

DESERT RAMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

WINTER 2010 EDITION • VOLUME 23, NO. 3

Ramblings

OWYHEE SAGE-GROUSE STRONGHOLD THREATENED BY BLM GRAZING PLAN

By Mac Lacy, *Senior Attorney*

Sixty years ago, some long-time ONDA supporters tell me, an Owyhee country explorer would commonly flush out flocks of Greater Sage-Grouse of up to 50 birds at a time. It wasn't uncommon to see 200 or 300 grouse per visit on a weekend hunting or fishing trip. Jackrabbits bounded away in lower elevation flats at a rate of one per minute.

This was before the Bureau of Land Management cleared hundreds of thousands of acres of native sagebrush as part of the Vale Rangeland Project in the 1960s and 1970s. It was before BLM a decade ago identified severe ecological damage from livestock grazing to Louse Canyon's fragile desert streams, springs, and wet meadows. Today, the visitor who travels deep into this remote and wild landscape may chance upon a small flock of six or eight of these iconic birds on a lucky day.

The sage-grouse has become a symbol for conserving sagebrush ecosystem
see **SAGE-GROUSE** page 4

FROM THE OUTBACK

From the Outback Headline



*Male sage-grouse
displaying at lek.*

see **FROM THE OUTBACK** page 12



An Energetic ONDA Enjoys Success in 2010

By Helen Harbin
President

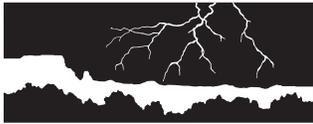


FROM
THE DEN

The year 2010 has been a fantastic year for Oregon's high desert. It started in February when Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley introduced the Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven Wilderness Act of 2010. This proposal is progressing through the Senate and is poised to protect over 18,000 acres of Wilderness and expand public ownership along the John Day River. In other areas of the state, ONDA's wilderness campaigns in Central Oregon and the Owyhee Canyonlands are gaining momentum towards permanently protecting millions of acres of Oregon's high desert. New support from the Wildlife Conservation Society will allow us to expand our efforts with other groups to restore and protect critical wildlife habitat in the Greater Hart-Sheldon region.

ONDA continues to chalk up legal victories; a couple of which are significantly furthering efforts towards native fish recovery in the John Day Basin and beyond. And ONDA's members continue to turn out in record numbers to work on restoration and stewardship projects throughout Eastern Oregon. Financially, ONDA continues to be strong in spite of a tough economy thanks to members like you. To find out how you can continue to support ONDA's efforts, please check out our year-end campaign on page 7.

Here's to more successes for Oregon's high desert in 2011!



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**ONDA exists
to protect, defend,
and restore the
health of Oregon's
native deserts for
present and future
generations.**





Dave Jensen, Peter Bray – Two Who Walk the Talk

By Jefferson Jacobs

Wilderness Stewardship Coordinator

The strength of ONDA is in its members. They are truly not ones content to sit idly by and let their precious landscapes be trampled. No, on the contrary, ONDA members **do** something to protect these precious areas. It is this “action”, this “doing”, that makes ONDA so effective. It is a frequent theme in my *Desert Ramblings* articles to describe ONDA volunteers “walking the talk”. These folks get out in the field, work to exhaustion in the heat of eastern Oregon, get scratched by barbed wire, and get blisters from hiking to remote work sites: and they love it. Working with these volunteers all summer, and seeing their commitment, is inspirational. Members also join us in the office and volunteer hundreds of hours on projects that help ONDA achieve its mission. These volunteers toil happily at very unglamorous tasks: stuffing envelopes, uploading photos and cataloguing data. We appreciate all of their hard work, and work hard to let them know how critical their contributions are. However, there are other ways members show their true colors, and we would like to recognize and thank ONDA members Dave Jensen and Peter Bray!

Recently, ONDA was approached by a permittee who was considering the retirement of a 3,938 acre grazing allotment that encompassed the Juniper Woodlands recreation area immediately to the north of the new Oregon Badlands Wilderness Area. This area includes hiking trails, lava formation and ancient junipers. Thanks to a donation by Dave Jensen, ONDA was able to purchase this grazing allotment and because of ONDA’s earlier efforts with the BLM, this allotment has been administratively retired for good. This neighbor of the Badlands is now available for quiet recreation without conflicts with cattle, and its fragile ecosystem will be allowed to recover.

In a similar situation within the Diablo Peak Wilderness Study Area in southeastern Oregon, ONDA was approached by an owner of a key inholding. The owner had an offer to sell this linchpin property to a developer, but preferred to sell it to an environmental group. ONDA member Peter Bray donated the funds necessary to purchase the critical piece of land. Thanks to his timely donation, this area can be restored to its wild state, and the Diablo Peaks Wilderness proposal can be expanded to include nearly 83,000 acres!

Both these members responded to extremely short notice calls for help from ONDA. It is fantastic to know that when necessary, ONDA can count on its members to step up and help. Clearly ONDA members know what it takes to get work done, to protect the places and ecosystems they love. Nearly 2,000 strong, ONDA members have made things happen for over 20 years now, and will continue for as long as they are needed into the future!

Special Thanks to Bend Office Volunteers!

ONDA relies heavily upon volunteer involvement for many of its operations to run efficiently and effectively. The Bend office has been a beehive of volunteer activity the past six months, with volunteers completing a steady flow of projects each week. These volunteers graciously help with anything from stuffing envelopes, to uploading photos, to in-depth GIS work. In appreciation for all their hard work, we would like to send out a big **thank you** to the following volunteers for their generous contribution of time (over 300 hours to date this year!) and effort to the protection of Oregon’s deserts. Thanks, everyone, for your dedication and enthusiasm!

Candace Baker
Manasi Bhandare
Joe Checketts
Ruth Clark

Emily Conant
Jeff Hancock
Hannah Hinman
Miriam Lipsitz

Karen Parker
Nathalie Pehna
Keith Spernak
Bill Sterner

ONDA Celebrates Return of Desert Conference

By Devon Comstock

Development Assistant

Since 1978, conservation partners have been gathering at Desert Conference to share information about how to best protect the vast, diverse and spectacular deserts of the West. We are happy to announce that after a six-year absence, ONDA and a number of conservation partners (The Peradam Foundation, The Wilderness Society, The Sierra Club-High Desert Committee, Hells Canyon Preservation Council and the Conservation Lands Foundation) rallied together to host Desert Conference XXV in the John Day Basin.

