members receive 5 percent off all purchases at Pine Mountain Sports for life. Now those of you who live in central Oregon can contribute to the community by keeping your dollars in central Oregon, while supporting local groups such as ONDA. For more information on the Pine Mountain Sports Club, visit Pine Mountain Sports, 255 sw Century Drive, Bend, or call 541.385.8080.

wilderness inventory work. Their internships cost us plenty in repairs to the Suburban, multiple trips to Burns to straighten out their court case (trespass charges stemming from when they approached a private landowner after getting a flat tire to ask if they could drive on his road), and more office time than they had expected. However as intern Tyler Archie writes in the article, "understanding the public land debate – how the land defines the people and their politics – requires firsthand experience with the land."

Many of us have had humbling experiences in the desert. It is those unexpected challenges that teach us the most about the environment and who we are. As Tyler pursues a journalism career in North Carolina, and fellow intern Francisco Javier Maejia returns to Ecuador, they carry with them a piece of eastern Oregon – a place wild and open, where we are forced to confront the vastness of ourselves.

"...what grows in the desert, grows strong in the desert."



PHOTOS: KELLY O'BRIEN

Blackstrap, Bend's very own bluegrass band, fills Aspen Hall with foot-stomping music.

The first annual Badlands Bluegrass Blowout

This October's Badlands Bluegrass Blowout was a huge success for ONDA and fun for everyone!

Bluegrass talents Jackstraw, Blackstrap, Back from the Dead, and Quincy Street joined ONDA for a day of celebrating Oregon's High Desert at Aspen Hall in Shevlin Park. The hoedown was a family event complete with beautiful artwork, pumpkin painting, hula-hoop making, cake walking, and, of course, dancing to Oregon's finest bluegrass music. One lucky winner even got to take home a new guitar, courtesy of Breedlove Guitars. Bend artists, Kay and Gordon Baker were also there to display their magnificent high desert artwork and Gordon was generous enough to donate an original painting as the door prize.

ONDA was also fortunate to have the help of several local businesses:

- The Source newspaper helped us get the word out;
- Silver Moon Brewing Company provided local brews;
- Wild Oats Market cooked up some delicious meals;
- Green Energy Transportation ensured that everyone had a safe, environmentally friendly ride home.

ONDA would like to thank these businesses and ONDA volunteers for helping us make this event happen and thank all of you who helped us celebrate!

Families made the most of the sunny day by painting pumpkins and twirling hula hoops while listening to the music from outside of Aspen Hall.



Father and son duo Pete and Durlin Hickok help table the event.



Thank you, volunteers: the friends who helped with ONDA projects in 2005

Thank you ONDA volunteers!

In 2005, nearly 200 people generously donated their time to ONDA. It is through your dedication and passion for Oregon’s High Desert that ONDA was able to accomplish 16 work parties, the Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival, the Badlands Bluegrass Blowout, the 2006 Wild Desert Calendar, our calendar exhibit and

Cage Aaron	Diana Eddleston	Daniel Jones	Thomas Osborne
Elaine Austin	Kyle Egerston	John Katzenstein	Bob Petit
Jon Austin	Shelly Emerson	Karen Kellingsworth	Bruce Pokorny
Brad Bailey	Scott Erickson	Debbie Kennedy	Tony Pulokas
Gordon Baker	Paul Ferro	Barbara Koop	David Rein
Kay Baker	Brian Finn	Walter Koop	Eugene Roberts
Michael Barnes	Latham Flanagan	Don Kunz	Kristen Ruether
Cindy Bartlett	Mary Jane Flanagan	John Lasseter	Eric Sawyer
Kate Beardsly	Jamie Flannigan	Bob Lockerby	Fred Sawyer
Gary Beaudoine	Susan Fowles	Amy Lundstrom	George Schink
Judd Beck	Jessica Fry	Tim Lunney	Tom Sedgwick
Gail Beeson	Steve Gibbs	Michael MacVeigh	Chris Seftick
Alex Berlin	Patty Giffin	Bob Manus	Tom Segal
Deborah Burke	Terry Gloeckler	John Manwaring	Joan Segal
Greg Burke	John Gnass	Ralph Mathis	Mike Sequeira
Mike Burri	Ian Golden	Brian McCall	Ken Serkownek
Mark Chidlaw	Sarah Graham	Heather McCloud	Laura Sherrill
Ryan Choate	Tim Greyhavens	Thurlow McCloud	David Sherrill
Evan Clark	Steven Gustafson	Lee McConnell	Taro Shido
Frank Cleland	Helen Harbin	Erin McCracken	Sara Shields
Molly Connors	Joe Hessler	Art McEldowney	Loretta Slepikas
Terri Cummings	Alan Hickenbottom	Kristi Mergenthaler	Kyle Smith
Jean Currie	Gavin Hoban	Tom Merrow	Mary Ann Smith
Jim Davis	Matt Holmes	Jane Merrow	Bob Speik
Tom Davis	Calvin Howell	John Michael	Tommie Speik
Michael Dean	John Howell	Craig Miller	Al St. John
Dale Deason	Roger Howell	Carey Miller	Shawn Steinmetz
Gale Deason	Sharon Hrdlicka	Marilynn Miller	Heather Sterling
Linda Delgado	Hal Hushbeck	Ben Moon	John Sterling
Catherine Dickson	Bruce Jackson	Jim Moos	Lily Sterling
David Eddeston	Melanie Jennings	Lon Nelson	Grace Swanson

