

Ramblings

DESERT RAMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

SUMMER 2011 EDITION • VOLUME 24, NO. 2

WILDERNESS 101

By Matt Little
Conservation Director

Have you ever wondered how wilderness proposals are developed and what your role can be as a citizen to make sure that these areas are protected for future generations? This article will explain the wilderness designation process using ONDA's current proposals, describe some of the complexities and common misunderstandings involved with wilderness, and let you know how you can help.

Horse Heaven Mountain, part of the Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven Wilderness proposal along the John Day River. Photo © Tyler Roemer

The concept of Wilderness was first introduced to America through the Wilderness Act of 1964. This law defined wilderness as an area that "(1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value." Wilderness is one of the highest levels of land protections for an area, and features primitive types of recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and horseback riding. A Wilderness designation prohibits the building of roads, restricts motorized uses, maintains livestock grazing at

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FROM THE OUTBACK

Connecting Oregonians to their Desert Lands

By Brent Fenty
Executive Director

People care for the things they know about. This is a basic premise of ONDA's new Oregon Desert Trail project. It is also one of the biggest challenges facing the conservation of Oregon's high desert.

Oregon's high desert is an incredible area that is largely unknown to most Oregonians. At the same time, many of us who love Oregon's high desert are loathe to call attention to our favorite places for fear that they will be overrun with people and become less wild than we find them today.

I've heard this very concern raised in the past about places like Steens Mountain and the

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Durlin Hickok – Recipient of the Alice Elshoff Award!

By Helen Harbin
President



FROM
THE DEN

At our Annual Meeting in April, past Board President Durlin Hickok was chosen as the recipient of the 2011 Alice Elshoff Award. Named for one of ONDA's founding volunteers, the Award honors outstanding contributions to desert conservation. Durlin was recognized for his skilled and diplomatic leadership in the successful transition from ONDA's founding director, Bill Marlett, to the current Executive Director, Brent Fenty. Durlin has continued to be an active, positive and generous presence on the Board, and has made many new friends for ONDA. Congratulations, Durlin!!

Matt's article on the anatomy of wilderness legislation reminds me that any wilderness campaign starts with grassroots organizing. In fact, the origins of ONDA can be traced to a group of ordinary local citizens who organized themselves to advocate for wildness. Since those early days, ONDA has protected hundreds of thousands of acres of public land through wilderness status and better management practices. None of ONDA's successes would have been possible without our dedicated volunteers/members. These are not just the people who remove fences or photograph remote areas or restore streams. These are also the people who write a letter, show up at a meeting, or send a check. Being a member is being a volunteer. I hope you'll look around you and ask someone you know to become a member.



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

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Desert Ramblings is published three times annually (spring, summer and winter) by the Oregon Natural Desert Association, 50 SW Bond Street, Suite #4, Bend OR 97702.

This is the summer 2011 edition, Volume 24, No. 2.

Barksdale Brown, *Editor*
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www.onda.org





Partygoers stopped their revelry to hear Brent talk about new ONDA projects, and unveil the new ONDA logo.



Folks spilled into the parking lot to hear the sounds of Truck Stop Gravy.

ONDA Open House: May 13, 2011

Casting superstition aside, hundreds of ONDA members, friends, and new faces packed the house, and kicked off ONDA's celebration of its new location in Bend—50 SW Bond St., Suite 4—on Friday, May 13. Whether it was moving to the sounds of our local favorite Truck Stop Gravy; chatting with ONDA wilderness coordinators about projects and campaigns; or being entered into ONDA's membership-drive raffle; there were smiles all around, and the beer miraculously evaporated!

Thanks to all who gave time and energy to lend a hand before, during and after the party, and to those who generously donated food, drinks, decorations, and more. We couldn't have done it without you!

ONDA moved from downtown Bend to the mid-Mill: the area between downtown and the Old Mill. Amid a mix of brownstones and long red mill buildings, ONDA's office is smack in the middle, across the parking lot from Strictly Organic Coffee. You can't miss our glass-paned garage door with our new logo soaring above. Come visit and check out our new digs, beautiful desert diorama provided by Wintercreek Restoration, and our funky three-floor office space.

Speaking of a new look, ONDA unveiled its new logo at the open house. After a multi-stage design process, the decision was made to go with a logo refresh: keeping the major elements of the traditional logo, while making it a little brighter. We hope you like it!



ONDA's new logo

Thank You for Furniture!

ONDA would like to give a shout-out to everyone who donated furniture for our new office, and for responding to our cries of help.

We received bookcases, tables, printers, plants, couches, chairs, and a desk or two. Our office space is much more complete and comfortable than it would be without your generous donations.

Many, many thanks from all the staff at ONDA.

Visit the ONDA Booth!