In late September over 100 desert enthusiasts joined us for a stimulating and entertaining Desert Conference. Author, Craig Childs gave an evocative and poetic presentation on water in the world’s deserts, giving us pause to consider the tipping point at which we become defined by the lack of water and how water shapes our lives and landscape. Craig described it like this, “This dry landscape is in a rain shadow. The desert is a shadow of rain”. We also enjoyed the charismatic conservationist, Ed Norton Sr. who reminded us that our efforts are not for naught and despite the challenges of conservation, in the United States there is actually a mechanism in which citizens, organizations and policy makers can engage and affect real change.

Most importantly Desert Conference gave attendees an opportunity to unite with other desert enthusiasts and advocates. Panels offered presentations from experts in their fields and opportunities for discussion and idea sharing amongst professionals and grassroots activists. The ability to combine people from different walks of life and unite them in a common goal of preserving the deserts of the West was most apparent when we enjoyed Peter Illyn’s inspirational sermon highlighting the theology of conservation and the idea that man is responsible for the stewardship of God’s creation, the Earth. Peter’s group, Restoring Eden aims to challenge the Dominionist theology and encourage the concept of “Creation Care” within the modern Christian dogma.

ONDA would like to thank all of the Desert Conference participants, especially our star volunteers who worked very hard helping to feed us and clean up after meal times. We couldn’t have done it alone and we are grateful to our partners for helping to bring Desert Conference back.

The future of Desert Conference will depend on the participation of leaders in the conservation arena as well as engaged advocates, like you. ONDA hopes to continue to hold Desert Conference biannually, with the next one in the fall of 2012. If you would like to participate in the planning of Desert Conference or offer suggestions or support of any kind, please contact us at onda@onda.org or 541-330-2638.





OWYHEE SAGE-GROUSE STRONGHOLD THREATENED BY BLM GRAZING PLAN

SAGE-GROUSE from page 1

upon which it depends year-round for roosting, cover and food. Sadly, loss and fragmentation of sagebrush habitat has left the Sage-Grouse in danger of going extinct. At the heart of one of two remaining strongholds of sagebrush habitat in North America, an area essential to the survival of the Sage-Grouse, is Louse Canyon in remote southeast Oregon.

In 2001, BLM determined that the domestic livestock grazing it allows each year within this half-million acre area of public land is causing widespread damage to streams, natural springs, and wet meadows. Rather than reduce that grazing, BLM issued a plan in March 2010 to continue to allow thousands of cattle to roam the area each year, consuming native plants and exposing bare soil. To prop up unchanged numbers of cattle, BLM's plan calls for building more than 70 combined miles of barbed-wire fences and water pipelines strung across the landscape, pumping water away from natural springs and piping it to cattle troughs and into storage tanks, and mowing native sagebrush to provide more grass for the cattle to eat.

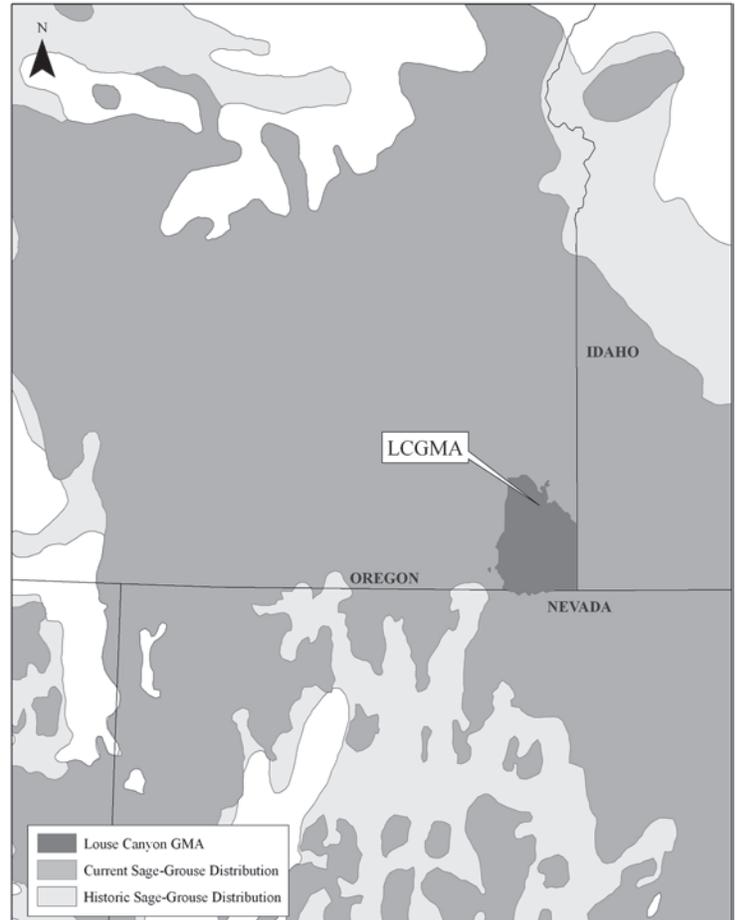
The Louse Canyon grazing plan threatens Sage-Grouse by expanding the number of "sacrifice zones" of cattle concentration surrounding new range projects that fragment core Sage-Grouse habitat, by installing barbed-wire fences that will snag and kill low-flying Sage-Grouse and provide artificial perches for predators, by increasing a significant new mortality risk through construction of artificial livestock watering places that will provide vectors for West Nile virus-bearing mosquitoes, and by shifting the impacts of the grazing into the mating, nesting, and brood-rearing habitat that is essential to the Sage-Grouse's survival.

When it first proposed this plan in 2005, BLM acknowledged many of these likely significant impacts to Sage-Grouse, yet concluded Sage-Grouse would be "substantially protected" by the new plan. But in the five years between the time BLM prepared its environmental analysis, and March 2010 when BLM finally adopted the challenged plan, significant new information has emerged concerning the plight of the Sage-Grouse and its ever-shrinking habitat. In November 2009, the U.S. Geological Survey released a comprehensive scientific monograph that assembles the latest research on Sage-Grouse and sagebrush ecosystems.