“Never doubt that small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”
— MARGARET MEAD

There’s more to Oregon than Mt. Hood; add Spring Basin, Badlands to bill

On December 3, 2005, U.S. Representatives Greg Walden and Earl Blumenauer held Mt. Hood Summit III, two public meetings focused on sculpting a plan to protect undeveloped wilderness on Mt. Hood that would appeal to multiple users. Shortly after the second summit, Senator Ron Wyden unveiled his Lewis and Clark Mt. Hood Wilderness Act of 2004, which proposes to increase Mt. Hood Wilderness by 180,000 acres and to add 48 miles to the existing Wild and Scenic River system. In contrast, Blumenauer and Walden propose a mere 75,000 acres (out of 285,000 acres that qualify) of additional wilderness and only 15 miles (out of over 100 miles that qualify) of wild and scenic river designations.

There is still the opportunity for a Senate version of a Mt. Hood bill, co-sponsored by Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith, that could lead to greater wilderness protection than the Blumenauer and Walden proposal. In fact, ONDA and many other conservation organizations would like to see other wilderness proposals, such as Spring Basin and Badlands, added to the Mt. Hood proposal.

The proposed **Spring Basin** Wilderness Area encompasses nearly 9,000 acres along the spectacular Wild and Scenic John Day River. This special place is home to many candidate and endangered species, such as the northern bald eagle, yellow-hairy Indian paintbrush, and transparent milk vetch. Spring Basin also houses several archaeological sites, including a pithouse village and associated pictographs.

Stretching 31,000 acres, just 15 miles east of Bend, is the **Badlands WSA**. Within this wonderful landscape are desert blooms, dry river canyons, castle-like rock formations, pictographs and 1,000-year-old junipers. Bend’s booming population needs to protect these wild places for present and future generations.

Ask Senators Wyden and Smith, and Representatives Blumenauer and Walden to add Spring Basin and Badlands to the Mt. Hood Wilderness proposal.

Make a lasting commitment for the future

Make a lasting commitment for the future. Join the Oregon Natural Desert Association’s High Desert Legacy Society. Membership in the High Desert Legacy Society is open to ONDA supporters who wish to join us in leaving a long-term gift to ONDA. Society membership is a meaningful way to pass on your compassion for Oregon’s high desert and provides several tax benefits.

Until Dec. 31, special tax benefit available under Hurricane Katrina act

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the president enacted the Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act to help storms victims. Although many of the act’s benefits are only available to those affected by the storm, the act provides generous gift limits for donations to all charities. Until Dec. 31, 2005, you may donate funds to **any** charitable organization and use the resulting charitable tax deduction to offset up to 100 percent of your adjusted gross income (this is double the normal 50 percent limit). This tax benefit also applies to income

from appreciated stock or retirement plans, and could considerably reduce your tax liability on such income.

This legislation presents a short-term opportunity to significantly reduce your tax liability. If you would like to use this opportunity to contribute to ONDA, your contribution must be postmarked by Dec. 31, 2005. If you have any questions or would like to make a donation, please contact Kelly O’Brien at 541.330.2638 or kobrien@onda.org.

Congratulations, Craig!

We are proud to share the news that the East Cascades Bird Conservancy has named Craig Miller, ONDA board member and GIS specialist, Conservationist of the Year.

The East Cascades Bird Conservancy supports bird conservation by engaging the public in volunteer field studies and by supporting projects that advance the knowledge and appreciation of birds and their habitats. They are a new voice for bird conservation and birding education in Oregon. They train volunteers, conduct surveys, and publish data for everyone to use.

As many people know, Craig is an avid birder and dedicated conservationist. The award couldn’t be better suited. Craig, thank you for all that you do.



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STREAMS *from page 1*

exemplify these concerns: All native salmonid populations, including spring Chinook and redband trout, are severely depressed. Bull trout and steelhead are so imperiled that they have been listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Past grazing has created degraded streams and streamside areas and present grazing management on the Malheur National Forest is preventing recovery. This situation persists even though the ESA and Forest Plans require the Forest Service to ensure that grazing is managed to allow these habitats to recover.