ONDA has increased its outreach to Central Oregon by tabling at several events this summer. We've had a great time connecting to fellow desert lovers and invite you to stop by our booth and introduce a friend to ONDA. Come visit our booth at:

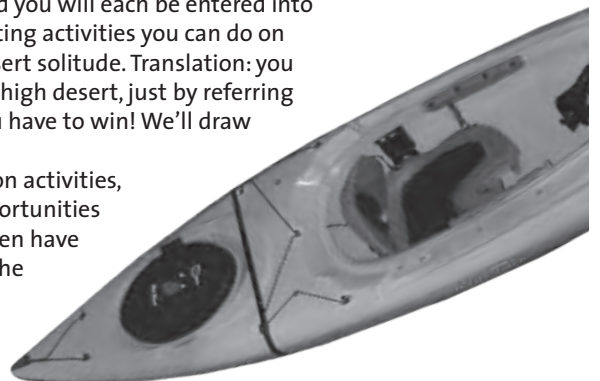
- Northwest Crossing Farmers Market
- Tumalo Creek Kayak & Canoe's Pickin' & Paddlin' Music Series: August 31, September 21

Get in on the Fun with ONDA's Membership-Drive Raffle

Calling all members! Encourage a friend or relative to become an ONDA member, and you will each be entered into ONDA's 2011 membership-drive raffle. There are six categories of grand prizes, representing activities you can do on the Oregon Desert Trail: hiking, biking, boating, trail running, family adventure, and desert solitude. Translation: you could win a kayak, a mountain bike, running and hiking gear, or a two-night stay in the high desert, just by referring new members to join the fold. The more new members you refer, the more chances you have to win! We'll draw winners at a holiday gala event at ONDA on Friday, Dec. 2.

Come visit the ONDA table as we represent at various summer and fall Central Oregon activities, including Pickin' and Paddlin', Northwest Crossing Farmers Market. These are great opportunities to introduce your friends to ONDA and encourage them to become members, as we often have great incentives to share at these events (cool water bottles, calendars, and entry into the membership-drive raffle). Everyone leaves the ONDA table with a smile!

Tumalo Creek Kayak & Canoe donated this kayak for the Membership Drive.





Fish, Rodents and Kids

The Latest from the Restoration Program



Volunteers planting willow and cottonwood along Cherry Creek. Photo: Alexa Bontrager

Alexa Bontrager

Restoration Coordinator

As our members have no doubt observed, the number of ONDA's volunteer work-party trips has expanded in each recent year. Our 2011 calendar, at the time that registration was opened in January, comprised close to 30 trips. Since then, a number of additional opportunities have been added, including those supporting a brand new ONDA program: the Oregon Desert Trail.

This year, riparian-planting trips by volunteers at Jake Place on the South Fork of the Crooked River and at the Cherry Creek Ranch in the John Day Basin have provided our organization with some of its first opportunities to work on private property. Our partnerships with the landowners of these properties will allow us to continue the efforts of our volunteers in these areas over the forthcoming years. Beginning next year, a new collaboration with the Silvies Valley Ranch will generate multiple opportunities to work on private property for the next several years.

The Silvies River, flowing through Grant and Harney Counties, is located in the Harney Basin. It originates in the Aldrich Mountains and terminates at Malheur Lake. The Silvies River Basin provides habitat for many different types of birds, including waterfowl and raptors as well as sandhill cranes. Its fish include redband trout and the endemic Malheur sculpin.

Teaming up with the Silvies Valley Ranch, ONDA has a number of upcoming volunteer opportunities in the Silvies Basin. Portions of the river and approximately 20 of its tributaries flow, in part, through the property. Over the last few years, the ranch has begun a large-scale effort to bring fish and beavers back to the area by restoring these creeks. Overgrazing by cattle is among the past practices that has led to the deterioration of streams and their corresponding riparian areas, wetlands, and meadows. Other factors include the use of riparian zones by bison, a large captive elk herd, and even a menagerie of exotic ungulates. Adding the effects of stream channelization for agricultural purposes and the historical near-extirpation of beavers in the West has made for such features as eroded banks on many of the creeks, lowered water tables, and loss of wet meadows.

ONDA's role in the Silvies project will largely consist of monitoring the effects of restoration in comparison to baseline conditions.

Our volunteers will have several opportunities to assist in monitoring the geomorphology, habitat, and water quality (among other measures) in some of the creeks. In addition, we plan to have trips in which our volunteers will be planting aspen, which are a major focus of the ranch's planting efforts. The Silvies restoration and monitoring will be an exciting opportunity for our volunteers, taking place in a location new to many.

In addition to its inventory and restoration efforts, ONDA has begun an education program in the John Day Basin. The Stream Team program (modeled after SOLV's Green Team program) will join with schools in the Lower John Day Basin. Each school will adopt a nearby stretch of stream. Middle-school students at these schools will learn about watershed function and ecology through visits to their adopted site in which they will conduct various hands-on restoration activities. Such activities include removal of invasives, planting of native species, and bank stabilization. The 2011-2012 school year will be the Stream Team's inaugural year, with the Mitchell and Fossil schools participating. In subsequent years, our hope is that the program will expand to further schools in the area.

ONDA's restoration reach in the John Day Basin (and beyond) has been extended to include not only new geographic areas but also, through its school program, a new aspect of outreach. So much of our restoration work and achievements to date would not have been possible without the dedication and enthusiasm of our volunteers. We look forward to including you in our present and upcoming endeavors.



A restored stretch of Hay Creek, in the Silvies Valley. Photo: Alexa Bontrager



To ONDA's Volunteers, Thank You!



ONDA volunteers working in the field. Photo: Jefferson Jacobs

By Jefferson Jacobs
Stewardship Coordinator

ONDA members are famous for going the extra mile. Some may offer technical expertise, many donate financially, and other donate their time as volunteers.