Based on the monograph, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ("FWS") then determined that the Sage-Grouse is in danger of extinction and warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act, reversing its own decision from five years earlier. The FWS explained that the scientific community's understanding of the status of the species and its threats had changed substantially since 2005. Sage-Grouse expert Dr. David Dobkin, Ph.D., has explained in papers we recently filed with the Court that scientists now understand that Sage-Grouse are affected by habitat disturbance at far greater spatial scales than previously understood.

The BLM, however, rather than update its stale environmental analysis, claims this information is "nothing new," declining to update its 2005 analysis and issuing a grazing plan essentially identical to the one it proposed five years ago.

Louse Canyon GMA and Greater Sage-Grouse Distribution (NW)



Louse Canyon is at the heart of one of two remaining Sage-Grouse strongholds in North America. Map by Craig Miller, ONDA

The Greater Sage-Grouse

The Sage-Grouse is 22 to 30 inches tall and can weigh up to six pounds. Males are larger than females and feature a white chest and black throat, which they puff out as part of an extravagant mating display each spring. Sage-Grouse are sagebrush obligates, meaning that they depend on sagebrush year round. The sagebrush ecosystem features sagebrush in the overstory, native grasses and forbs in the understory, and biological soil crusts filling interspaces between vegetation. .

Every spring, Sage-Grouse move to breeding areas known as leks to perform their famous mating dance. Sage-Grouse have strong fidelity to lek locations, returning for generations to the same spot. In southeast Oregon, the lek season runs from early/mid-March to the end of April. In establishing leks, Sage-Grouse prefer sites with extensive cover of low grasses, surrounded by taller sagebrush.



OWYHEE SAGE-GROUSE STRONGHOLD THREATENED BY BLM GRAZING PLAN

After mating, the hen moves away from the lek to establish a nest. The nesting season in southeast Oregon runs from about the beginning of April to the end of May. Successful nesting is critical because the Sage-Grouse has one of the lowest reproductive rates of any North American game bird, and its populations are not able to recover from low numbers as quickly as other upland bird species. Nests established under taller stands of sagebrush are the most successful because these stands provide scent, visual, and physical barriers to potential predators.

Hatching and early brood-rearing of chicks generally occurs during May and June, while late brood-rearing occurs during July and August. The hen and chicks require high quality forbs, which are herbaceous flowering plants other than grasses (e.g., wildflowers). Forbs provide good nutrition for the hen, increasing her chances of successfully hatching and raising her chicks. An herbaceous understory provides greater access to forbs and to insects, which

the hen and chicks also consume.

During summer months, Sage-Grouse move to wetter sites like natural springs and wet meadows, as these areas will have good forb cover. In the fall, Sage-Grouse migrate to higher-elevation winter sites, gradually eating fewer forbs and more sagebrush, until they are eating almost exclusively sagebrush by December.

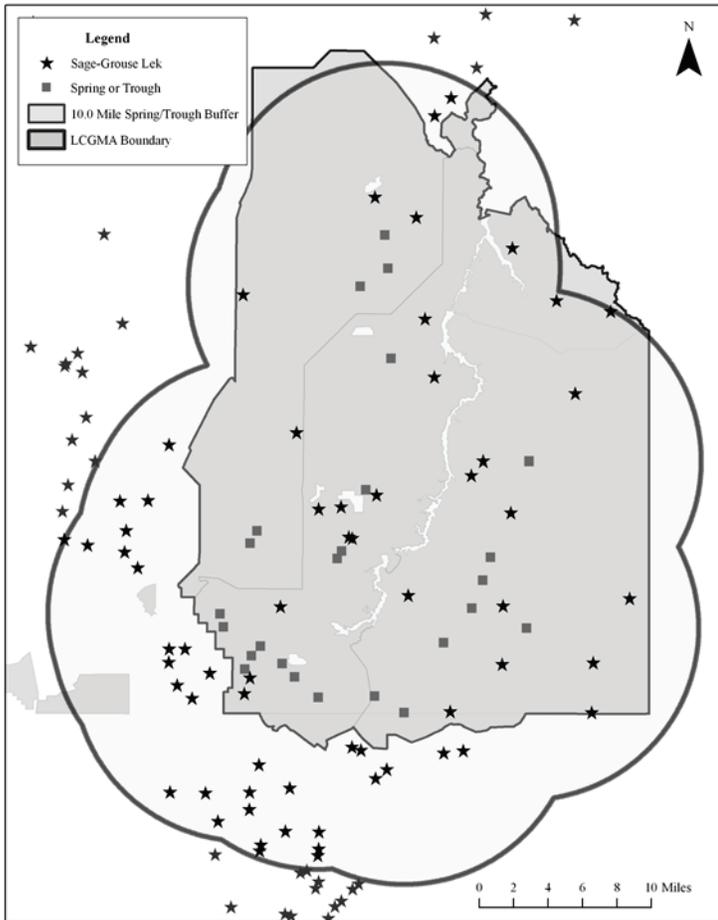
Once numbering between 1.6 and 16 million birds ranging across 13 western states and 3 Canadian provinces, Sage-Grouse numbers have declined severely over the last 50 years. Today, they occupy only half of their historical range. Oregon Sage-Grouse populations and sagebrush habitats comprise about 20% of today's range wide distribution of the species. For this reason, management actions in Oregon have "implications on a rangewide scale" for the species. Between 1965 and 2007, Sage-Grouse populations range-wide, including in Oregon, declined by 2–3% per year. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife ("ODFW") estimates that the state-wide population of Sage-Grouse in Oregon fell from 40,000 birds to 29,000 between 2003 and 2009. The drop within BLM's Jordan and Malheur Resource Areas has been even more precipitous, from about 15,700 birds in 2003 to between 6,869 and 8,535 in 2009 – thus, only half as many Sage-Grouse are now thought to be present in this at-risk Sage-Grouse stronghold as there were just six years earlier when BLM first developed its grazing plan for Louse Canyon.

Sagebrush is one of the most imperiled ecosystems in North America. Among the myriad threats to Sage-Grouse habitat are altered and unnatural fire regimes, the spread of non-native weeds and grasses, climate change, road networks, energy development and transmission corridors, and other land use issues including urban development and agriculture.