The situation is not hopeless. Research has consistently documented that streams damaged by grazing can restore themselves naturally and fairly rapidly, if grazing is suspended for a few decades. This may seem like a long time, but it is well to remember the stream damage was caused by many decades of grazing.

In response to the above concerns, ONDA filed a lawsuit to prompt the Malheur National Forest to rectify habitat degradation in watersheds drained by the Malheur River, a designated Wild and Scenic River that provides habitat for imperiled bull and redband trout. ONDA filed another to prompt the Malheur National Forest to do the same for tributary watersheds of the John Day River, which are home to imperiled steelhead and chinook salmon. In the areas covered by both lawsuits, the Forest Service clearly failed to manage grazing consistent with requirements to allow stream recovery.

Data from small areas along streams where cattle had been excluded for a decade or more consistently demonstrate that those streams are in far better shape than where grazing has continued. Our extensive, multiple-year field evaluations documented that grazing was damaging streambanks and preventing the recovery of streamside vegetation necessary for improv-

ing stream habitats (see photos). Even the Forest Service's expert on streamside conditions stated in written testimony that cattle grazing should be suspended to allow recovery in tributaries of the John Day.

Our field evaluations also demonstrated that the Malheur National Forest allowed cattle to consume more vegetation than allowed under ESA agreements. The hard work of ONDA volunteer Chris Christie over several years documented that this situation was widespread. In short, there was abundant and unmistakable evidence that the Forest Service had not met its legal obligations to manage grazing consistent with stream recovery, including suspending it as necessary to meet this goal.



In contrast to nearby grazed reaches, streambanks inside this enclosure are highly stable, the channel is continuing to narrow, and deep-rooted, shade-providing, deciduous vegetation is well-distributed and vigorous. A beaver dam, extremely uncommon in grazed reaches and an important feature for productive fish habitat, is evident in the center of the photo. Vegetation covers more than 90% of the ground in the streamside area. Livestock grazing has been excluded for more than 20 years along this reach, a tributary to the Wild and Scenic portion of the Malheur River.

Through the diligence of ONDA's attorneys, the initial developments in the case were positive despite the legal fight from the Forest Service. Judges in both cases initially ruled that the conditions affected by grazing on the Malheur National Forest required management changes. In response to this litigation, the Forest Service provided rest from grazing and reduced use over extensive areas covered by the lawsuits.

The significance of this rest cannot be underestimated. It is probably more reprieve from grazing than many of these streams and their fish populations have had in more than a century. The response of vegetation was immediate and positive.

However, the importance of the brief respite from grazing should

not be overvalued. This limited rest is not nearly enough to allow damaged streams to recover significantly. Raw banks, over-widened channels, and deep-rooted streamside vegetation take many years to heal. After short periods of rest, renewed livestock grazing vegetation can easily negate stream and habitat improvements.

Recently, in March 2005, a judge newly appointed to one of the cases dismissed it on a narrow jurisdictional issue; the judge in the other case followed suit. However, ONDA has appealed both decisions and will argue them before the Ninth Circuit in early 2006.

ONDA is one of a handful of groups in the West tackling the important issues arising from grazing on public lands, even though this land use represents one of the greatest continuing threats to imperiled

Trampled banks, an overly widened channel, and a total lack of functioning streamside vegetation from grazing characterize this tributary to the Wild and Scenic North Fork of the Malheur River. The streamside area has been grazed in excess of the levels allowed under binding ESA agreements. The dearth of shade-providing vegetation has greatly increased water temperature, adversely affecting native trout.



native fish and many wildlife species. ONDA is bringing sound science and law to bear on a simple goal: getting public land managers to comply with existing law, their own regulations, and the ecological need to restore pervasively damaged stream systems.

Although the most recent decisions in the case were not a desired outcome, the litigation provided some on-the-ground relief for aquatic systems. Such relief is perhaps more than any other group has triggered in the Columbia River basin despite more than a decade since the listing of imperiled salmonids under the ESA. This story is not yet over.

“Data from small areas along streams where cattle had been excluded for a decade or more consistently demonstrate that those streams are in far better shape than where grazing has continued. ... field evaluations documented that grazing was damaging streambanks and preventing the recovery of streamside vegetation ...”