So many people give to ONDA in so many different ways, but in this issue of Desert Ramblings I would like to be sure to extend some special recognition to those tireless volunteers that help make ONDA outstanding. Over one third of our members volunteer, and by "walking the talk" and putting their "backs" into the work of protecting the high desert, volunteers contribute tremendously to our organizational achievements.

Many are familiar with the commitment of our field volunteers that spend their vacation time driving hundreds of miles to remote wilderness areas to work in the hot sun, get all scratched up, and share the camaraderie and *esprit de corps* of working hard for an important cause. Their work not only improves eastern Oregon's wildlands, it helps give ONDA a more respected seat at the bargaining table by showing we are not outsiders: we are here working and demonstrating our commitment to local stakeholders.

Less familiar, but equally important are our office volunteers and interns. These unsung heroes donate their free time to come and work inside our office on gorgeous sunny Bend summer days, and on perfect powder ski days. They bake us goodies (no small thing for keeping the staff running!!), generate high quality maps, organize us, move us, file, create educational materials, upload, download, stuff and fold. ONDA's efficiency and impact is nearly doubled by their contributions.

Other volunteers help by writing well thought out, convincing "letters to the editor" and to the congressional delegation. By adding more independent voices to the conversation, they help tip the scales of discussions on legislation, management and public perception.

And no discussion of volunteer contributions would be complete without a mention of ONDA's fantastic volunteer Board of Directors, who make time in their busy lives to shape and steer the development and application of ONDA's efforts.

ONDA's political power, weight at the negotiating table, ability to win prestigious grants, and institutional legitimacy are all bolstered by our volunteers. It is because of these contributions that we will be presenting an annual "Volunteer of the Year Award" at each Annual Member Meeting starting April 2012! ONDA members and staff will be given the opportunity to nominate a volunteer that they think stands out amongst the rest. And as a reward, we will shower the winner with prizes and appreciation, not only for what they have done, but as a representative of the volunteer effort as a whole! Look for additional information, links to the nomination web page and a list of prizes in the fall newsletter. Until then: think of your nominee and thanks to all of you for everything you do!

Your Donated Dollars at Work through ONDA

By Allison Crotty
Development Director

So far this year...

- Our new Oregon Desert Trail Coordinator and volunteers have surveyed 181 miles of potential trail route since April. We have 194 more to go by this October to meet our year one goal and have plans to inventory another 350 miles next year. Whew!
- 17,000 acres of land in the John Day basin will be protected forever and 4 miles of new public access to the John Day River will be created through the passage of legislation currently pending in the 112th Congress.
- 200+ volunteers have put in more than 2,000 hours to restore and protect Oregon's desert lands by planting trees, surveying wild lands, monitoring wildlife, removing obsolete fences, monitoring trails and other projects.
- Hundreds of local residents are building consensus and learning more about the benefits of Wilderness in their communities through our Whyhous-Deschutes Wilderness Campaign, which has the potential to protect nearly 20,000 acres of pristine desert wild lands in Central Oregon.
- Two million acres of public land in the Owyhee Canyonlands region, renowned for its outstanding natural beauty, recreation potential, and as a haven for wildlife, will remain intact as this wilderness campaign gains momentum and builds local support for permanent protections.

... And so much more, all made possible thanks to you!





WILDERNESS 101

A primer on the law that governs wilderness, ONDA's grassroots campaigns, and your role in the effort

Continued from page 1

existing levels and does not allow new development in the area. This designation keeps large landscapes in their natural and “wild” condition for future generations to enjoy.

Initially, the Wilderness Act applied only to lands managed by the Forest Service, but not to the millions of acres of high desert and other ecosystems throughout the West managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In 1976, Congress corrected this oversight with the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). As a result, BLM was required to use the wilderness definitions established in the Wilderness Act to inventory all BLM lands for wilderness characteristics within 15 years, and make a recommendation to Congress. Until Congress acts on these lands and designates them as wilderness, they are known as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), and BLM must maintain and protect their wilderness characteristics. Today, there are 2.9 million acres of WSAs in Oregon's high desert.

ONDA and volunteers have logged thousands of hours in the field documenting millions of additional acres of BLM high desert lands that have wilderness characteristics and should be managed and protected ...

However, as BLM was completing these inventories, citizens were noticing that the agency did not do a complete job and that large areas where they hiked and explored were not included in surveys or were not recorded for the wilderness values they contained. In 1987, some of these citizens in Oregon self-organized and used the agency's own methods to document these wilderness values and submit them to the agency for consideration. This was the beginning of ONDA.

Since these small beginnings, ONDA and volunteers have logged thousands of hours in the field documenting millions of additional acres of BLM high desert lands that have wilderness characteristics and should be managed and protected for their unique qualities. Through working with BLM land use planning processes, ONDA has been able to get federal recognition of these lands' wilderness values, and by working with Congress, we have been able to protect some of them permanently as Wilderness. The list of Wilderness Areas currently protected by the efforts of ONDA and friends are the iconic Steens Mountain, the Spring Basin Wilderness on the John Day River, and the Badlands Wilderness just east of Bend.

