

Ramblings

DESERT RAMBLINGS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION
WINTER 2006 EDITION VOLUME 19, NO. 3

FROM THE OUTBACK

CATTLE GRAZING IN WILDERNESS

Steens for Sale: Looming Land Sales Threaten

FROM BURNS TIMES HERALD (SUMMER, 2006)

A rare gem, first time available in decades! Fish every cast, hunting, views, history, wildlife, and utter wilderness seclusion! Build a cabin. This is for the person that wishes a wilderness setting. There will be no electricity and access is via BLM old primitive road. Property provides only ATV access tracks to creek in 20-miles. Spring water and stream at logical site for cabin. Check additional McCoy parcels on this site for additional photos. Strong investment opportunity, i.e., environmentalists/BLM will/do wish to acquire. Steens Loop Rd. starts at Frenchglen, which is some 60-miles south of Burns. Some 18-miles up this road is Fish Lake. Just before Fish Lake a BLM primitive road turns off to the north paralleling the west canyon top of McCoy Creek. Property is string of 40s with mile of stream bottom. Located some 6-miles down BLM primitive road. This 480-acres is priced at: \$750,000. Owner will carry financing.

By Bill Marlett, Executive Director

It's been tough for conservationists to get ahead of the land speculation frenzy on Steens Mountain. In the six years since the Steens Act was passed by Congress, we have made little progress in moving conservation issues left unresolved in the Act. As we continue to work hard with others to address these issues (road closures, wilderness study areas, grazing, etc), we are now facing a new threat that could trump all other issues combined.



PHOTO: DAVID SHERRILL

Steens meadow in autumn light.

This summer, Dan Jordan, a local landowner on Steens Mountain, filed a Measure 37 claim requesting Harney County to waive its zoning ordinance to allow him the option of selling off 640 one-acre lots near Fish Lake (includes Whorehouse Meadows) on the top of Steens Mountain (different from the Burns newspaper ad above). As many in Oregon now know, Measure 37 was a state ballot measure granting long-time owners of land (prior to land-use zoning) to claim development rights as of the time the land was purchased or otherwise be compensated by the local jurisdiction for their loss.

As the measure itself is undergoing lawsuits elsewhere in Oregon, it remains to be seen whether

Jordan will be able to proceed with his development.

Jordan bought the 640-acre parcel on Steens in 1966 and has graciously allowed the public to use his property for recreation use over these many years. We have no doubt that Jordan cares for the land and wants to see the land protected. But we also know he wants to explore all his options. In this case, he wants to maximize the dollar value placed on the land when it comes time to reach agreement on a transition plan for his land to a more permanent status, where both Jordan, the BLM and the public, can achieve everyone's expectations.

see **OUTBACK** page 10

Victory in Ninth Circuit Preserves Public's Right to Participate

By Mac Lacy, Staff Attorney

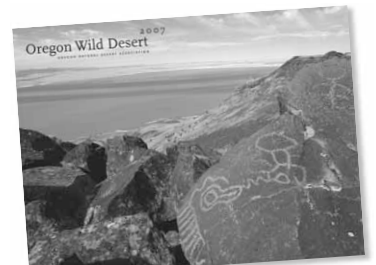
In September, the U.S. Court of Appeals Ninth Circuit issued a decision restoring the public's right to participate in a key decision-making process by which the Forest Service authorizes livestock grazing on federal lands.

In 2003, ONDA and the Center for Biological Diversity sued the Forest Service to address grazing damage within two Wild and Scenic River corridors and bull trout and steelhead spawning habitat in the Malheur National Forest. The district court initially confirmed that the authorized grazing was causing violations of federal standards to protect fish and aquatic habitat as well as protected river values. A second district judge, to whom the case was transferred, then dismissed the case on a narrow jurisdictional issue. The Ninth Circuit decision restores the right to participate in public land management decisions that impact key spawning and migratory habitat essential to the survival of these long-revered native trout species.

see **VICTORY** page 8

IN THIS ISSUE

- ONDA's Oregon Wild Desert 2007 calendar, featuring spectacular photographs of the High Desert, is now available. Ordering information in Market Place, Page 15.
- ONDA thanks the more than 150 individuals who gave their time as volunteers on projects ranging from wilderness fence pulls to the film festival in 2006. Pages 6-7.
- Volunteers travel to Washington, D.C., to promote wilderness. Page 4.



Election Night

Durlin E Hickok, *President*

By 10:00 PM election night I was exhausted from following several close races across the country and the anticipation of a change in leadership in the U.S. House of Representatives.

But the night was still young for one of the most important races with the potential to influence future environmental legislation – California’s District 11 race with Jerry McNerney challenging the powerful Chair of the House Resources Committee, Richard Pombo. As a conservative influence in environmental issues across the West, Representative Pombo is best known, perhaps, for his attempts to introduce legislation that would rewrite the Endangered Species Act.

Although the race remained close throughout the night, McNerney would eventually be declared the winner. While we should celebrate this victory, at the local level we must remain committed to ONDA’s mission to protect, defend and restore Oregon’s native desert ecosystems.



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DESERT RAMBLINGS

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PHOTO: TRACY BOWERMAN

Keen footwear employees get ready for a day of conservation work at the John Day Basin in eastern Oregon.

Keen gets to work

In an era where outdoor goods flood markets from New York City to India, it's hard to believe that many makers of rugged outdoor wear actually spend much time out of doors, let alone out of the city. But the footwear company Keen proved to be one business that stands behind the image it sells.

In September, Keen brought its entire staff out to the John Day River Basin to volunteer with ONDA. Keen is a member of the Conservation Alliance, a collection of outdoor businesses whose annual membership dues support nonprofit environmental groups around the country. ONDA has been a recipient of Conservation Alliance grants in past years. Keen's president and ONDA board member, Kirk Richardson, decided that the best way to engage his staff in conservation efforts was to actually put them to work pulling barbed wire fence and cleaning up the Spring Basin Wilderness Study Area.

Forty-seven hard-working Keen employees helped remove barbed wire from the Pine Creek Conservation Area, clean up a trash pile at the base of Spring Basin, and GPS the Wilderness Study Area's boundary to help ONDA make a hiker's map of the area. Keen showed that the company truly turns its ideals into actions. Who knows, maybe we'll even see a fence-pull shoe design come out of it one day!

Cars for Conservation Donors

ONDA would like to thank our recent Cars for Conservation donors for donating old cars or trucks to support the protection of Oregon's High Desert! Your old cars are not just junkers to us. Through out the years ONDA's Cars for Conservation program has helped to protect thousands of acres of Oregon's desert wilderness.

A big thank you to:

John Kingery
Lee Hickok and Sharon Loomis
Don and Anne Hanson
Joan Segal
Lee Christie and Tom Keffer

Thank you to all Earth Share donors!