GRAZING *from page 1*

For the past few years, conservation groups have been exploring cooperative means to eliminate livestock grazing from sensitive wildlife habitats, wilderness areas, parks and other special areas. While administrative and legal venues, including appeals and litigation, will remain the modus operandi for addressing the negative ecological impacts of non-native domestic livestock on our public lands, ONDA is committed to collaborating with ranchers using permit buyouts on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis. But permit buyouts are not the end-all solution. They are attractive because of reliance on market incentives and collaboration, but we don't want to convey the notion that we can buy our way out of every grazing problem on public lands. We don't have the money. Too, we don't want federal agencies to abdicate their responsibility to manage public lands. Unfortunately, we all know that some federal agencies have a hard time doing the right thing when it comes to reducing livestock grazing on public lands. While buying grazing permits in wilderness areas and steelhead habitat is intuitively obvious, federal agencies still have a legal duty to protect our federal lands and rivers for future generations. Finally, conservation groups' willingness to put money on the table as an incentive for ranchers to "sell" their grazing permits does not mean all ranchers are interested. Many are not. Regardless, the novelty of the solution in the Upper Deschutes Plan has caught the attention of BLM nationally and we hope to see more management plans throughout the West adopting this approach. It's taken 140 years (in much of the West) of grazing on public lands to get us where we're at today. We won't solve the problem overnight. But we need to be more aggressive to protect and restore habitat, as we continue to lose land every day to exotic weeds among other factors. Many species in the Oregon's High Desert are not doing well directly or indirectly because of the effects of livestock grazing, and we can ill afford to spend the next 140 years experimenting on how to fix the problem. There will always be examples of successful grazing on some public lands, or isolated situations where livestock can even play some nominal role in managing the land, but the science is conclusive: Livestock exact a huge toll on the ecological health of the land, especially in arid landscapes. Some persons oppose permit buyouts, believing that removing livestock from public lands will somehow lead to disintegration of rural lifestyles, the undermining of rural communities, or the transformation of ranches into ranchettes. These are real issues, but they ignore the much larger economic, environmental and social forces at play across the West and the U.S., and continuing to graze livestock on public lands will not solve these problems. A recent Government Accoutability Office report on the "cost" of the public lands grazing program reveals that U.S. taxpayers are supporting a small number of ranchers who have permits to run livestock on public lands (For more detail, see the article about the GAO report on Page 11 of this newsletter, or go to our website for the full report). While the GAO report accurately describes federal agencies' expenses, it overlooks the enormous "ecological cost" of public lands grazing.

The grazing program costs taxpayers millions, but the reality is most Americans are subsidized in one form or another. Even so, we should not subsidize activities such as public lands grazing that harm the land, especially our public lands. We could support rural communities and rural lifestyles through restoration programs. If subsidies are needed, let's pay people to restore habitat for prong-horns, sage grouse and steelhead. Most of our public lands today are in anything but excellent health, and prospects for restoring much of our public lands have, at least in our lifetimes, passed. Of course, much of this damage occurred prior to passage of the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934 (when Congress mandated some protection for what are now federal lands managed by the BLM), but to suggest we've learned from our mistakes, or in fact now know how to manage a non-native species (e.g., cattle) in a desert ecosystem, would be disingenuous. How would the GAO calculate the value of what is gone forever, much less what we don't know we've lost?

Badlands Wilderness: Another Step Forward
In the wake of BLM's updated management plan, ONDA reached an agreement to retire the grazing permits of rancher Ray Clarno, one of the ranchers in the Badlands Wilderness Study Area. We have collaborated with Ray for the past several years to secure wilderness protection for the Badlands, and this takes us one step closer to restoring the fragile ecology of the Badlands. Coupled with BLM's decision in its new management plan to officially close the Badlands wsa to all motorized use (but for emergency purposes), the Badlands has taken a big step on its way to being managed for hikers, horseback riders, wildlife and wilderness values. As you may recall, the three Deschutes County Commissioners voted to take no position on support for Badlands Wilderness earlier this year, in part because of vocal objections from off-road vehicle users. With BLM's decision to close the Badlands to motorized vehicles, the off-road issue has been put to rest. BLM's decision to prohibit motor vehicles comes not a day too late. The Badlands is only 15 miles from Bend, and Bend recently was recently identified as the sixth-fastest-growing metropolitan area in the U.S.

The window for securing permanent protection for the Badlands is closing, and it remains up to Rep. Greg Walden and the rest of Oregon's congressional delegation to finish the job by asking Congress to secure designation of the Badlands as Wilderness, ideally as part of a broader wilderness package including Mt. Hood, Spring Basin and Badlands (see Action Alert on p. 7). As we move ahead, we will ask the County Commissioners to reconsider their position on Badlands, and will continue to cooperate with other ranchers in the Badlands and Central Oregon who might be open to relinquishing their grazing permits.