Congress has the authority to pass legislation making any area Wilderness. However, this does not happen overnight and takes a significant grassroots effort to build the community support needed before Congress will consider it. This is where ONDA and volunteers like you can have a big impact.

Wilderness Proposals – From the Ground Up

The first step with any of these proposals is defining special areas and landscapes that qualify as wilderness and encompass areas of unique ecological and recreational value. Currently, ONDA



President Lyndon Johnson signs the original Wilderness Act into law on September 3, 1964. The original law applied only to lands managed by the Forest Service. Congress in 1976 extended the law to cover lands under the Bureau of Land Management. In 1987, citizens mobilized to document lands that met the definition of wilderness under the law – an action that was the beginning of ONDA.

has identified a number of areas that we are working to protect as wilderness. These proposals are described in the sidebar on page 7.

Once identified, potential wilderness areas must be thoroughly researched and vetted with local communities. ONDA staff and volunteers work hard to review wilderness inventories and re-visit areas on the ground to confirm that the area is primarily affected by the forces of nature. Local landowners are approached to learn about their uses of the public lands adjacent to their properties and work through any concerns, while building support throughout the community. Meetings are held with the public land managers to understand their issues regarding these lands and further understand the potential for wilderness.

During this process, opportunities may arise for land exchanges that can further consolidate public and private lands to improve management and protect larger tracts of wilderness. A key example of this process has been with the Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven Wilderness Proposal currently before Congress. The proposal started as a checkerboard of alternating squares of public and private lands. This situation creates areas of public land that cannot be accessed and therefore lead to trespass issues with private landowners. By working closely with major landowners in the area, a land exchange proposal was generated for Congress that will consolidate public and private lands. In the end, public access to BLM lands will be doubled through new road and river access, and private landowners will have larger tracts of contiguous land for better management. These opportunities can be identified in any wilderness proposal and help provide the local support needed to bring a proposal to Congress.

As local community support for a proposal grows, ONDA and members of the community reach out to local officials and county commissions for their support. This support can only be achieved through the time and commitment of volunteers to help communicate the benefits of these proposals and the desire to protect these landscapes while we still can.

Once a threshold of community support has been established for

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WILDERNESS 101

ONDA is working to secure formal Wilderness protection for several worthy areas:

Sutton Mountain. Photo © Tyler Roemer

Sutton Mountain

This unique conservation opportunity combines 60,000 acres of WSAs named Pat's Cabin, Painted Hills, Sutton Mountain, and Dead Dog to create a large backcountry experience surrounding the Painted Hills National Monument near the John Day River. With stunning geologic features, this large area contains a diversity of habitat types, including grasslands, riparian areas, shrub steppe and forests, and will provide incredible opportunities for solitude and backcountry recreation.



Whychus-Deschutes. Photo © Jim Davis

rock spires, and rolling sage plateaus truly epitomize the arid American West. Rafter and recreationists target this area for backcountry adventures, and Golden Eagles and North America's largest herd of bighorn sheep call this place home.



Cathedral Rock. Photo © Greg Burke

Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven

These two potential wilderness areas near Ashwood, Oregon, encompass 17,000 acres along the John Day River and include dramatic basalt cliffs and amazing recreational opportunities along the wild and scenic river. Not only will protections help federally-threatened steelhead maintain sustainable populations in the river, but the uplands will provide refuge for deer, elk and sagebrush and grassland species.

Whychus-Deschutes

In a deep, rugged canyon, Whychus Creek and the Deschutes River combine to form a 19,000 acre wilderness proposal in the backyard of the largest urban area in Central Oregon, just west of Terrebonne. Encompassing the Steelhead Falls WSA and roadless areas within the Crooked River National Grasslands, this area is a great setting for recreation and exploring Central Oregon's past. Both waterways contain world-class trout fisheries and will provide crucial spawning habitat for returning steelhead salmon. Pictographs and other cultural artifacts remain throughout the canyons.

Owyhee Canyonlands

The Owyhee Canyonlands in Southeast Oregon contain the largest conservation opportunity for wilderness left in the lower 48. This vast landscape of 1.9 million acres of WSAs and citizen-proposed wilderness, equivalent to the size of Yellowstone National Park, has been described as Oregon's Grand Canyon. Its deep riverine canyons, red



Hidden Springs. Photo © Tyler Roemer

Hidden Springs

In the remote high desert of Central Oregon, a deep river canyon cuts through a vast open country of rolling grasslands, rugged buttes and dense groves of old-growth juniper. Coldwater springs rush from every draw, feeding the South Fork of the Crooked River as it winds its way northward. By combining three WSAs and one citizen-proposed wilderness, there is potential to conserve over 120,000 contiguous acres of wild desert in perpetuity. This unbroken landscape provides crucial habitat for wildlife such as Rocky Mountain elk, Mule Deer, Pronghorn antelope, bobcats and cougar.