What a year! ONDA is a member of Earth Share of Oregon (ESOR), which supports our work by partnering with businesses and public agencies to conduct annual workplace giving campaigns. In 2005, Earth Share raised near \$800,000 through individual and corporate donations in 100 workplaces. If you count yourself among the over 4,000 individual donors to this year's giving campaign, **thank you!**

If you and your co-workers don't have an ESOR giving program, this is how it works: ESOR coordinates with employers to allow employees who want to support environmental nonprofits to donate by making a payroll contribution. Through this program, employees can choose to support Earth Share as a whole, enabling all of ESOR member groups to benefit, or they can designate their support for one or more specific groups. In this way, even a small gift of \$5 per paycheck adds up to a generous contribution. It's easy and it makes a difference! For more information, please contact Meghan Humphreys at ESOR: (503) 223-9015 or meghan@earthshare-oregon.org; or visit www.earthshare-oregon.org.



a member of Earth Share
OF OREGON

Don't Forget Your Year-End Contribution to ONDA!

The year 2006 was exciting and challenging for ONDA. Our volunteers and staff removed close to 12 miles of fence; we won a major legal victory in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals; and we made great headway in our effort to permanently protect special places, like Spring Basin, as Wilderness. ONDA accomplished a great deal this year. This holiday season, give a **Gift Membership** to a friend or family member as your year-end contribution. As a member they will receive a free 2007 Oregon Wild Desert calendar in addition to Desert Ramblings, and invitations to ONDA sponsored events.

Please send your year-end contribution or gift membership request to:

ONDA
16 NW Kansas Ave.
Bend, OR 97701
or make a donation on-line at www.onda.org.



Volunteer Lobbying Trip to Washington, D.C.

by David Eddleston and Diana Eddleston

Saturday, September 9 dawned hard and clear in central Oregon. We were on our way to Washington, D.C. to present to Oregon's Congressional delegation the case for declaring Spring Basin a wilderness, and to continue to press the idea that the last remaining acreage of Badlands also be declared a wilderness.

Both of us are very familiar with Spring Basin and Badlands, having made many volunteer field trips with ONDA to these areas. ONDA invited us to join Development Director, Kelly O'Brien, to be a part of Wilderness Week in the nation's capital. We would be joining hundreds of volunteers from like-minded organizations across the United States for a week of lobbying on behalf of wilderness. Neither of us had been to D.C. and were looking forward to the experience.

At the opening reception for Wilderness Week, we had the opportunity to mingle with all the other enthusiastic and motivated participants. We swapped stories on delegates and expressed the hope that mid-term elections would bring some changes.

Our first morning was spent being briefed by experienced lobbyists on how best to present the case to our delegation, even to the extent of role playing. After lunch, prepared, and attired in our Oregon Tartan kilts (the better to create a lasting impression), we headed to the "Hill", the place from where the nation is governed, for the first of our many appointments.

Walking the marbled corridors of the Congressional offices was an experience; the trappings of power were apparent, men dressed all in black or blue suits topped with a red tie, women all be-suited with clattering high heels. We kept reminding ourselves these offices and people belong to "We the People", and that we were visiting the servants of "We the People".

Most noticeable was the youth of our congressional delegation's aides and assistants. It was somewhat of an eye-opener that these

personable people were in fact the first point of contact, in who met and saw their bosses. In one instance, while we waited in the offices, we heard actual legislation being written by the assistants and aides.

Over the next very busy three days we visited every one of Oregon's delegation, presenting our case for Spring Basin and Badlands. It was interesting, in view of the differences between Republican and Democrat viewpoints, how deference was made to each others' standpoints on our areas in contention, to see if each were supportive of their respective points of view.

All of our meetings were with Senate and Representative aides; however we did have an opportunity to talk briefly with one of ONDA's friends, Senator Ron Wyden. We were met with courteousness throughout our meetings, even with the Oregon Representative most at variance with ONDA's wilderness stance. We think it was a plus in our hearings that we were volunteers, who expended hundreds of hours and expense and had human interest stories to tell, and not professional lobbyists or spinmasters.

The evenings were spent at related functions with our volunteer colleagues, debriefing and learning from our respective meetings, and passing on advice to each other. I believe we achieved our objectives in presenting the case for new Wilderness areas in central Oregon.

In concluding, mid-term elections have changed Washington DC since our visit, and pertinent to our visit, has removed some of the more obstructive representatives to the aims and goals of ONDA and our Wilderness colleagues.

The people have spoken, and what we did learn after DC is that "We the People" of ONDA continue to speak. Idealistic? Sure, but that's why organizations like ONDA and its volunteers exist.

We can make change happen and we can achieve our objectives.

ONDA receives unique support from three businesses

ONDA would like to extend a special thank you to the businesses below that have chosen to support ONDA through their retail sales, showing a unique commitment to their community. These businesses help promote change and growth by offering outstanding service, top-of-the line products, and by giving back to the groups working for social and environmental change. Please show your appreciation by supporting them.

Nau

www.nau.com

Nau, Inc. is striving to re-define the intersection of philanthropy, commerce, and community. They aim to be a touchstone for sustainable practices in design, manufacturing, and human resources, and to demonstrate a commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

Through a unique point-of-sale mechanism involving customer choice and participation, five percent of every sale will be directed to an environmental, social, or humanitarian charitable organization. These contributions will be made to pre-selected regional, national and global organizations. By inviting customers to engage in selecting where their philanthropic efforts are directed, at the time

of each and every purchase, their customers are introduced to the range of Nau's community partners, and asked to examine where they would like to help affect change. ONDA is honored to have been selected as one of their regional "partners for change."

Patagonia by Pandora's Backpack

920 NW Bond St., Bend | www.pandorasbackpack.com

Pandora's Backpack is a member of 1% For The Planet (1% FTP). 1% FTP is an alliance of businesses committed to leveraging their resources to create a healthier planet. Members recognize their responsibility to and dependence on a healthy environment and donate at least 1% of their annual sales to environmental organizations worldwide.

Pine Mountain Sports

255 SW Century Dr., Bend | www.pinemountainsports.com

Pine Mountain offers the "Sports Club Card." With this program, Pine Mountain donates 1% of all club card purchases to a selection of Central Oregon's nonprofits. ONDA is honored to be one of the five nonprofits selected by Pine Mountain. In November we were presented with a \$1,000 check for the 2006 proceeds from club card purchases. Thank you Pine Mountain Sports!

Action Alert: Steens Land Acquisition

Call your congressional representatives now and ask them to support federal funding for land acquisition on Steens!

The threat is real: Harney County will have no choice but to approve the creation of 640 one-acre lots near Fish Lake on Steens Mountain. And while ONDA will fight this decision in court, we can't address every Measure 37 claim in the future.