Habitat fragmentation is the main cause of the decline of Sage-Grouse populations because the species requires large expanses of contiguous, unfragmented sagebrush. Livestock grazing can seriously degrade Sage-Grouse habitat and exacerbate many of the most significant threats to Sage-Grouse. For example, grazing can degrade nesting and brood-rearing habitat by decreasing

see **SAGE-GROUSE** page 6

LCGMA Proposed Trough and Spring Water Developments with 10-mile West Nile Virus Risk Buffer



The dozens of artificial water sources BLM requires to prop up existing cattle numbers leave Sage-Grouse throughout the entire Louse Canyon area – and then some – vulnerable to West Nile virus-carrying mosquitoes. Map by Craig Miller, ONDA.

This lawsuit, which we filed with our partner Western Watersheds Project, already has caused BLM to re-inventory Louse Canyon for wilderness values. In 2008, the agency agreed with our citizen inventory report that more than 112,000 acres of public land beyond existing Wilderness Study Areas possess wilderness character as defined by Congress in the Wilderness Act of 1964. Yet despite that important determination, the agency continues to press forward with its ill-conceived grazing and range construction plan. Through this next phase of the litigation, we aim to achieve a court order suspending further implementation of BLM's plan, directing removal of or mitigation for already-implemented projects, and requiring BLM to prepare a lawful plan and environmental analysis – most importantly, one that protects Sage-Grouse and this threatened Sage-Grouse stronghold in one of the most special places in eastern Oregon.



OWYHEE SAGE-GROUSE STRONGHOLD THREATENED BY BLM GRAZING PLAN

SAGE-GROUSE from page 5

vegetation. Cattle compact soils, consume native plants, increase soil erosion, and increase the proliferation of exotic plant species including cheatgrass, a rapidly spreading non-native grass that is replacing sagebrush.

Beyond grazing's direct effects, the infrastructure necessary to manage large herds of cattle in the desert also degrades sagebrush habitat. For example, massive systems of fencing constructed to manage domestic livestock can cause direct mortality to Sage-Grouse in addition to degrading and fragmenting habitats. Fencing is a mortality threat for Sage-Grouse because the low-flying birds collide with barbed-wire fences, leading to injury or death. One Wyoming study recently documented 146 Sage-Grouse deaths on a 4.7-mi. stretch of fence over a 19-month period. The threat is especially acute around leks and riparian areas. Fences also provide artificial perches for predators like golden eagles and ravens. Sage-Grouse avoid habitat adjacent to fences even if the actual habitat is not yet removed.

Likewise, livestock water developments artificially concentrate cattle in important Sage-Grouse habitats, thereby exacerbating impacts such as heavy grazing and vegetation trampling in those

areas. Diverting water from natural springs also dries up riparian areas next to streams and in wet meadows, in some cases completely eliminating these habitats that are important to Sage-Grouse as sources of forbs or insects.

The warm, stagnant water in livestock reservoirs and troughs—and even in cattle hoof prints—also acts as a mosquito breeding ground, facilitating the spread of West Nile virus. Sage-Grouse are highly susceptible to West Nile virus, with resultant high levels of mortality. Individual mosquitoes can fly more than 11 miles from these water sources. Dr. Dobkin explains BLM's plan leaves virtually every acre of the half-million acre Louse Canton GMA susceptible to this major mortality threat.

Sage-Grouse in the Louse Canyon GMA

Louse Canyon is a vital stronghold for Sage-Grouse. The entire half-million acre GMA is classified as yearlong Sage-Grouse habitat. There are 28 Sage-Grouse leks and lek complexes within the GMA. The area has one of the highest numbers and densities of leks in southeast Oregon. There are dozens more leks surrounding the GMA and therefore affected by management actions within it.

Greater Sage-Grouse Under Threat – You Can Help

By Liz Nysson

Climate Change Coordinator

The Greater Sage-Grouse epitomizes the special needs of wildlife in our sagebrush steppe, high desert system. They rely on the nutrient rich sagebrush forbs for food, and use the brush for nesting and protection from predators. Unlike other large chicken-like birds (in the family called Galiform), Sage-Grouse have a non-muscular gizzard and therefore cannot eat seeds or other hard plant material. In addition, Sage-Grouse do not like tall structures such as trees and power-lines, and tend to avoid nesting and breeding close to them. Structures signify perches for raptor, a type of species that will prey on Sage-Grouse. This reliance on low lying habitat and soft forbs makes the Sage-Grouse a true sagebrush obligate, a species that only lives in sagebrush habitat.

Recently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that the Sage-Grouse is “warranted, but precluded” under the Endangered Species Act. Meaning, the Sage-Grouse warrants protection due to the severe declines in population range-wide, but they are precluded for the formal endangered species listing because there are other species in more dire need for protection. Therefore, the Sage-Grouse is considered a “candidate species” and the Service will review its status annually as long as it still warrants protection.

We feel the State is obliged to create policies and procedures that will help the federal government protect the integrity of the species. According to Sightline Institute, populations of the bird are “below their historic abundance” and “probably less than 25% of historical numbers.” The low population numbers and threat of additional habitat loss in the State make this an issue of great importance and a priority for Oregon's policy makers and State

authorities regulating development which could fragment critical Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.

With declines in a species that indicates the health of our sagebrush steppe systems, it is imperative the State of Oregon take steps to preserve this habitat so that the Sage-Grouse is not listed as endangered and all sagebrush obligate species are protected. In an effort to protect the species and meet U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requirements, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife released a draft plan to protect the most important Sage-Grouse habitat in the State based on core-habitat mapping.

Although we hope the final plan is more protective and has measures in place to recover the population, we strongly support the use of science to create the plan. We also support the designation of category one habitat in places that are most important to nesting, breeding, and connectivity. Category one areas are no development zones, and category two and three habitat (also seen as “essential habitat”) will have restrictions and required mitigation. With an expanding renewable energy market in our high desert, this policy creates common sense limits on development so that renewable energy in Oregon is truly green.

The ODFW Commission has decided to delay adoption of the ODFW sage grouse management plan by 6 to 8 months because outside groups, such as wind-industry advocates, feel the mapping is too restrictive and the process was not inclusive. ONDA and many other environmental groups feel it is a common-sense plan based on peer-reviewed science that should be adopted immediately. Now is the time to write to the ODFW Commission and tell them we need a plan now so that we can ensure this special desert species is not lost forever.