WILDERNESS 101

A primer on the law that governs wilderness, ONDA's grassroots campaigns, and your role in the effort

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a proposal, it is time to ask local congressional members to champion the wilderness proposal, which needs to be passed by Congress. Working closely with congressional staff, ONDA staff and volunteers work with the local community to discuss the issues and prepare a proposal. Once a member of Congress decides to champion a proposal, they must draft the legislative language defining the area for protection and any special requirements for management. The bill then must be introduced in either the Senate or the House of Representatives and is referred to the relevant committees. In the Senate, the committee of jurisdiction is the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, currently chaired by Senator Bingaman of New Mexico. It is then passed along to the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests for hearings and consideration. Currently, Oregon is lucky to have Senator Wyden chairing this subcommittee, and Senator Wyden has been a great at moving wilderness proposals forward. In the House, the Natural Resources Committee and the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands has jurisdiction. Once a bill is reviewed in committee, oftentimes the committee will vote to have the bill move to the floor of the respective chamber of Congress. The bill can be considered alone, or along with a package of wilderness bills that the committee has reviewed. Both chambers must pass the bill and the President must sign it for it to become law.

In 2009, Congress passed the most recent round of wilderness legislation called the Omnibus Public Land Management Act. It was called an Omnibus because it combined a number of land conservation bills previously passed by the Senate. This bill protected 2.1 million acres in nine states, including two of ONDA's proposals – the Badlands and Spring Basin Wilderness Areas.

Oregon currently runs a deficit when it comes to protecting wilderness. Looking at our closest neighbors, California has 15% of its land area protected as wilderness, Washington has 10%, and Idaho has 9%. In comparison, Oregon only has 4% of its lands protected as wilderness. This should serve as a wake-up call for those of you who recognize the special places and diverse ecosystems that Oregon has to offer and create a desire for you to help protect these places while there is still time.

How You Can Help

Your support is critical during the entire process. Volunteers and supporters have opportunities each year to help us inventory special places for wilderness designation by participating in work trips that are advertised on our webpage. Participating in these trips allows us to cover more territory than staff can do alone and allows us to sufficiently document the wilderness characteristics with photos and area write-ups. You can also help us pull fences, plant trees, and generally prepare these natural areas to be more resilient, with improved wildlife habitat, so that they have even more value for long-term protection.

If you know of an area where we are working and have special skill sets in photography or video and you want to help document

the beauty and primitive recreational values of this place, please contact the ONDA staff person in charge of a campaign and offer your help. If you have connections with landowners or decision-makers in the area of one of our campaigns, you can help us make these connections and tell decision-makers about the special places that deserves protection. Having conversations, sending

When proposals get to the stage of congressional review and approval, such as the stage where Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven are right now, you can help us by contacting your congressional members ...

letters and showing up to meetings where these issues are considered will help bring attention to the areas you care about and move proposals along. Encouraging newspaper writers to focus a story on this area or taking the initiative to write your opinion in a Letter to the Editor to your local paper will also help spread the word.

When proposals get to the stage of congressional review and approval, such as the stage where Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven are right now, you can help us by contacting your congressional members, telling them that this area is worthy of protection, and asking them to pass the necessary legislation. If you are signed up for ONDA's email action alerts, you can receive opportunities to take actions like these and help us gain support for campaigns. A financial gift to ONDA supports these efforts by providing us the resources to hire staff and equipment necessary to protect the special places in Oregon's high desert. A donation of field equipment can be very helpful as well, and right now we could use an additional 4x4 vehicle so that we can get more staff and volunteers out into the areas we need to protect.

As you can see, there are many ways to help protect wilderness areas. Please read more about our wilderness proposals and find opportunities to participate at www.onda.org. Thank you for supporting ONDA and joining us in our mission to protect, defend, and restore Oregon's high desert!

Have 4x4, will travel!

Do you have a 4x4 vehicle that you've been thinking about donating? ONDA would love to talk with you! Four-wheel-drive vehicles with high clearance and in good working order are critical to ONDA's field efforts. These trusty vehicles ultimately ensure our success in collecting data, performing inventories, transporting staff and volunteers, and attending essential meetings with landowners, county commissioners, legislative staff, and more.

Many proposed wilderness areas and Wilderness Study Areas are far-flung across Oregon's high desert. Help us reach these rugged destinations safely and as efficiently as possible with your tax-deductible vehicle donation.

Please contact Barksdale Brown at hbbrown@onda.org or 541.330.2638 to discuss the benefits of donating your 4x4 vehicle to ONDA.