Government Accountability Office confirms huge subsidies paid to ranchers

By Mark Salvo and Greta Anderson
It's finally, officially confirmed. Ranchers on federal public lands annually receive millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies to graze public lands. In some cases, ranchers could not continue grazing without taxpayer support. In nearly every case, subsidized ranchers pursue their activity at the expense of native flora, fauna and ecosystems on the public domain. In October 2005, the Government Accountability Office finally released a report that found that ranching on public lands costs taxpayers at least \$123 million annually on U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands (see the report and additional information at www.publiclandsranching.org/htmlres/subsidies.htm). Overall, 10 federal departments and agencies spend \$144 million dollars annually to manage public lands grazing, while receiving only \$21 million per year in grazing fees (most of which are deposited into the "Range Betterment Fund" and similar dedicated accounts). While taxpayers subsidize numerous and worthy government programs, in the case of public lands grazing, only a select few benefit from the public's largesse. Of the approximately 989,460 livestock producers in the United States, only 2 percent hold federal grazing permits/leases. GAO's report exposed the galling ubiquity of federal government support for ranching on public lands. The report lists an array of federal departments and agencies that spend millions of dollars to support the federal grazing program, from APHIS-Wildlife Services, which contracts with exterminators to kill predators on public lands, to the Department of Justice, which pays lawyers to defend federal grazing policy against citizen lawsuits to protect public lands and resources. Unfortunately, GAO's report suffers from some gaping holes in the data. For example, GAO refused to estimate some direct and indirect subsidies (agency planning, range management, etc.) that contribute significantly to the total subsidies received by ranchers. Several agencies, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Environmental Protection Agency, also failed to provide estimates of their grazing related costs to the GAO, even though these agencies are charged with mitigating grazing impacts to soil, water, and vegetation. A study published by the Center for Biological Diversity in 2002 responsibly estimated these missing costs and concluded that the total cost of federal grazing program is closer to \$500 million annually. Finally, the GAO report does not address the environmental costs of livestock grazing on public lands, such as impaired habitat and diminished recreational and aesthetic values. Despite its flaws, the new GAO report has finally settled a debate between conservationists and public lands ranchers about whether public lands grazing is a losing proposition for taxpayers. It is, in fact, a rotten deal. Representatives of the public lands ranching industry did not dispute the findings in the report. Rather, Jeff

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Eisenberg, executive director of the Public Lands Council of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, said the numbers don't reflect the value of "maintaining a way of life and keeping land free from development" and that low grazing fees represent an "investment that reflects decades and decades of public policy." Of course, both contentions are a pile of cow poop. Some people just don't get it.t

Organizations petition to raise federal grazing fee

By Greta Anderson and Mark Salvo
In November, the Oregon Natural Desert Association joined the Center for Biological Diversity, Western Watersheds Project, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Forest Guardians and the Sagebrush Sea Campaign to request the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior to increase the grazing fee on federal public lands. The request was formally submitted as a petition for agency rulemaking to the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act. The federal grazing fee is a pittance. The Government Accountability Office recently confirmed that the low fee fails to recover even a small percentage of the costs of the federal grazing program. The grazing fee charged on National Forest System and BLM lands in 2005 is \$1.79 per cow/calf per month, one-seventh of the average fee charged on equivalent private, non-irrigated grazing lands in the 17 western states, where fees ranged from \$8 to \$23 per animal unit month and the average fee was \$13.40 in 2004. The Forest Service/BLM fee is also less than those charged on state lands, where the average fee in 16 western states (excluding Texas) in 2004 was \$14.30. The current Forest Service/BLM fee is based on a flawed formula that was established in the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (PRIA). The formula, which was itself based on economic data from 1966(!), was set to expire in 1986, but President Reagan extended its use indefinitely via Executive Order. In 1988, the secretaries formally approved the continued use of the PRIA formula. However, in 1991, Congress directed the Forest Service and BLM to re-evaluate the PRIA formula and the resulting "fair market value" study showed the grazing fee was too low to recover program costs. In 1991, the GAO affirmed that the low fee was the result of a flawed formula, which begins with a low base fee and is adjusted using an index that heavily weighs factors such as grazing permittees' ability to pay. In 1994, the secretaries set forth new rules, under the banner of "Rangeland Reform," which proposed using a new base value and a slightly different formula for setting the grazing fee. This change would have resulted in a significant increase in the cost recovery of the federal grazing program, but it was never adopted. Despite knowing that the formula is flawed and fails to recover program costs, the federal government has refused to raise the fee to allow the grazing program to pay for itself. Citing existing law and policy, our organizations contend that the grazing fee must be both "reasonable" and reflect fair market value of federal forage. While the true costs of degraded wildlife habitat, impaired water quality, damaged riparian areas, and soil erosion may be impossible to quantify, our petition proposes a new fee formula that would at least move toward recovering the administrative costs of the federal grazing program.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: ONDA VOLUNTEERS