The recent Measure 37 claim underscores how critical it is for BLM to have money set aside for purchase of remaining private land in order to preserve the wild and open character of Steens Mountain.

This proposed development is within the Steens Mountain Management Area created by Congress in 2000. As stated in the legislation, the guiding purpose of the Steens Act is to manage Steens Mountain: "to conserve, protect, and manage the long-term ecological integrity of Steens Mountain for future and present generations."

As part of the Act, Congress authorized \$25 million to be used to acquire land within the boundaries of the management area, including the Steens Wilderness.

In light of this Measure 37 claim it is more critical than ever that Congress appropriates funds to acquire private lands on Steens to help stop the threat of future development on Steens Mountain. There are literally thousands of acres of private land on Steens just waiting for this project to be approved. Unless we have federal dollars set aside for land acquisition, these other private lands could be sold for development as recreational home sites.

The Steens Mountain-Alvord Desert region has often been

referred to as the "crown jewel" of Oregon's High Desert and was once described by Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt as "the most magnificent, unprotected landscape left in the entire West." That changed with the passage of the 2000 Steens Act. But we need to make sure that the protection of Steens Mountain is lasting.

Call your congressional representatives now and ask them to support federal funding for land acquisition on Steens!

Senator Ron Wyden

230 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20510-3703

Tel: 202.224.5244

Fax: 202.228.2717

Email: www.wyden.senate.gov/contact/

Senator Gordon Smith

404 Russell Building

Washington, D.C. 20510-3704

Tel: 202.224.3753

Fax: 202.228.3997

Email: www.gsmith.senate.gov/webform.htm

Representative Greg Walden

1210 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515

Tel: 202.225.6730

Fax: 202.225.5774

Email: www.walden.house.gov/contactgreg

Reflections on a Summer in the Field with ONDA Volunteers

By Erin Barnholdt, Outreach Coordinator

As I settle back into the office for the winter season, eating lunch at my desk instead of under a gnarled old juniper with an amazing view of the Steens and enjoying conversation with a group of new



PHOTO: ERIN BARNHOLDT

Volunteer trip pronghorn sighting.

friends, I can't help but to let my thoughts drift back to the adventures of the summer.

The places I get to call my office in the summer are the Steens Mountain Wilderness, Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge, Pine Creek Conservation Area and the Badlands Wilderness Study Area. No doubt these places set an amazing backdrop to the work that needs to be done. But what is

more amazing to me are the people who willingly, I can even say eagerly, join me on these hot summer days to wrestle barbed wire off of wilderness areas, close old roads and inventory remote areas. As one volunteer said this year, "the people that come on these trips aren't ordinary people." This year I had over 100 different 'co-workers' in the field with me. A revolving, and often returning, pool of talents and endless enthusiasm.

Something magical happens on these trips. Freed from dizzying day to day responsibilities, released into open desert wilderness, all senses awaken. The days are reduced to good, hard work, meals and sound sleep under the stars. We sink into the rhythm and beauty of the landscape. Simply being out in the wide open, breathing in

the sage scented air and sharing it with a great group of people is reward enough. Working on the land is a rejuvenation you can't get anywhere else. Sometimes I wonder if these trips are purely selfish. On the last of a three day trip, the desert showed us they are not.

After our second day of pulling fence, we started our two-mile hike back to camp through a huge meadow of dried balsam root flowers. Above us was the fence line we removed yesterday, now coiled and stacked in piles. Just beyond someone spotted something moving. Wildlife love this gently rolling meadow bordered by the Little Blitzen River, although it is rare to see any activity during the day. A pair of binoculars is quickly pulled from a pack. It is a small herd of pronghorn, and they were coming closer. In fact, they were approaching the old fence line. What will they do? Will they even notice it is gone?

Through the binoculars we could see them gently trotting toward the old line. When they reached the place where the line had been, they stopped. They seemed to recognize that something was different. The four strand barbed fence that normally blocked them was gone. What happened next was our thank you for many days of long hikes, little shade and sweat laden work. The largest pronghorn took a couple steps forward, looked to the left and then the right before cautiously proceeding forward while the others waited. Once safely on the 'other side' the rest of the herd followed. They stopped, regrouped, looked back and took off again in a graceful stride. After four years, a meadow once crossed with fences is now open. One day there will be a generation of pronghorn who won't have to stop and look; their instinct to run will never have been inhibited.



Thank you, ONDA volunteers!

Volunteer David Sherill carefully removes barbed wire from a Juniper Tree at Hart Mountain.

PHOTO: BEN MOON

Thanks to almost 200 volunteers in 2006, ONDA has removed roughly 12 miles of barbed wire fence, closed five roads in the Badlands, and took inventory of approximately a half million acres of BLM land. ONDA owes its successes to you, our volunteers and members. We couldn't do it without you. On behalf of the staff and the Board, ONDA extends its heart-felt thanks to the many of you who have donated your precious time to ONDA. We proudly list your names on the next page. You have made a difference.

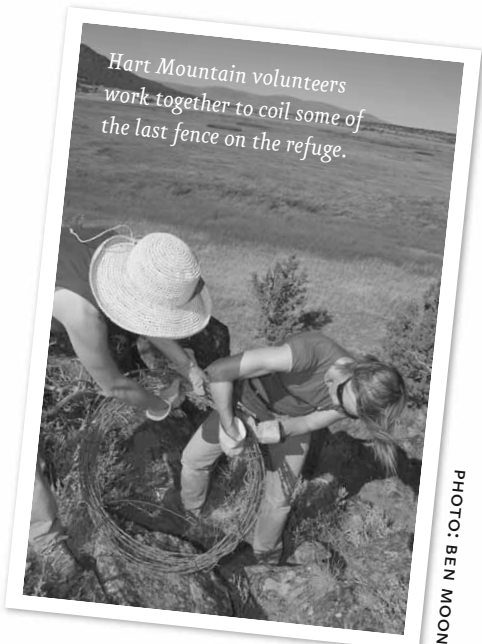
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 Amy Lundstrom
 Andrew Flory
 Ari Halpern
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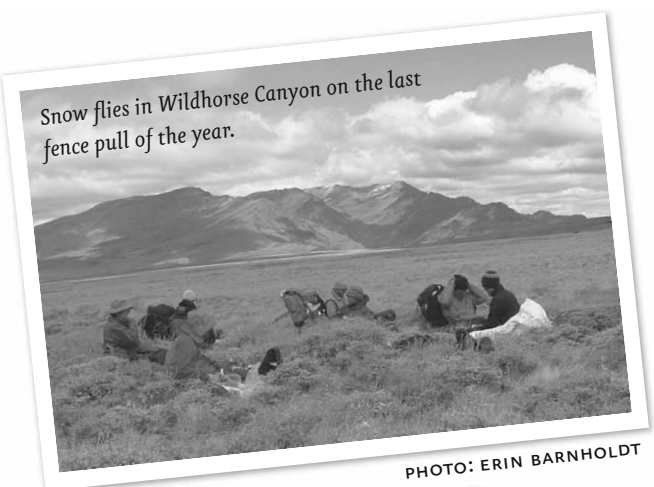
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 Whitney Tolley
 Zephyr Moore



Hart Mountain volunteers work together to coil some of the last fence on the refuge.