Connecting Oregonians to their Desert Lands

FROM THE OUTBACK from page 1

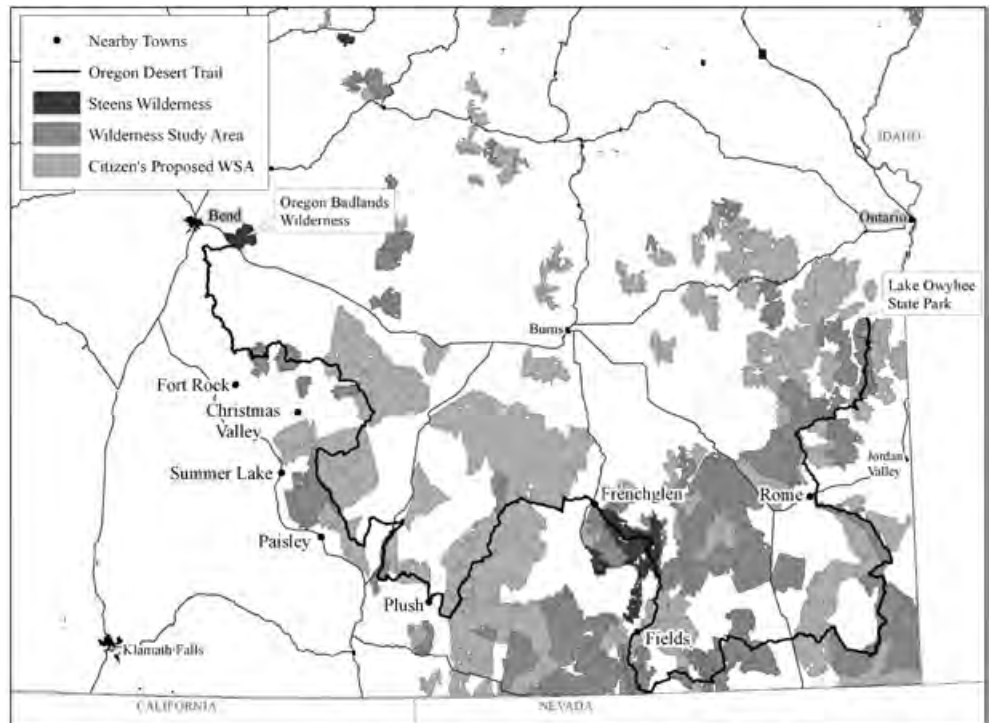
Badlands. Nevertheless, ONDA worked hard for years to help people appreciate these amazing places and the thousands of people who ultimately gave voice to Steens and the Badlands is the reason that today these areas enjoy permanent protection as Wilderness. I was recently grappling with this very issue when I took a small group of folks, including a couple writers, on a hike down a remote section of the Owyhee Canyonlands.

The hike was part of ONDA's larger effort to raise awareness and therefore support for protecting this amazing area that is home to bighorn sheep, sage grouse, and some smaller and less charismatic species such as springsnails and plants that occur nowhere else in the world. It also featured one potential section of the newly-proposed Oregon Desert Trail.

The Oregon Desert Trail proposal was developed over the last several months. The primitive trail corridor was mapped by Craig Miller and volunteer Keith Spernak who wove together myriad map layers such as land ownership, proposed and existing wilderness, existing trails and sensitive areas to craft a nearly 750-mile trail that extends from Central Oregon to the Idaho border through some of Oregon's desert gems including the Badlands, Steens Mountain, Hart Mountain and the Owyhee Canyonlands.

The trail concept builds on the work that has been done over the past couple decades by the Desert Trail Association (DTA) which envisions a trail that runs from Mexico to Canada through desert regions parallel to the better-known Pacific Crest Trail. As part of this effort, the DTA had already identified a nearly 100-mile section of trail marked by rock cairns through Steens Mountain and the Pueblo Mountains.

The Oregon Desert Trail concept takes a similar approach. The intent is not to construct new trails but to connect existing trails and two-track roads with cross-country travel to create a primitive path through Oregon's high desert. The proposed corridor has been designed in a way to travel through or near towns in Oregon's desert (see map) and to avoid any sensitive areas along the way. The hope is that such a "trail" will raise public awareness about areas that need to be protected in Oregon's high desert, an appreciation of the native



The intent is not to construct new trails but to connect existing trails and two-track roads with cross-country travel to create a primitive path through Oregon's high desert. The proposed corridor has been designed in a way to travel through or near towns in Oregon's desert and to avoid any sensitive areas along the way. The hope is that such a "trail" will raise public awareness about areas that need to be protected in Oregon's high desert, an appreciation of the native wildlife that call this area home, and an understanding of the challenges and threats facing Oregon's high desert

wildlife that call this area home, and an understanding of the challenges and threats facing Oregon's high desert.

Such a project will, of course, take lots of volunteers. As usual, we need your help. Our plan is to inventory 350 miles per year over the next two years. Volunteers will help determine the quality of existing trails, where water is available, where the proposed corridor needs to be realigned, and what else folks should know before embarking on a hike along a particular section.

My own recent hike with folks in the Owyhee was an illustration of the rewards and challenges that such a project presents. We were hiking through an area where livestock grazing was removed after ONDA's successful Wild and Scenic River legal efforts over a decade ago. Thanks to this victory, willow and other riparian vegetation is recovering and had taken over large sections of the stream. Beavers have capitalized

on this recovery and are re-colonizing many remote sections of the river which is creating great habitat for other native species such as redband trout. The terrain forced us to scramble over large boulders to find a path but we were consistently rewarded with incredible views of towering canyon walls and the occasional piercing cry of a red-tailed hawk flying overhead.

Our hope is that such experiences will help people understand the immense value of such places and that younger generations who experience our public lands through human-powered recreational activities such as backpacking will learn to treasure these areas and become our next generation of desert rats.





Wolves – Finding a Home in Oregon

By Matt Little

Conservation Director

As you have probably noticed, Oregon's small band of wolves continues to make big headlines in the news. Most recently, the Oregon legislature passed a bill that will establish a \$100,000 depredation fund to compensate ranchers for livestock losses due to wolves and to increase non-lethal protection measures. Considering that the legislature was previously considering legislative concepts that would remove state protections for the wolf and allow ranchers to shoot any wolf within 500 feet of a residence, this is a welcome outcome and similar to a program established by Defenders of Wildlife in other wolf states.