“Three seasons into my career as a volunteer fence puller, I have experienced so much joy at ripping and prying, tearing and pulling, snipping and rolling, that I sometimes fear for my sanity. I wonder at our willingness to drive



more than halfway across this amazing state, to fill our vehicles and sleeping bags with dust, to daub blood from myriad fence-wounds, to shred happily our best work clothes and yet, to break out in goofy broad grins as the work day is called and the fence behind us is. ... no longer there! I am reassured that our efforts are worthwhile as I walk back to camp along the now

vanished fence line and find myself losing my way. A bit of wild has been restored! The single most important aspect of our continuing effort to restore these wild areas is what is missing when we leave: an artificial boundary that serves not the wilderness.”

“**How rare it is**, and so extremely gratifying, to join together with fellow Oregonians to contribute to an immediate and personally observable positive effect on our fragile desert wilderness. Writing letters to policy makers and sending money to conservation groups is good and necessary, but, for me at least, nothing beats the shared experience of sore backs, scarred forearms and shredded jeans. ONDA’s skillful volunteer coordination and leadership, exemplified in the removal of dozens of miles of barbed wire from the Steens Mountain Wilderness, will help ensure that these desert jewels and their resident wildlife will forever remain wild and free.”

“**My 17-year-old son** and I signed up for two fence-pulling sessions on Steens Mountain this past August and it turned out to be the highlight of our summer. It is good work with nice people in a spectacular place, with results that are immediately apparent and clearly significant for wildlife and wilderness. The Steens has long had a special place in my heart, but next time I’m out there I will go as a committed investor, not just a visitor.”

“**The Steens Mountain Fourth** of July trip was absolutely the most challenging volunteer event I have ever participated in. After a long backpack in, we spent two days removing barbed-wire fence in heat and sun, with no source of cool water near the work site. But I was so elated on the hike out I practically floated the eleven miles. I kept thinking that we had seen the last of that section of fence. No backpackers or animals, not a plant or even wind and fire would ever pause at that fence again. On the eight-hour drive home I sang my version of the Robert Frost line with every song I heard on the radio: Something there is that doesn’t love a fence. That trip was absolutely the most rewarding volunteer event I have ever participated in.”

“**While our bodies had** sometimes felt the physical demands, our minds were strengthened by the exhilaration of time well spent, of repairing the spoilage of humans, and of giving some of the wilderness back to the Steens.”

New lawsuit targets rangeland project in Beaty Butte gulches

On Oct. 21, 2005, ONDA filed suit against the BLM over the agency’s decision to implement a rangeland project on Beaty Butte in south-east Oregon. The project, which will occur in the East and West Gulches near Beaty Butte’s summit, involves over 13.5 miles of new barbed-wire fence, three new pipelines totaling about 5.5 miles, three new water developments complete with steel storage tanks, and rehabilitation of one road coupled with construction of two miles of new road. The project also calls for development of a modest riparian exclosure in the East Gulch.

During the public comment process, ONDA had asked the BLM to consider the impacts of the project on wilderness values documented on 121,000 acres of public land in ONDA’s “Spaulding Proposed WSA Addition.” The gulches project area lies entirely within ONDA’s inventory proposal area. Unfortunately, the BLM refused to consider ONDA’s significant new information during the NEPA process. ONDA argues the agency has a duty to consider that information, both under NEPA and FLPMA.

Beaty Butte is a 7,918-foot elevation “sky island” situated within the northern Great Basin, in eastern Oregon’s high desert. Near its summit, the adjoining East Gulch and West Gulches contain locally rare stream and riparian habitats important to sage grouse and other species. The public lands on and around Beaty Butte are significant as a critical swath of relatively intact sage-steppe habitat linking the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge, to the north and west, with the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in northern Nevada, to the south.

The area exhibits a stunningly diverse landscape, ranging from ridges and hills to table lands, from sagebrush-steppe to playas, lakes, springs, streams and riparian areas, and from scattered old-growth juniper woodlands to the defining landscape feature of Beaty Butte itself. It supports a wide variety of wildlife and includes critical winter and migratory habitat for pronghorn antelope, as well as important habitat for sage grouse, pygmy rabbits, Western big-eared bats, ferruginous hawks, burrowing owl, desert and short-horned lizards, and countless other birds and mammals.

In addition to claims targeting the wilderness issue, the complaint also targets the BLM’s refusal to consider alternatives that would involve increased herding, reduced grazing, and/or a larger riparian exclosure area. Current grazing practices and the infrastructure required to sustain current levels of use threaten this area’s potential to one day be conserved as wilderness.