CONSERVATION DESERVES MORE THAN 2%*

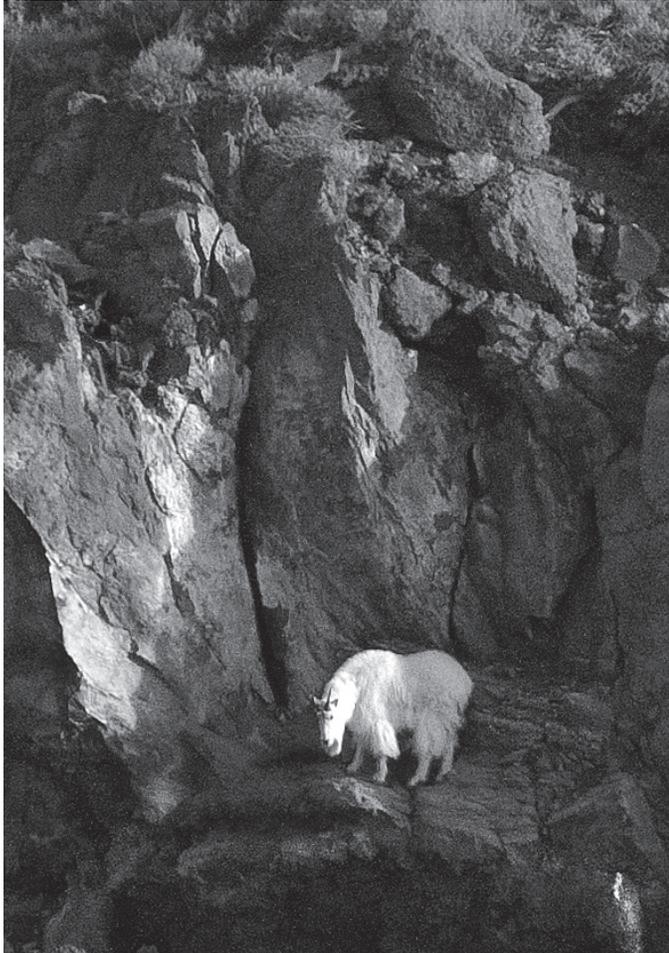


PHOTO © BRIAN OUIMETTE

Mountain goat in the Oregon Badlands Wilderness, March 2009.

We asked our members: Why do you believe conservation deserves more than 2%*?

"I believe it is vital that ONDA continues its seemingly solitary effort to preserve and protect Oregon's desert landscape. The desert's silence can only be preserved with a loud and aggressive voice that keeps its preservation issues in the public forum."

– Jim Davis

"As a member of ONDA for eleven years now, my affiliation is as meaningful to me now as it was when I first joined. Coming from the Midwest, where public land doesn't exist anymore, I love contributing to this highly effective organization whose mission is to preserve and protect Oregon's desert wilderness. As a volunteer, I love that I feel part of the action and that I am appreciated for what I do."

– Miriam Lipsitz

"ONDA is important to our family because it gives us an opportunity to teach our kids about volunteer service and being part of the wilderness. It's important for children to learn the value of volunteering and working to protect the places they care about. Plus it's a whole lot of fun."

– Alan Hickenbottom

Help ONDA raise \$60,000

to meet our Earth Friends Challenge Goal

Member contributions translate to real conservation in Oregon's precious high desert. With your investment ONDA has been able to continue to work to increase Oregon's desert wilderness areas, restore degraded streams, remove barbed-wire fence, and be a watchdog for fragile wildlife and landscapes.

Since 2008 Earth Friends Challenge Grants have increased the value of member donations by making an extra gift to further ONDA's mission. Help us meet the \$60,000 challenge by making a donation or giving a gift membership to someone who cares about Oregon's deserts today.

* Of the \$308 billion donated in the United States in 2008, only 2% went to environmental conservation. Source: Giving USA Report.





Essense of Wilderness: The Owyhee Uplands

By Chris Hansen
Owyhee Coordinator

The uplands portion of the Owyhee Canyonlands meets all the requirements of Wilderness, but one characteristic stands out the most: opportunities for solitude. The plateaus in the Southeast corner of Oregon stretch to the horizon, unveiling miles of rolling sagebrush and native grasses where antelope and wild horses run on untrammled ground. The absence of mankind within this place is startling – I have been seated for hours in a low-flying airplane over this area and not seen a single man or machine.

Although the romantic notion of solitude permeates our ideas of wilderness and the west, attempts to objectively define “out there” are difficult to grasp. Such is the blessing and challenge of the three Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within the Owyhee Uplands: Lookout Butte WSA; Upper West Little Owyhee WSA; and Lower Owyhee Canyon WSA. These areas are untrammled (BLM estimates that 94% of the area is unaffected by mankind or development) and far from the established access points for recreation that characterize the Lower Owyhee. There are essentially two places for a hiker to access the untouched and pristine canyons: Anderson Crossing in the far south and Three Forks to the north.

The combined acreage of these three WSAs is 238,000 acres and they represent a good portion of the land in the Southeast Oregon deserving protection. More importantly these areas represent the wilderness ideal: places where the plant and animal communities of the Owyhee ecosystem can flourish without human interference.

If one looks at a map of the nearly 9 million acres of desert watersheds that make up the Owyhee ecosystem it becomes apparent that nature has little respect for political boundaries. This paradox is evident in the air, as there is no way to know when one crosses from the 269,000 acre Owyhee River Wilderness in Idaho, to the Burnt River drainage in Nevada, to the Lookout Butte WSA in Oregon. All areas should hold the Wilderness designation. The threatened Sage Grouse finds vital habitat on both sides of the border. Pronghorn also use the vast stretch as a corridor, along with mule deer, white-tailed jackrabbits, and the nation’s largest population of California bighorn sheep.

As our society grows ever outward these corridors remain the last greatest hope for the survival of iconic plants and animals. The Upper Owyhee is one of the few remaining areas whose size allows for the advancement and proliferation of wildness. The shallow draws, low rolling hills and scattered rims have hosted mankind, but not embraced him. As Wallace Stegner once said, “We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.”



Cathedral Rock, Horse Heaven Await Hearing

PHOTO: TYLER ROEMER

Proposed Horse Heaven Wilderness Area in the John Day Basin.

By Aaron Killgore
John Day Coordinator

The Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven Wilderness Act of 2010 awaits a full hearing in the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, a critical step in preparing the bill to become law. Since a subcommittee hearing in April, ONDA has worked with stakeholders, committee staff, and Senators Wyden’s and Merkley’s offices to help address any remaining concerns for the designation of these two unique areas. As a result, over 1,500 additional acres have been added to Horse Heaven, and several key boundary adjustments were made to help improve management by BLM.