According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, there are currently 17 confirmed wolves in Oregon, with at least eight in the Imnaha pack near Joseph, six in Wenaha, and three around Walla Walla. While these wolves are all in Northeast Oregon, there also have been reports of wolf sightings as far south as The Owyhee Canyonlands. Because Oregon still contains large areas of intact habitat and potential wilderness, wolf populations should only continue to grow, but only if we collectively allow them to live sustainably with us on the landscape.

As of May of this year, wolves across the West are no longer protected under the Endangered Species Act. This unfortunate decision was not made through the normal

Fish and Wildlife Service process of analyzing population trends and scientific data, but through a federal legislation fiat – slipped into a congressional funding bill. This action handed management authority for wolves back to the states, including the Oregon population east of highways 395, 78, and 95. The wolf continues to be protected at some level by the Oregon Endangered Species Act and the Oregon Wolf Plan, but recent actions by ODFW have put these protections into question.

Within hours of the federal legislation that gave wolf management to Oregon, ODFW issued permits that resulted in the baiting, trapping and killing of a male and female wolf in the Imnaha pack, without the documentation required under the Wolf Plan and the

Oregon ESA. Later, ODFW issued 24 “caught-in-the-act” permits to allow livestock producers who witness a wolf biting, wounding, or killing livestock to shoot it. Again, the Wolf Plan requires the agency to promote non-lethal measures and to document extensively how those efforts failed in each case before allowing lethal control. Issuing 24 kill permits in a state with a confirmed population of 17 individuals is completely unreasonable.

Conservation groups like ONDA, Oregon Wild, and Hells Canyon Preservation Council have been responding to these issues and demanding that the agency retract these permits. ODFW should instead focus on non-lethal programs they have established to haze and radio-collar trouble wolves, and work with livestock operators to remove things that attract wolves, such as piles of livestock carcasses. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), 55,000 cows in Oregon died in 2010 due to weather, disease, and theft. Comparatively, less than a dozen cows have been confirmed to die from wolves in the past decade. Despite this incongruity, ODFW is responding to each depredation call as if each cow's death should require a wolf's death in response. With this strategy, it won't be long until we have no wolves.

Wolves belong in Oregon. Because they have been absent for so long in this state, people have not adjusted to their presence and some sportsmen think that the abundant deer and elk numbers that we have experienced in the past decades are “normal” for the environment. As an avid sportsman myself, I am well aware that bringing wolves back to Oregon could decrease the number of deer and elk available, and behaviors will change, such as decreased bugling in the fall. However, I am happy for it because that is how nature works. Although we don't act like it, humans are only a part of nature and at ONDA, we work to create a sustainable future for all species and habitats in the high desert. The wolf should be a welcome member of our environment and the state agency tasked with protecting this great animal should have sustainability as their top priority.

ONDA Wins Steens Mountain Travel Plan Case

The Department of the Interior violated four different federal statutes when it approved BLM's plan to open 519 miles of roads on Steens Mountain, according to an April 2011 decision by Federal Magistrate Judge Paul Papak in Portland. The court agreed with ONDA that Interior's plan is illegal under the Steens Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the Wilderness Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.

Interior's plan establishes motorized travel on 519 miles of routes, but the record showed more than 100 miles of the routes were virtually non-existent. The agency's decision to designate these areas for motorized use violates federal laws prohibiting off-road travel and creation or re-establishment of new roads on Steens Mountain, as well as laws protecting against damage to wilderness areas and requiring BLM to prioritize protection of “long-term ecological integrity” above all else on the mountain.

In June, ONDA asked the court to bar BLM from mechanically “maintaining” about 400 miles of primitive routes on Steens Mountain, unless and until the agency prepares a lawful environmental review. Only by requiring the agency to conduct this review before taking ground-disturbing action, will Steens Mountain be protected against destruction of roadless areas and unfragmented sagebrush habitat throughout this remarkable, nationally significant landscape. If implemented as proposed, BLM's plan would have enshrined motorized access before non-motorized recreation is even considered.

In its decision, the court noted Interior's “utter failure to seriously evaluate” ONDA's (or even BLM's own internal) route inventory findings. As a result, wrote the court, Interior failed to provide a convincing statement of reasons showing it made rational connections between facts found and choices made.

ONDA Seeks To Block Uninformed Juniper “Treatment” Project

In May, concurrent with its opening brief on the merits, ONDA asked the district court to preliminarily enjoin BLM from further juniper treatment actions that will harm sage-grouse and wilderness on Steens Mountain, until the court can issue a decision on the merits.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome, Betsy Littlefield



Betsy Littlefield

Betsy Littlefield joined ONDA in March as the communications and membership coordinator. After obtaining a BS in wildlife biology and an MS in forest resources, she has worked in the natural-resource communication field for the past 20 years; many of those years navigating forestry issues during the '90s and beyond. Originally from Massachusetts, she had lived in Oregon since '93, working at Oregon State University for many years before moving to Bend. She is happy to now be working to help keep Oregon's high deserts wild, and enjoys hiking, running and telemark skiing in beautiful Central Oregon.