PHOTO: BEN MOON



Snow flies in Wildhorse Canyon on the last fence pull of the year.

PHOTO: ERIN BARNHOLDT

Craig Miller
 Dan McGarigle
 Daniel Jones
 Danny Baker
 Darcy Hagin
 Dave Becker
 Dave Jensen
 David Drake
 David Eddleston
 David Sherill
 David Theriault



Lunch under an ancient juniper overlooking the Donner und Blitzen River.

PHOTO: ERIN BARNHOLDT

VICTORY from page 1

The two underlying district court cases involve key riparian habitat on different parts of the Malheur National Forest. One case involves the congressionally-designated Malheur and North Fork Malheur Wild and Scenic Rivers, which are home to native bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) throughout nearly 40 miles of river corridor. The other involves encompassing 85,000 acres of federal land in upper John Day River watersheds. The John Day is home to bull trout, as well as the largest completely wild run of steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) in the Columbia River basin.

Bull trout and Mid-Columbia River steelhead both are listed as “threatened” species under the Endangered Species Act. The grazing allotments at issue contain designated critical habitat for steelhead (see Blue Mountain and Murderer’s Creek allotments on map of Columbia Basin), and key spawning streams for both species.

In 2004, the district court judge stated:

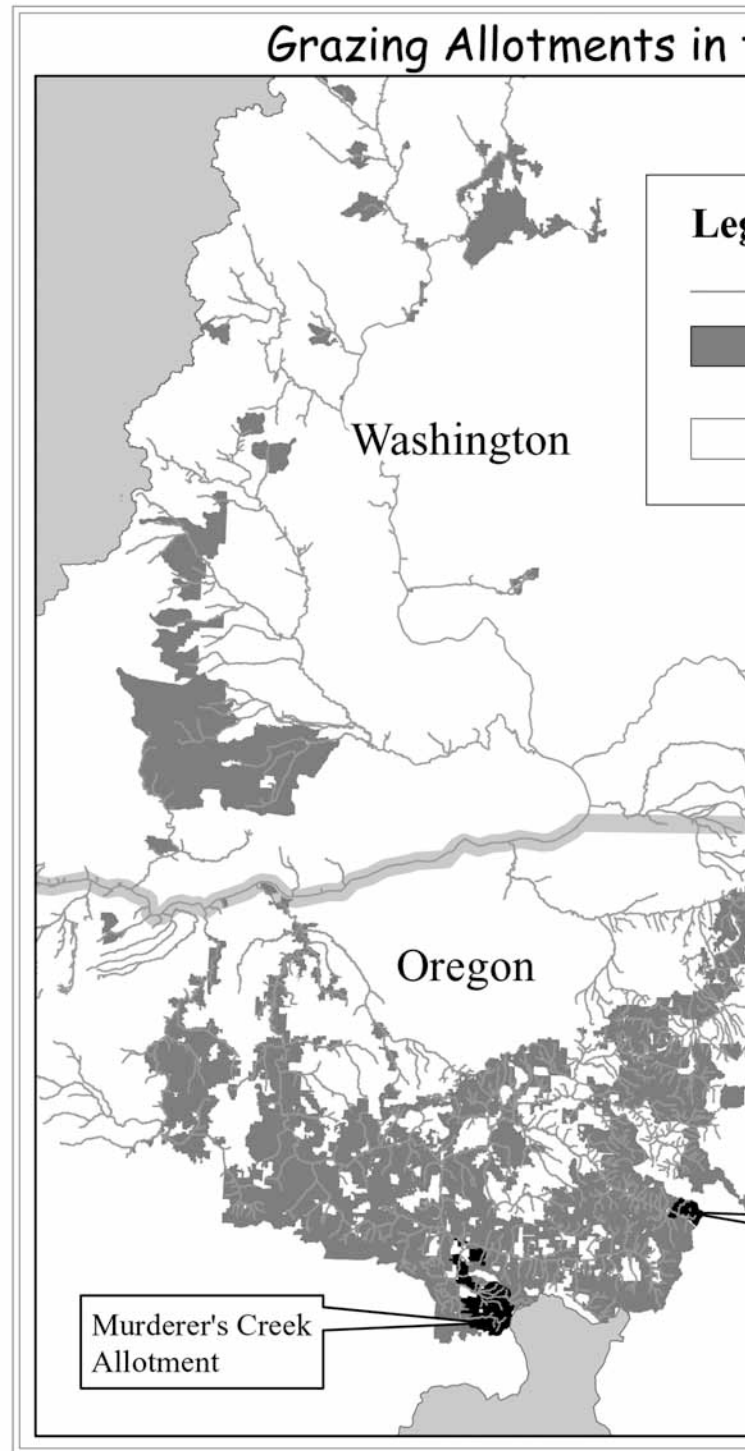
“I acknowledge the Forest Service’s and the intervenors’ statements regarding the historic place ranching has held in the West. However, the way in which grazing has been managed on these lands is clearly at odds with the statutory mandates related to the protection of the river corridors and the species that depend on them. In order for the Forest Service to comply with its duties, I suggest the agency begin to examine more drastic changes.”

Ore. Natural Desert Ass’n v. U.S. Forest Serv., No. 03-213-JO, slip op. at 19 (D. Or. June 10, 2004). Despite that admonition, field work this fall reveals that the litigated areas remain in as poor a condition as they were when ONDA first began monitoring them in 2001. (See photos, below right.)