The consolidation and wilderness designation of Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven will address access and management problems with the historic checkerboard pattern of public and private lands. Over 100 years ago, the Federal Government awarded private contractors every odd numbered section of Bureau of Reclamation (now BLM) land as payment for the construction of the Dalles-Canyon City Military Road. These parcels were later aggregated by the Prineville Land and Cattle Company to form the Big Muddy Ranch, which was infamously occupied by the Guru Rashnish (Osho) in the 1980s.

ONDA’s outreach coordinator, Jefferson Jacobs, led volunteers this summer on a rafting trip to the Cathedral Rock proposed wilderness area to gather information for future restoration work for fence removal, route rehabilitation and weed mapping. He reports that “there are a couple of simple restoration projects we can work on out there, but the Cathedral Rocks area is one of those rare places that is in great shape, with very few human and livestock impacts. The scenery and isolation speak for themselves and are well worth the trip.”

The timeline for markup and passage of the Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven Wilderness Act of 2010 as well as 14 other conservation areas throughout the country will be difficult to predict. ONDA and other wilderness advocates are asking our congressional leaders to support an omnibus package similar to the Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009, which included Spring Basin Wilderness Area and the Badlands Wilderness Area.

Your voice can help make a difference

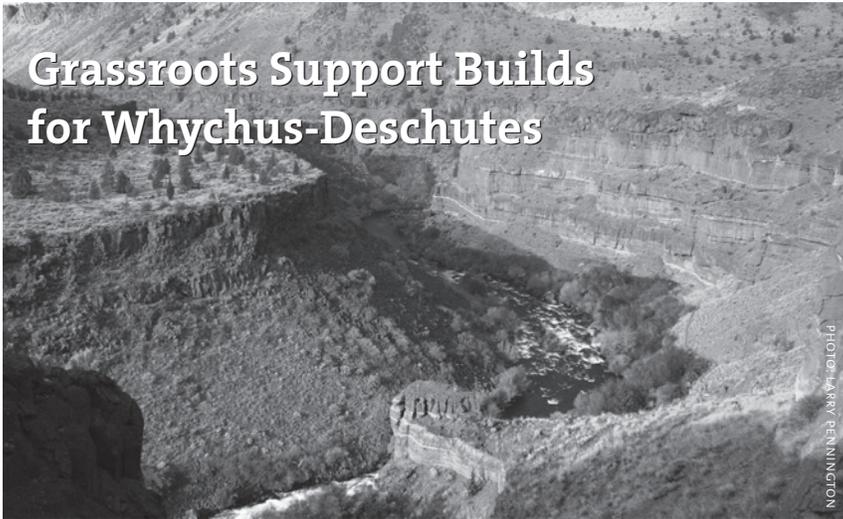
Please write Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley to thank them for their continued support for Cathedral Rock, Horse Heaven and future Oregon desert wilderness areas. Please ask U.S. Representative Greg Walden to introduce legislation in the House. You can do both by e-mail from this page on the ONDA website:

onda.org/defending-desert-wilderness/john-day-wilderness

If you would like more information on how to further contribute to wilderness campaigns in the John Day Basin, please contact Aaron Killgore at akillgore@onda.org.



Grassroots Support Builds for Whychus-Deschutes



Scout Camp Trail in the Whychus-Deschutes Canyon

By Gena Goodman-Campbell
Wilderness Coordinator

The leaves are changing out at Alder Springs on Whychus Creek, creating a colorful canvas out of the canyon bottom. As winter approaches, we are gaining momentum on our campaign to permanently protect this beautiful area as a part of the Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness. Over the past few months, we have made substantial progress in our efforts to reach out to landowners surrounding Wilderness proposal. We have forged strong allegiances with several landowners at Crooked River Ranch (CRR) and hosted three information sessions in supporters' homes which were attended by a total of 50 landowners from around CRR. Primarily, the goal of the information sessions is to share the draft wilderness proposal with adjacent landowners, answer questions and get feedback on potential conflicts related to existing uses of the area and adjacent lands. However, these meetings have also served as a tool to recruit and further engage supporters, volunteers and new ONDA members.

Our outreach at CRR has resulted in a growing list of dozens of supporters, as well as the involvement of volunteers who have attended meetings with landowners outside CRR, held meetings in their homes, distributed information to friends and neighbors, collected petition signatures and advised us on strategy for the campaign. We want to take the opportunity to welcome all of these new volunteers and members to the ONDA family and thank them for all of the work they are doing to help protect the land in their backyard!

In addition to our landowner outreach at CRR, We have now met with about 90% of the major landowners surrounding the Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Proposal. Many of these landowners have extensive agricultural development on their land and hold grazing permits on the few small allotments within the wilderness proposal that remain open. Of the 15 major landowners in the area, three are ideologically opposed to the wilderness proposal due to concerns about access and increasing government encroachment. We will continue to meet with these landowners with the goal of convincing them that the wilderness proposal can be in their best interests. If these landowners can come to see the ways that wilderness can benefit them, we hope to at least neutralize their opposition and begin the process of gaining the support of local elected officials next spring.

On November 6, a hearty group of volunteers braved the crisp fall weather to check up on the progress of our restoration work at Scout Camp trail overlooking the confluence of Whychus Creek and the Middle Deschutes. We are happy to report that the plantings we did to camouflage the old road really took off thanks to the wet spring, and this area is now well on its way to reverting back to a more healthy natural state. With the restoration that volunteers from ONDA, Trout Unlimited and Crooked River Ranch have accomplished, we are now able to include this area in the Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness proposal for permanent protection.

Private Land: New Frontier for Restoration Efforts

By Alexa Bontrager,
Restoration Coordinator

Until recently, the conservation and restoration projects into which the volunteers and staff of ONDA have directed their efforts have focused on public lands. However, much private property also has great conservation and restoration value. For example, the majority of the John Day Basin with its critical native fish habitat is under private ownership. Our restoration activities on private property have been limited to areas soon to become public, such as the future Cottonwood Canyon State Park. However, we now have opportunities to work on private land with receptive landowners.