Welcome, Jeremy Fox



Jeremy Fox

Jeremy Fox, Oregon Desert Trail Inventory Consultant, has a degree in Environmental Education from Western Washington University. Over the years Jeremy has worked as an outdoor school instructor, organic farmer, wildland firefighter, outdoor guide, and international service trip leader. He has mostly retired from the transient-seasonal lifestyle, enjoys living in Bend with his wife Colleen, and he is loving the challenge of coordinating the survey and inventory of the proposed Oregon Desert Trail.

Thank You, ONDA Summer Interns



Paul Ruprecht

Paul Ruprecht

Paul Ruprecht was awarded a stipend from Lewis and Clark Law School's Public Interest Law Project to support his work at ONDA this summer. He is excited for the opportunity to help protect Oregon's high desert and is learning a great deal from Mac Lacy and Dave Becker. He will begin his third year at Lewis and Clark Law School this fall.



Kevin Jensen

Kevin Jensen

Intern Kevin Jensen is a Natural Resources/GIS major at Treasure Valley Community College in Ontario, Oregon. He has been married for 25 years and has three children, ages 23, 21, and 16. He is originally from Emmett, Idaho and he is currently living in Payette, Idaho where he has lived since 1990.

Lindsay Baker

Intern Lindsay Baker, a native Texan, moved to the northwest two years ago to pursue a graduate degree. She is currently a student at Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland in the environmental and natural resources program. After graduation, Lindsay hopes to work for a national non-profit organization working on wildlife conservation policy.

Kelly Cossey

Originally from Houston, Texas, Kelly is an Environmental Studies major attending Washington and Lee University in Virginia. She has enjoyed her experience out West learning about all the great work ONDA is doing and can't wait to return!

SAVE THE DATE



ONDA presents: Wild & Scenic Film Festival

September 22, 2011, 5 – 8 pm

McMenamin's Old St. Francis School, Bend

The Wild & Scenic Film Festival returns to Bend with another impressive selection of films! Enjoy stellar films that inspire the activist in everyone. Learn about ONDA's most recent efforts to protect Oregon's deserts and how you can get involved. Enter our drawing to win fun prizes!

Presented with support from E² Solar, Patagonia, Cliff Bar, Sierra Nevada Brewing Company, Osprey Packs, Klean Kanteen, and Grist.org.



The 2011 Wild Desert Calendar

ONDA Wild Desert Calendar Exhibit in Bend

Opening Night:

First Friday Art Walk,

October 7, 5 – 8 PM

Footzone, 845 NW Wall Street, Bend

Website: www.footzonebend.com

Celebrate Oregon's high desert with stunning images from ONDA's 2012 Wild Desert Calendar. Calendars and framed prints will be available for purchase, as well as new membership opportunities unique to this event!





Oregon Natural Desert Association
50 SW Bond Street, Suite #4
Bend, Oregon 97702

OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION



DESERT RAMBLINGS

ONDA's Annual Meeting



OMSI's Hancock field station was filled to the brim yet again with a record 102 guests for this year's Annual Meeting. ONDA members from across Oregon convened for a festive weekend, including a salmon bake provided by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and foot-tappin' tunes from the Wheeler County Ramblers. Volunteer teams pulled 3.5 miles of fence, clearing the way for safe movement of deer and elk through Pine Creek Conservation Area. The Annual Meeting continues to be a hit for families; six attended this year, most of which now have five meetings under their belts! ONDA would like to thank everyone who attended for their hard work and welcome the new members who joined the reunion this year.

LEGAL DOCKET

LEGAL DOCKET from page 10

ONDA claims that the Department of the Interior unlawfully authorized and carried out burning and cutting of juniper trees in essential Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) habitat and protected Wilderness Study Areas ("WSAs") on Steens Mountain. The North Steens Ecosystem Restoration Project's so-called juniper "treatments" will have significant harmful effects on the sage-grouse. The sage-grouse is an imperiled bird of the high desert that since March 2010 has been listed as warranted for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

When BLM issued its project decision in 2007, its environmental review did not identify where juniper would be treated within the 336,000-acre project area, nor which from a long list of authorized treatment methods would be used in specific areas. Instead, Interior left those site-specific decisions to future agency decision-making processes during the decade or more that it will take to carry out the Project.

However, the affected resources vary dramatically throughout the vast project area. Sage-grouse inhabit areas of up to 100,000 acres surrounding leks (mating grounds). About two dozen leks are spread unevenly throughout and adjacent to the Project area. Interior has not evaluated the impacts of the project on sage-grouse in light of significant new information, including proposed development of industrial wind energy in core sage-grouse habitat on north Steens Mountain, and an unparalleled scientific monograph about the species' status, upon which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service relied in making its "warranted" decision last year.

In 2011, Interior has contracted for logging and a "broadcast burn" in core sage-grouse habitat on Moon Hill, adjacent to the proposed energy development site, and plans a second burn and series of logging units that would adversely affect sage-grouse at three other leks just 15 miles to the south.

If executed, these treatments will irreparably harm sage-grouse by destroying sagebrush habitat, fragmenting the landscape with new and reconstructed roads to move heavy equipment into the Project area, and introducing weeds that will replace native plants essential to the sage-grouse's survival. The treatments also will destroy wilderness values in protected WSAs, where Interior is prohibited from conducting "vegetative manipulation" and from using motorized vehicles off of roads, except for limited purposes not applicable to this project.