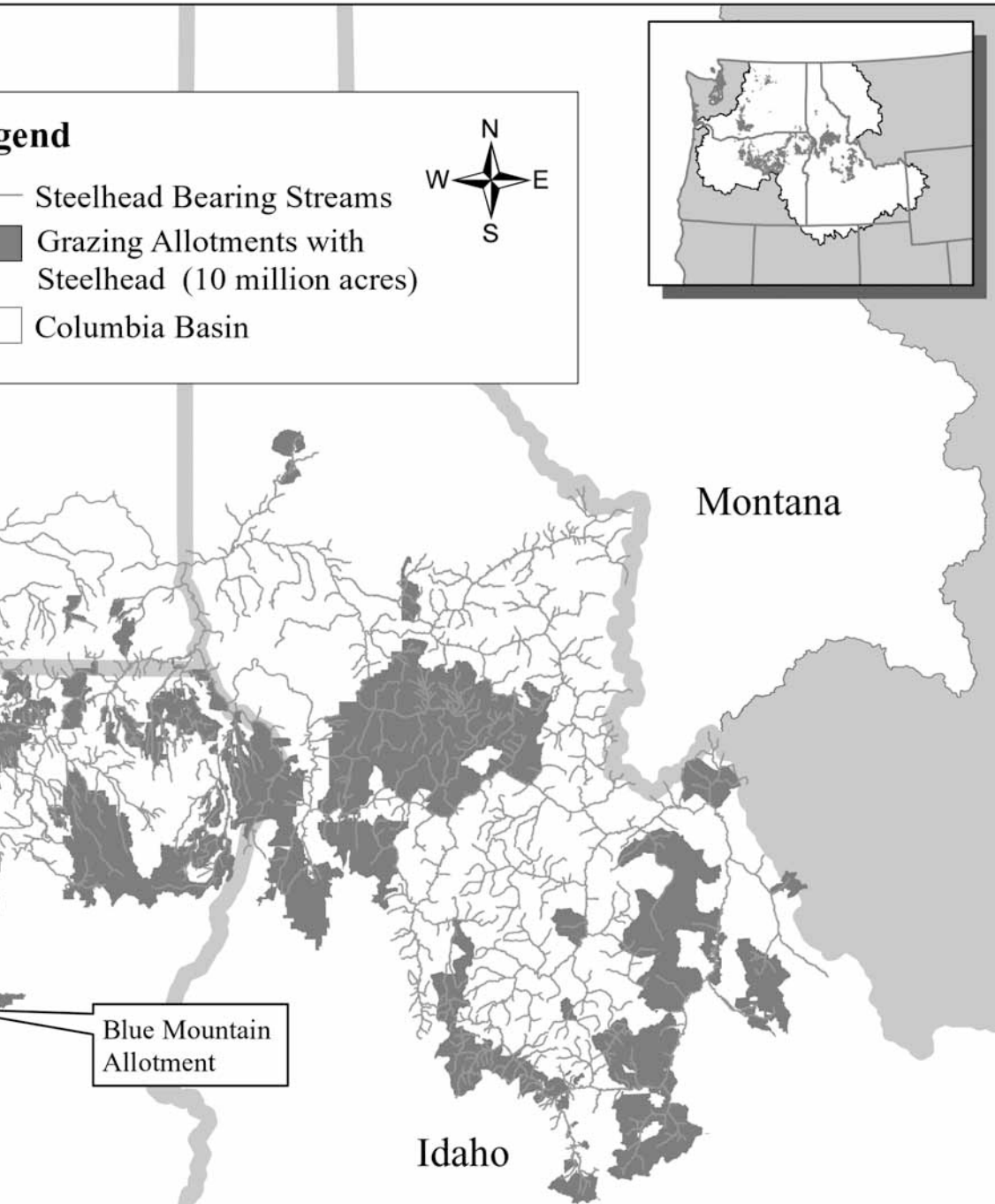
The Ninth Circuit’s decision answered the narrow question whether the Forest Service’s issuance of annual operating instructions (AOI) to permittees who graze livestock on national forest land constitutes “final agency action” for purposes of judicial review under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). The Ninth Circuit concluded the Forest Service’s issuance of an AOI is “final agency action” under the APA and therefore that the public may lawfully challenge these decisions.

The decision protects public involvement in management of national forest lands by allowing the interested public to challenge the Forest Service’s annual grazing decisions. It has no impact on ONDA’s ability to prevail on the merits of its claims. We would still be held to the high standard of “arbitrary and capricious” review of agency actions under the APA. Likewise, it has no impact on a rancher’s retention or renewal of a federally-issued grazing permit.

For purposes of these two cases, the decision means that the district court finally will be required to rule on the merits of ONDA’s claims. Because these stream and riparian areas are (sadly) in the same dire straits this fall as they were more than three years ago when ONDA initiated the lawsuits, we are confident that our cases will finally obtain the relief from severe overgrazing that these areas deserve.



the Columbia Basin with Steelhead Streams



The decision protects public involvement in management of national forest lands by allowing the interested public to challenge the Forest Service's annual grazing decisions.

MAP: CRAIG MILLER



Lake Camp Spring, 2004 & 2006. Unfortunately, the same extreme overgrazing that ONDA documented in 2004 at this spring on the Bluebucket Allotment's Lake Camp Unit, adjacent to the Malheur Wild and Scenic River, continues today. Photos show bank damage (to the extent banks even remain identifiable), little residual vegetation, and failure to meet all applicable ecological standards. ONDA's Ninth Circuit victory means a court will finally rule on whether the Forest Service's grazing authorizations have resulted in violations of aquatic conservation strategies and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

PHOTOS: CHRIS CHRISTIE



Whorehouse Meadows, the Steens.

PHOTO: JOHN VITO

OUTBACK from page 1

ONDA's goal is twofold: prevent Jordan's Measure 37 request from becoming a template for future Measure 37 requests on Steens, and to work with Dan Jordan to make certain that he gets what he needs to ensure the permanent protection of his land for generations to come. To that end, we must temper the threat of Jordan's request in its current form. Failure is not an option. If we don't nip this in the bud, Measure 37 claims will haunt Steens for years to come (unless we can remove the threat of Measure 37 altogether, a far preferable option).

To put this in to perspective, let's look at the scale of possible threats on Steens, where literally thousands of acres remain in private ownership on Steens. Fully 17 percent of the Steens management area is in private ownership (see map). Moreover, 10 percent of the Steens Wilderness is in private ownership. Of course, not all private landowners are eligible to file Measure 37 claim. Nonetheless, even if only half of this amount were eligible, 43,000 acres (43 Dan Jordan proposals) could be looming on the horizon with similar requests for development being submitted to Harney County. The result would be an unmitigated mess.

Fortunately, many, if not most, landowners on Steens would never contemplate dividing up their lands for residential development. But we have no control over the remaining landowners who may not