Just another day in the field: While inspecting the Middle Fork John Day River in September, ONDA staffer Mac Lacy and volunteer Chris Christie spotted hundreds of fish stranded in an irrigation ditch. The ditch was dry at the headgate and dry again several miles downstream, meaning the fish had no way out. ONDA contacted the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, which immediately sent a crew from John Day. The ODFW crew was able to salvage 15 *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (juvenile steelhead or resident redband), mostly from last year’s brood (age 1+), and return them to the Middle Fork. The crew also salvaged thousands of juvenile redband shiners, hundreds of juvenile dace, and a few juvenile suckers. Although the ditch has a functioning fish screen, the *O. mykiss* may have gotten in before the screen was lowered before the irrigation season in April.



PHOTO: CHRIS CHRISTIE
Mac Lacy inspects the irrigation ditch.

ONDA files new Freedom of Information Act lawsuit

ONDA filed suit on Oct. 17, 2005 challenging the BLM and Department of the Interior’s handling of a two-year old FOIA request asking for documents related to the agency’s consideration and analysis of ONDA’s wilderness inventory report as part of the Andrews-Steens RMP planning process. The first targets the DOI’s failure to justify its decision to withhold over 100 pages of responsive documents. ONDA alleges the BLM failed to provide enough information for ONDA to assess the legitimacy of the agency’s claim that those documents are subject to the FOIA’s “deliberative process” exemption. Simultaneous with the agency’s opening brief, it “voluntarily” elected to release a number of the contested documents.

The lawsuit also targets the agency’s use of an improper cutoff date for processing the request. Although the BLM did not complete its response until February 2005, the agency refused to provide documents more recent than August 2003.

As is required by law, ONDA in February 2005 administratively appealed both issues. DOI was required to have decided ONDA’s appeal no later than March 30, 2005, but never responded. After four reminder letters went unheeded, ONDA was left with no choice but to file suit in federal court. ONDA’s right to obtain the public information at issue in this action is critical to our ability to assess whether and how adequately the BLM considered our comprehensive wilderness inventory report during the Andrews-Steens RMP process.

Forest Service issues grazing CEs fast and furious

Since November, ONDA has commented on six different Forest Service decisions relying on a congressional appropriations bill rider allowing the agency to “categorically exclude” from NEPA review grazing permit reauthorizations. The rider can be used only if monitoring indicates grazing is meeting or moving toward objectives in the forest plan. This includes PACFISH standards tied to native trout habitat requirements. ONDA believes the Forest Service’s use of this rider is inappropriate in most cases we have reviewed so far, because of the agency’s complete lack of monitoring to assess whether PACFISH standards are being met.



Lisa Brown

Welcome Lisa Brown, board member

Lisa Brown has worked with Northwest conservation groups on watershed and aquatic habitat protection projects for more than a decade, as well as for an aquatic research group at the Pacific Northwest Research Station in Corvallis. Lisa earned a bachelor of science degree in environmental science from Oregon State University, and graduated with honors from Lewis & Clark Law School with a certificate in environmental and natural resources law. She is a staff attorney at WaterWatch of Oregon and is a member of the Oregon Bar. A desert rat at heart, she joined the ONDA board in 2005 and looks forward to having more excuses to get to the east side.

Welcome Kristin Ruether, staff attorney

Kristin Ruether became ONDA's second staff attorney in fall 2005, joining Mac Lacy in the Portland office, where she will focus on grazing enforcement in the John Day basin. She is a recent graduate from Portland's Lewis & Clark law school. She spent her free time there working with the school's activist group, Northwest Environmental Defense Center, and the school's clinic, Pacific Environmental Advocacy Center (where she worked on one of ONDA's Malheur grazing cases). She was on the Lewis & Clark team that won the 2004 national environmental moot court competition. She grew up in the scenic Rust Belt and, as a kid, was lucky to take many camping and canoeing trips with her family to eastern Canada. She received her undergraduate degree in biology from Cornell University. After seeing a roadshow on the Cove/Mallard timber sales, she felt called to the northern Rockies. She worked as forest watch coordinator for Friends of the Clearwater in Moscow, Idaho, for a few years, where she battled timber sales and backpacked as much as possible. She loves wilderness, running, X-C skiing, cow dogs, and knitting. She is thrilled to work for ONDA.