This past spring, ONDA embarked on its first on-the-ground, private restoration project. A landowner in the Bridge Creek watershed worked with us to develop a restoration plan and secure its funding. Thanks to the combination of a rainy late spring, an excess of live willow and cottonwood stakes as well as rooted alder, and the time and effort of agency personnel involved in Bridge Creek restoration, we were able to complete a preliminary round of riparian planting. Subsequent steps in the restoration plan, such as erosion control and fence repair, are ongoing, with the main riparian planting effort slated for spring 2011. The proximity of the property to areas along Bridge Creek focal to restoration efforts of the National Marine Fisheries Service and the National Park Service not only allows their participation in the project but also gives them a stake in working to ensure its success.

Since then, we have collaborated with additional landowners to develop further restoration projects on private property. Our volunteers will be instrumental to the success of these projects; and these opportunities are included among the numerous volunteer trips for the upcoming year.

One example of this is our Cherry Creek project. The creek is a Lower John Day tributary that has numerous restoration actions recommended for steelhead recovery. It was recently fenced to exclude cattle, and the landowner would like to revegetate damaged riparian areas. Another project is at Job Creek, a Burnt River tributary. Riparian plantings are one way in which the landowner is seeking to improve water quality to a system that includes rainbow and cutthroat trout. Both of these are exciting opportunities for our volunteers to make a difference to the recovery of native fish at sites that are new to ONDA projects.

Expanding our restoration program to private property has been a big and important step for ONDA. Armed with the strength of our volunteers, we plan to build on our successes in these initial private restoration projects to gain further such opportunities. There is much more work to do to restore areas key to the recovery of native fish and other species in Oregon. With the extension of our reach to private property, ONDA is better poised to make a substantial impact on the recovery of these species and their habitats.



LEGAL DOCKET

Greater Hart-Sheldon Conservation Fund

In July, ONDA entered into a landmark agreement creating the Greater Hart-Sheldon Conservation Fund in lieu of opposing construction of the Ruby Pipeline. The Conservation Fund agreement will support protection for species and habitat in the area around the Hart Mountain and Sheldon Refuges. It is one of two agreements between Ruby and environmental groups under which the natural gas pipeline company will donate more than \$20 million over the next 10 years to preserve lands and wildlife habitat and retire grazing permits near the pipeline's route. The Greater Hart-Sheldon Conservation Fund will create restoration and conservation opportunities in critical sage-grouse and pronghorn habitat in the 5 million acres of southeastern Oregon and northwestern Nevada encompassing the Refuges.

The fund will purchase private inholdings on and near the refuges from willing buyers, promote restoration activities such as spring restoration, fence removal, riparian exclosures, invasive species control, and habitat improvements, and fund retirement of livestock grazing permits on a willing-seller basis. Protecting the area around the Hart Mountain and Sheldon Refuges is critical to ensuring the survival of high desert species like sage-grouse and pronghorn antelope. Establishing the Greater Hart-Sheldon Conservation Fund will create restoration and conservation opportunities on critical habitat spanning over 5 million acres. ONDA has been working to protect this region for over 20 years, particularly through fence removal efforts on the Hart Mountain Refuge, and the Fund ensures that this work can continue for the next decade.

Southeast Oregon, Lakeview Resource Management

ONDA entered into a settlement agreement with BLM this year that successfully concludes 15 years of watch-dogging these two land use plans that govern nearly eight million acres of public land in southeast Oregon. In 2008, we won a landmark decision in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals when that court held that BLM must, when preparing a land use plan, study impacts to wilderness like any other resource on the public lands. This includes citizen inventory information that ONDA and others provide to the agency. This year, we wrapped up a final settlement in that case that requires BLM to re-inventory roadless areas on these eight million acres of land for wilderness character, to consider additional grazing alternatives for wilderness-quality lands, and to study closing wilderness-quality areas to off-road vehicle use. In initial comments submitted over the summer, ONDA also asked BLM to re-evaluate these plans' effects to sage-grouse populations and habitat in these important sage-grouse strongholds.

Horseshoe Meadow and Juniper Mountain

In October, and for the third time since 2006, ONDA once again challenged BLM's plan to build a 5-mile fence up the ridgeline and through an ancient, protected juniper stand on Juniper Mountain, an isolated, horseshoe-shaped mountain about 50 miles west of Frenchglen. We successfully blocked this wildlife- and wilderness-damaging project via a federal court lawsuit in 2006 and again via an administrative appeal in 2008. Although ongoing grazing has severely damaged Horseshoe Meadow, BLM's plan allows the grazing to continue and at the same time fails to recognize the outstanding wilderness values present in ONDA's 68,000-acre proposed wilderness area that encompasses the mountain and surrounding sagebrush habitat.

Steens Mountain Wind Energy

In September, ONDA and 12 coalition partners submitted extensive comments on BLM's draft environmental impact statement for the transmission line to a 200-turbine wind development proposed on Steens Mountain. BLM is considering a 29-mile line that would cross the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and a 44-mile line slicing across northern Steens Mountain. If built, the transmission line and wind turbines would disrupt dozens of square miles of sagebrush habitat, wipe out important sage-grouse populations and decimate local populations of Golden Eagles and Peregrine Falcons. The industrial-scale development would forever change the character of Steens Mountain and destroy its ecological integrity. A final decision on a route is due by the end of this year. ONDA will continue to lead the coalition opposing this ill-conceived, poorly-sited and environmentally-destructive project.

Illegal Roads on Steens Mountain

In August, BLM agreed in a settlement with ONDA to close and rehabilitate roads illegally constructed in 2009 within a protected area on Steens Mountain, in order to restore fragile, largely unfragmented, sagebrush habitat. ONDA had filed suit after discovering that BLM had widened and built roads and bulldozed ancient juniper trees and sagebrush—all without conducting any environmental study ahead of time. BLM's project threatened to establish illegal driving on the iconic desert mountain, destroy proposed and existing wilderness areas, fragment vital wildlife habitat and open the mountain to weed infestations. Prior to BLM's actions, some of the routes had been naturally reclaimed by native grasses and sagebrush after decades of little or no use.

Under the agreement, the agency will close three route segments to protect a large, unfragmented roadless area adjacent to the Wilderness Area. BLM will then rehabilitate the rest of the routes by narrowing them, eliminating most constructed ditches, redistributing soil and rocks, reseeding with native seed, manually relocating native plants in disturbed areas and removing downed juniper trees.