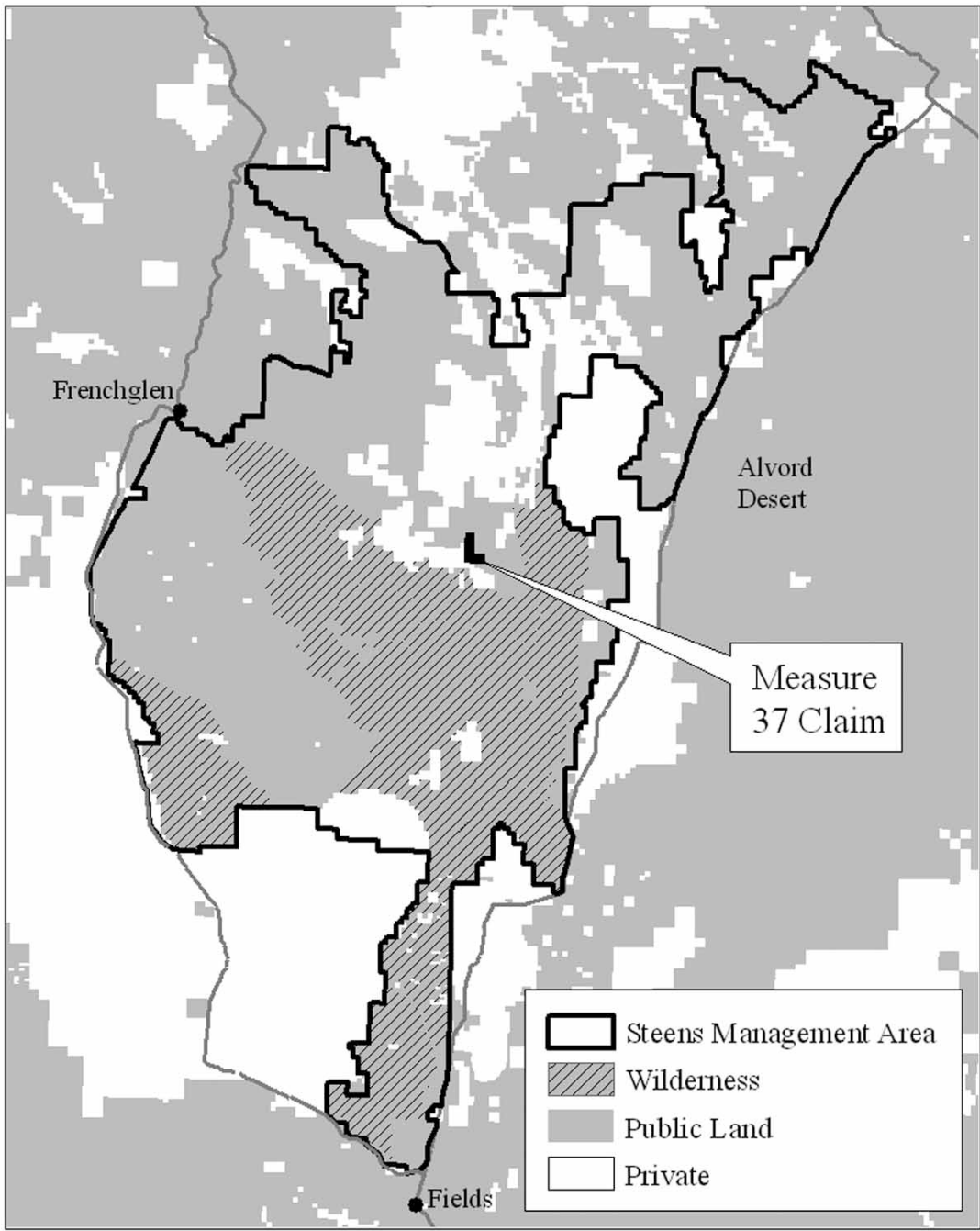
share the value of keeping Steens in open space.

The second goal is to work with Dan Jordan to make certain that he gets what he needs to ensure the permanent protection of his land for generations to come.

The bigger issues

Two issues underscore the current threat to the open and wild spaces of Steens. While I'm confident we can confront the threat of Measure 37, we can only do it if Harney County is willing to participate in protecting Steens Mountain as a vital economic asset and if Congress is willing to fund future land acquisitions to meet ongoing threats (and opportunities).

The first problem is Harney County's land-use zoning ordinance: it's lax. Currently, private lands can be divided into 160-acre sized parcels (or four parcels per square mile ... in Dan Jordan's situation, he would be limited to dividing his 640-acre parcel into four parcels). This may not sound like a lot until you realize at the 160-acre lot size, over 500 separate building lots could be created within the Steens management area (this assumes that all existing land ownership on Steens consists of lots of at least 160 acres, which they are not). This would have devastating impacts on recreation use, wilderness values, open space and wildlife.



**STEENS PRIVATE
LAND OWNERSHIP**

**STEENS
MANAGEMENT AREA**

	acres
BLM	426,000
Private	69,000 (17%)
Total	495,000

**STEENS MOUNTAIN
WILDERNESS**

	acres
BLM	157,000
Private	18,000 (10%)
Total	175,000

A former commissioner from Harney County once suggested the minimum parcel size on Steens should be 640 acres (a square mile). This would be a vast improvement in minimizing scattered development over the entire landscape, but would still have a noticeable impact to the casual visitor to Steens.

The second issue involves a promise made by Oregon’s delegation at the time the Steens Act was passed into law. During the year-long discussion leading to passage of the Steens Act, almost all stakeholders identified the possibility of private land development on Steens as a serious issue, threatening the unique wilderness qualities that people have come to appreciate and love over so many generations.

To address this issue, Oregon’s delegation agreed to authorize \$25 million for future acquisition of land and conservation easements on Steens. To date, not one dime has been appropriated for that purpose. Granted, it’s not been easy finding money for land acquisition

over the last six years in Congress. And it’s not that Rep. Walden and others in the Oregon delegation haven’t tried. But it was the promise of future funding that lulled some stakeholders, including myself, into believing we would be prepared to deal with this on-going development threat systematically over time.

While I’m confident we can address this threat with the help of our members and supporters, I’m not confident federal funding will be forthcoming given the financial mess Congress is in, irrespective of the power shift in Congress. Regardless, we should all continue to remind our delegation how important Steens Mountain is, and how important it is to keep trying to fulfill their promise from 2000. (see Action Alert, page 5.)

We will all need to pull together to help stop this Measure 37 threat in order to preserve the wild and open spaces of Steens Mountain.



under an infinite sky

By Sarah Ohlson

Hart Mountain volunteers start a day of fence pulling with a hike across an open meadow.

PHOTO: BEN MOON

We stand on the shoulder of a dirt road and listen to the air hiss rapidly from my car's rear tire. It is moments past sunset and seven owls descend upon us in a low circle, silhouetted against the purple, moonless sky like small ghosts. My seventy-pound dog hides reverently behind our legs. How does a person's car come equipped with a spare and a jack but no lug wrench? My travel companions, Ben and Eugénie, are polite enough to refrain from asking this question.

People are expecting us at a campsite five rocky, rutted-out miles away. Hours before, in the last, ideal hours of daylight, we stopped to take photographs at the bird-thronged Warner Valley Wetlands. We are now late.

Our saving grace arrives in the form of Ernest, who owns a working farm in Central California and on summer weekends comes to Hart Mountain to bow hunt. He, too, lacks a lug wrench, but graciously gives me a ride to the campsite where my housemate Erin and her accompanying volunteers are tucked snugly in their tents. Erin works for the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA), a nonprofit organization, and has facilitated a fence pull nearly every week since June. Like the other, more punctual volunteers, Eugénie, Ben and I have made a pilgrimage to Hart Mountain to remove some barbed wire.