Welcome, Pete Hickok, membership coordinator

An ONDA volunteer once commented that if you are part of the Hickok family, you are required (by family law) to work for ONDA at some point in your life. Never one to skimp on his requirements, Pete Hickok joined ONDA in October 2005 as the new Membership Coordinator. Though not originally from Bend, Pete has spent most of his summers either working on the Deschutes River rowing baggage boats for fly-fishing outfitters or exploring the central Oregon cascades and high desert. Pete figures that he has spent close to a full year of his life in a tent on the banks of the Deschutes. Yes, the fishing was good. After graduating from Lewis & Clark College in May, Pete's love for the desert and desire to dry out after 22 long winters in Seattle and Portland led him back to Bend. He enjoys hiking, skiing, fishing, art, tractors, and, when not in the desert, surfing. He is excited to join ONDA and to get to know all of you members out there.

Farewell Stu Sugarman, board member

Stu Sugarman has completed 12 years of service on ONDA's board, most of that time as an officer. Not only has he been a passionate activist for protecting Oregon's last remaining wild places, but an important voice in guiding ONDA's policies and direction. Stu's whole life has been immersed in social justice and environmental activism, all the way from defending tree-sitters in court to participating in non-violent direct action with the Sea Shepard Society. Stu, although the board will miss your bright humor and intelligent perspectives, we know that you will be with us in spirit as you continue your important fight against injustice.

Farewell Chris Egertson, wildlands coordinator

Chris Egertson, ONDA's wildlands coordinator, is moving on to greener pastures. Many of ONDA's wilderness volunteers are familiar with Chris' forays in to Oregon's desert wildlands where he led ONDA's field mapping efforts for the past two years. We'll miss his dry Midwest humor and unflappable demeanor around the office. We wish Chris the best of luck in his new adventure!



Chris Egertson



Oregon Wild Desert calendar

The ONDA Market Place is pleased to offer the 2006 edition of the Oregon Wild Desert Calendar – 12 inches x 9 inches in size and featuring two outstanding desert photos for each month of the year. Photographers whose work in this calendar are: Bruce Jackson, Greg Burke, John Lassiter, Tim Greyhavens, Al St. John, Frank Cleland, Sohn Sterling, David A. Rein, Jim Davis, Marilyn Miller, Scott Erickson, Tom Weber, David Sherrill and Mark Chidlaw. Price includes shipping. \$15.

Clothing
ONDA T-shirts. White, sage and neutral. with logo. When ordering, specify size. Women's short sleeve (S, M, L) \$12 Men's short sleeve (M, L, XL) \$12 Long sleeve (M, L, XL) \$15 Long-sleeve shirts are not available in sage.



Item Description (for apparel, please specify men's or women's)	Size	Quantity	Price	Total
Add 10% shipping (except calendars)				
Total				

JOIN ONDA

Help defend Oregon's wild places by becoming a member of ONDA. To join, use the membership envelope inside this newsletter, contact our office at 541.330.2638, or visit www.onda.org

'Cars for Conservation' can help ONDA

Don't ditch your old car in the desert! Donate your car to the desert and help ONDA's efforts to secure more wilderness in Oregon's high deserts! Please consider donating your vehicle(s) to ONDA to be assessed at market value. The car will be sold at auction and ONDA will receive the proceeds from the sale. You, in return, will receive a beneficial tax deduction. The better the condition of the car the better a donation to support ONDA's efforts.

If you have any questions about the "Cars for Conservation" program or would like to donate your vehicle, please contact Pete Hickok at 541.330.2638 or phickok@onda.org.

Bring Earth Share into your workplace

When Oregonians were asked in a series of surveys and workshops in the 1990s what they wanted in the future, they called – resoundingly – for clean air and water, open space, parklands, natural areas, and fish and wildlife habitat.

Since 1989, Oregonians have been asked every year to stand by that vision of a healthy environment by supporting the groups that work to keep people healthy, preserve wildlife habitat and reduce global warming. ONDA is one of those groups. Our membership in Earth Share of Oregon enables us to reach out to a broad cross-section of the state that might not otherwise learn about our work. This results not only in increased financial support, but helps us build bridges based on understanding the challenges and successes of environmental work.

Here's how it works: Earth Share cooperates with private and public employers to offer a payroll deduction program through which employees can either donate to Earth Share of Oregon as a whole or to designate a gift for one or more ESOR members.

The key to success for Earth Share members is participation – increasing the number of employers who offer this opportunity to their employees. This is where you can help.

First, find out if your workplace allows employees to donate to Earth Share of Oregon. If you aren't sure, check the list of Earth Share's Business Partners at www.earthshare-oregon.org.

Next, if you don't have an Earth Share campaign, ask your company president or other top leaders if they would consider starting one. Ron Shoals, Earth Share of Oregon's business development manager, can help you approach your company's leaders and provide materials for them to review. If you are an owner or leader in your company, it makes adding an Earth Share campaign that much easier!

To learn more about bringing Earth Share to your workplace, call Ron at 503.223.9015 or email him at ron@earthshare-oregon.org.



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