The agreement also calls for several years of no livestock grazing to guard against weed infestation, for BLM to re-evaluate ONDA's wilderness proposal for the area and for the agency to provide advance public notice for all future road maintenance projects on Steens Mountain.

Malheur National Forest Livestock Grazing

In the wake of Judge Haggerty's June 2010 decision that the Malheur National Forest's livestock grazing program illegally degrades streams essential to steelhead survival, ONDA has asked the Court to ban further grazing until the Forest Service and NOAA Fisheries complete a new environmental study and demonstrate to the Court that they have complied with Forest Plan obligations to protect steelhead habitat. Judge Haggerty is likely to issue a decision by the end of this year. Also, in September, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service designated 2,836 miles of stream in Oregon as critical habitat for threatened bull trout, including over 140 miles in the Malheur and North Fork Malheur River basins. ONDA has a pending lawsuit in these basins, challenging Forest Service grazing that damages bull trout critical habitat and the Wild and Scenic River corridors along these rivers.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

ONDA Welcomes Matt Little as Conservation Director

ONDA is delighted to welcome Matt Little as its new Conservation Director. For the past six years, Matt has been watching the great success of ONDA from afar. Covering the Pacific Region for the National Wildlife Federation out of Seattle, he kept hearing about this small group in Central Oregon that built effective grassroots campaigns to protect huge expanses of wilderness and other special places in the high desert. When he heard that this success led to rapid growth of the organization and a need for a new Conservation Director position, he applied immediately.

Matt grew up in Minnesota where he became passionate about the outdoors through fishing, hunting, and camping with his family and friends. An early desire to protect wild places and keep natural resources healthy and abundant led to a biology degree at Dartmouth, a policy degree at Syracuse, and his first career job at the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington DC. From there, he worked



Matt Little, Conservation Director

in Congress as a conservation advisor to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and other Members of Congress. Since then, he has led numerous grassroots campaigns to promote clean air, clean water, and conserve fish and wildlife. In Oregon, he was also lucky enough to be a park ranger at Crater Lake and a program leader at Multnomah County's Outdoor School.

Today, as Conservation Director at ONDA, he will work closely with six staff members who are protecting wilderness and wildlife, and promoting responsible renewable energy development in Oregon. Matt is also the point person for conservation work in Harney County, including Steens Mountain and Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

Matt's wife, Paula, is the Director of Development at Saving Grace, and they recently moved into a small house in Bend, complete with chickens. Matt and Paula are expecting their first child, a little girl, in February and very much look forward to raising her in Bend where they can show her quail and deer in the front yard and be only minutes from getting wet and dirty in a stream or forest.

Matt is looking forward to addressing the challenges facing our high desert in light of population growth, multiple uses of our public lands, and the increasing demands for energy development.

Farewell to WendyKay Gewiss, Development Director

This month we bid a fond farewell to our friend and colleague WendyKay Gewiss, ONDA's development director. After almost three years of dedication to ONDA's work

WendyKay has relocated to Poulsbo, Washington to be with her husband, who now works for Sage flyfishing.

During WendyKay's time at ONDA we went from eight staff to 13 staff, moved offices and resurrected Desert Conference. WendyKay always brought her positive attitude and cheerleading skills to bear whenever she faced tight deadlines and

heavy workloads. She was a great listener, and if anyone in the office ever had a problem, you could find them talking it out in WendyKay's office. On top of all this WendyKay was a party-planner extraordinaire, skills that served ONDA well when she was given the job of coordinating Desert Conference. From managing our growing budget and staff to throwing the party of the year, WendyKay's smile and determined attitude will be missed in the ONDA office. All the ONDA staff, board and members wish her well in her new home.



WendyKay Gewiss

Lee Christie, Calendar Volunteers Receive 2009, 2010 Elshoff Awards



The 2011 Wild Desert Calendar, on sale now

We would like to take this opportunity to show our appreciation to the 2009 and 2010 Alice Elshoff Conservation Award recipients. This spring, former ONDA Board President and long-time supporter Lee Christie was awarded the 2009 Elshoff award, and this fall at Desert Conference the ONDA Wild Desert Calendar Committee was awarded the honor for 2010. Calendar award recipients are Jim Davis, Greg Burke, Thomas Osborne, Mike Sequeira, and Bruce Jackson; these dedicated volunteers have worked for years to put together ONDA's beautiful and highly sought after calendar.

The calendar committee's hard work has really paid off this year, with another stunning Wild Desert Calendar. ONDA's 2011 Wild Desert Calendar is available now for \$15, online or in these stores: REI, Devore's Food Store, Newport Avenue Market, Wild Birds Unlimited, Strictly Organic, Thump Coffee, Between the Covers Book Store, The Curiosity Shoppe, COCC Book Store, Camalli Books, Dudley's Bookshop Café, Footzone, University of Oregon Bookstore, Whole Foods Market, Grass Roots Bookstore, Annie Bloom's Books, Paulina Springs Book Store.



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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.

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE/EMAIL

Clip and mail to: Allison Messina, Oregon Natural Desert Association,
33 NW Irving Ave., Bend, OR 97701

ONDA would like to acknowledge and thank the members of our Rimrock Society. Your vision and commitment will help ensure we are able to continue to protect, defend, and restore the health of Oregon's native deserts for present and future generations.

Becoming an ONDA Rimrock Society member can be as simple as including a bequest to ONDA in your will or designating ONDA as one of the beneficiaries of a retirement plan or life insurance policy. Your gift, large or small, can have a great impact on our efforts; you can help shape the future of Oregon's beautiful and vast native deserts.

We hope you will consider becoming an ONDA Rimrock Society member. Please contact me if you are interested: Allison Messina at (541) 330-3638 or allison@onda.org.

From the Outback Headline

FROM THE OUTBACK from page 1

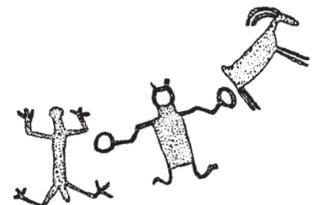


Photo Researcher, Videographer Needed

ONDA is looking to enlist a volunteer to collect historic photographs of Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge and Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge. ONDA is also looking to find a videographer interested in filming ONDA. If interested in either opportunity, contact Devon Comstock by e-mail at Devon@onda.org.