The work on these trips is arduous. Volunteers work for eight or nine hours a day under the imperious desert sun (wind, rain, hail), unfastening the wire, rolling it into wreaths and pulling steel posts

SARAH OHLSON is a new ONDA member and a freelance writer on assignment for NAU.

NAU is committed to pushing outdoor apparel to new levels of performance, beauty and sustainability, and to helping create positive change across a range of environments. To read more about these efforts, and to learn how you can join in the dialog and the efforts, visit the Collective section of nau.com, or join them at their blog, The Thought Kitchen (<http://blog.nau.com>)

from the ground. The effect is magic, as stretches of land that were once delineated by rusty sheaths appear untouched. Aesthetics are the least significant aspect to this work, however, as the absence of the fences insures that cattle are unlikely to graze the lands again and indigenous wildlife are spared potential injury from the barbs.

Ben, Eugénie and I are virtual strangers at the beginning of our trip. Our six hours of car time, plus the flat tire adventure, change all that, and soon we make the unexpected discovery that we love one another fiercely, like siblings or war buddies. We are bound by our commonalities, the beauty of our surroundings and the fact that none of us are able to check our cell phone messages for four whole days.

Hart Mountain is a luxurious holiday compared to a typical ONDA trip because, instead of backpacking several miles in to a remote wilderness location, we get to car camp. Also, there are hot springs. For this reason, the trip is the most popular excursion of the season.

When traveling with new people, you discover each other in a way that is different than if the friendships began in the context of every-day life. The natural rhythms of our bodies become obvious when stripped of our normal schedules. In this case, Ben, Eugénie and I learn about one another in the perfect, fragile balance of the desert. I have found a sweetness in their company that is as uncomplicated and strong as the sagebrush.

The profoundness of our particular bond happens often on these trips. I know this because when Erin returns home from her time in the field (always in need of a hot shower, a good night's sleep and some fresh vegetables), she is constantly energized and inspired by the relationships her volunteers form with one another, and the revelations they have about themselves.

Our last night in the refuge, the three of us can't sleep. We make a midnight excursion from our campsite to the hot springs and we are lucky on this night to have them to ourselves. We say nothing for a while, and allow ourselves to be swallowed up by a sky so infinite there is no doubt it's true when one of us, I can't remember whom, says: "I am happy right now."

Louse Canyon Geographic Management Area

On Sept. 14, 2006, ONDA filed suit challenging the BLM's decision to renew five grazing permits and authorize a massive rangeland project on 520,000-acres of public land in the Louse Canyon (West Little Owyhee River) area in the extreme southeast corner of Oregon. The BLM determined that more than half the streams in the LCGMA were not meeting the agency's own riparian watershed function standard, and that 90 percent of the springs/wet meadows were not functioning due to livestock trampling, overgrazing, or dewatering by developments. Rather than reducing grazing, the agency decided to shift grazing slightly away from the "hot season" to the early spring, and to add to the already significant rangeland infrastructure present on the ground in the LCGMA. The project would add more than 70 miles of new barbed-wire fences and pipelines, 10 new watering troughs, 17 new spring developments, and would include upland vegetation "treatment" involving clearing of native sage brush and mechanically drill-seeding more than 3,500 acres of public lands within non-native species. This, in a landscape in which co-plaintiff Western Watersheds Project has documented that only about 25% of the existing rangeland structures on the ground are actually functioning – the rest having been long abandoned following the government's 1960s-era "Vale Project." Throughout the NEPA process, the BLM refused to consider ONDA's wilderness inventory information. Relying on the now-published decision in *ONDA v. Rasmussen* (East-West Gulch Projects case on Beaty Butte), ONDA filed a Temporary Restraining Order motion on Sept. 20, 2006, and the BLM immediately agreed to not implement those parts of the project that would impact ONDA's Willow Creek, Black Butte Addition, and Oregon Butte Addition proposed WSAs. This means about 13 miles of fence and seven miles of pipeline will not go up in ONDA-inventoried wilderness areas this fall.

Horseshoe Basin Fence, Big Juniper Mountain Allotment

Filed Mar. 31, 2006, this case challenged a BLM proposal to build a five-mile long fence on a ridge without considering the project's impacts on ONDA's Juniper Mountain Proposed WSA. ONDA settled the case in August, and key settlement terms included rescission of the fence decision and that the BLM will prepare a new EA which will consider ONDA's wilderness inventory. The settlement also provided for a field trip in which ONDA staff met with BLM staff in September to review allotment conditions and ONDA's inventory area. It was a productive trip in that ONDA had the opportunity to discuss with the BLM in the field how many conditions have changed since the agency's original wilderness inventory in the 1970s. For its part, the BLM indicated its willingness to both consider ONDA's data and conduct more analysis on their own for future projects on the Lakeview District.

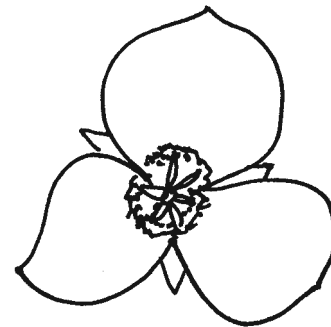
ONDA Delays Development Near Steens

As reported in the last Desert Ramblings, ONDA has been monitoring a project to construct wind testing towers and issue a right-of-way in the Pueblo Mountains, east of Fields. The right-of-way encompasses portions of three of ONDA's Proposed Wilderness Study Areas: Bear Dog Springs, Babes Canyon, and Mahogany Rim. The testing would determine whether the site is feasible for wind power development. While ONDA of course supports more wind energy, we do not believe lands meeting BLM's wilderness criteria are the proper location.

ONDA filed an administrative appeal of the project in September 2006. In response, BLM and the wind company asked the Department of the Interior's Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) for permission to "clean up" the decision to fix some of the legal problems ONDA identified, while keeping the decision in effect. In November, the IBLA instead "vacated" the decision. BLM immediately issued a new decision cleaning up one of the procedural legal problems, but choosing not to address any of ONDA's substantive concerns about wilderness. ONDA will again appeal the new decision to keep development out of areas that deserve wilderness protection.

New BLM grazing regulations enjoined

ONDA's sister group Western Watersheds Project recently received two nationwide injunctions on BLM's new grazing regulations, which will affect Oregon BLM lands. As reported in previous Desert Ramblings, the regulations would substantially weaken citizen participation and increase rancher control over millions of acres of BLM lands. For example, they eliminate public participation before granting permittees "temporary, non-renewable" permits; grant BLM an extra two to three years to correct violations of the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health standards; and grant ranchers shared title of certain range improvements on public land. In a set of two court decisions this summer and fall, Judge Winmill of the District of Idaho enjoined, nationwide, the worst of the provisions of the new regulations, until the merits of the case are decided. Congratulations, WWP.





Bark Brown

Welcome, Bark Brown, General Manager

Bark joined ONDA shortly after moving with his family to Bend from Bologna, Italy. While Bark was born in Ohio, he grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico. His time in New Mexico was interrupted by a four-year stint in Haiti where his parents worked at a local hospital.

He holds a B.A. in communications from the University of Colorado and a law degree from the San Francisco Law School. He also holds a Masters in Taxation from Golden Gate University. After practicing law in the Bay Area for seven years, he moved with his family to Perth, Australia where he worked for an Internet service company for four years.

After a short stint back in Albuquerque, the Brown family moved to Italy for two years where they attempted to master Italian. While living in Italy, Bark took a job as a trustee with a Baltimore-based family trust.

The Browns enjoy hiking, biking and skiing, thus making Bend the ideal spot to settle down in the U.S. Bark is looking forward to exploring central Oregon and skiing Mount Bachelor.



Melanie Leaf and
Jeff Bissonnette

Congratulations, Melanie and Jeff

ONDA would like to thank Melanie Leaf and Jeff Bissonnette for so generously registering their wedding gifts with ONDA! Jeff and Melanie's connection with the desert led them to be married at the Malheur Field Station at the end of this summer and to direct their wedding gifts to help protect the places they love. From all of us here at ONDA, thank you for your dedicated support and **congratulations!**

In Memory of John Soreng

John Soreng, long-time ONDA supporter, passed away November 15, 2006 at the age of 81. John was an avid fly fisherman and generous philanthropist during his lifetime. He and his wife Betty contributed to many groups working to preserve and restore habitat in Oregon, including ONDA. We would like to acknowledge John's support of ONDA over the years and extend our condolences to Betty.

Thank you, Calendar Photographers, Volunteers and Retailers

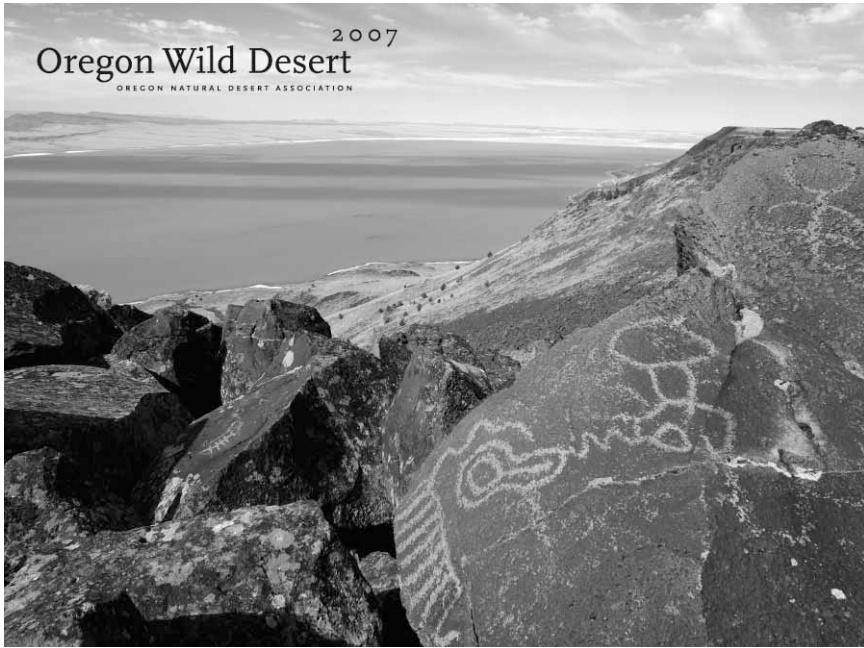
ONDA would like to give a big thank you to everyone involved in creating the 2007 Oregon Wild Desert Calendar. Most notably Greg Burke, Jim Davis, Bruce Jackson, Thomas Osborne, Mike Sequira, and John Vito spent countless hours photo editing, copy writing, and designing the new calendar. Their dedication to ONDA is unparalleled. Once again, we have an incredible collection of photographs exploring eastern Oregon's magnificent landscapes.

We would also like to thank all of the photographers who submitted to the calendar, as well as all of the local and regional business for supporting our cause by selling the calendar. In particular we would like to thank Mirror Pond Gallery for showing the framed photographs at Bend's Fall Art Hop in the beginning of October.

Calendars can be purchased online at www.onda.org, over the phone, through the mail with the order form on the next page, or at one of the many retailers listed below. Framed prints of the calendar photos are also for sale, please call the Bend office to check on availability, 541.330.2638.

BEND RETAILERS SELLING THE 2007 OREGON WILD DESERT CALENDAR

Boomtown	Strictly Organic Coffee	Bambini of Bend
Wild Birds Unlimited	Devoves	Leapin' Lizards
Sunnyside Sports	Westside Video	Healthy Paws
The Bookbarn	Sage Custom Framing	Environmental Building Supply
Pine Mountain Sports	High Desert Museum	REI
Pandora's Backpack/Patagonia	The Curiosity Shoppe	Patagonia (Portland)
Footzone	MirrorPond Gallery	Northwest Natue Shop (Ashland)
Abracadabra	Fly and Field	Willamette University Bookstore
Ranch Records	Paulina Springs Books	(Salem)



Oregon Wild Desert Calendar

The ONDA Market Place is pleased to offer the 2007 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 who contributed work to this calendar are: Greg Burke, Thomas Chamberlain, Mark Chidlaw, Jim Davis, Scott Erickson, Mike Henetz, Bruce Jackson, John Lasseter, Ben Moon, Mike Pajunas, Al St. John and John Vito.

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) \$15
 Men's short sleeve (m, l, xl) \$15
 Long sleeve (m, l, xl) \$18
 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)				
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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



GO FOR A JOY RIDE.

DONATE YOUR OLD CAR TO A GOOD CAUSE: THE ENVIRONMENT

When you donate your old car to the Oregon Natural Desert Association's cars for conservation program, you receive a tax deduction and experience the joy of knowing that you've helped ONDA's effort to restore, defend and protect Oregon's native deserts. Like to know more? Contact Peter Hickok at phickok@onda.org or 541.330.2638



Oregon Natural Desert Association
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Oregon Natural Desert Association

RIMROCK SOCIETY

By joining ONDA's Rimrock Society, Legacy Group, you are helping ensure ONDA's long-term sustainability and the future of desert wildlands in Oregon.

- Yes, I want to learn more about how I can leave an enduring legacy to ONDA.
- I have already established a planned gift for ONDA. Please enroll me in the Rimrock Society, Legacy Group.

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Clip and mail to: Kelly O'Brien, Oregon Natural Desert Association, 16 NW Kansas Ave., Bend, OR 97701



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