

Ramblings

DESERT RAMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

FALL/WINTER 2011 EDITION • VOLUME 24, NO. 3



ONDA Ramps Up Efforts On **Hart Mountain** And **Sheldon Refuges**

By Devon Comstock
Hart-Sheldon Coordinator

For over twenty years ONDA volunteers have been coming to the Hart Mountain Refuge in southeastern Oregon to help remove obsolete barbed-wire fence. Beginning in 1991, Craig Miller, ONDA founding board member, began bringing volunteers to this lonely sweep of sage. Volunteers banded together with a single goal, to tear down barbed-wire fences that stretched for miles across the land. Each year the logistics of finding and removing the fence became ever challenging. Volunteers travelled for hours over barely passable roads to spend a few hours pulling fence and then they woke up to do it all over again the next day. Days were hot and dry, but volunteers banded together, tasks were assigned, friendships formed, and fences were removed. This ef-

see **HART AND SHELDON** page 4

Fences that impede wildlife are turned into scrap metal at Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: Caleb Burke

FROM THE OUTBACK

Governor Honors ONDA Volunteers

By Brent Fenty, *Executive Director*

Not often enough, my job at ONDA takes me out to the wildest corners of Oregon's high desert. On the best of these trips, I often have the pleasure of taking in the smell of damp sagebrush in the early morning or watching a herd of pronghorn move swiftly across the horizon. I also frequently have the opportunity to be accompanied by ONDA volunteers and fellow desert rats whose passion for a landscape we all know and love motivates and inspires me for months to come.

Volunteerism is something that ONDA has always taken seriously even if our volunteers have had fun doing it. Founding members like Alice Elshoff, Bill Marlett, Craig Miller, and Matt Holmes were among ONDA's first volunteers and set an imposing standard for future volunteers to follow. Members like George Reynolds

see **FROM THE OUTBACK** page 12



Celebrating Oregon's Desert And The People Who Keep It Wild

By Helen Harbin
President



FROM
THE DEN

When I look back at the accomplishments of 2011, it is hard to choose a single accomplishment that ONDA can be most proud of. However, one award that seems to connect all ONDA's recent successes is the Governor's recent recognition of ONDA's volunteer stewardship program. I congratulate (and thank!) every single volunteer who has pitched in to make ONDA so successful. ONDA wouldn't be ONDA without our numerous volunteers, their energy, and can-do attitude.

This is also a time to thank all of you for your memberships and generous donations in difficult financial times. ONDA's ability to protect and restore Oregon's desert treasures is only possible with your support. I hope that you'll include ONDA in your thoughts as you plan your year-end giving and please don't forget to join us in Bend on December 2nd to celebrate Oregon's high desert and people like you who keep it wild. The celebration will feature the Oregon Desert Trail proposal, recently featured in the *New York Times* and Oregon's *1859* magazine, and images from the beautiful new 2012 Wild Desert Calendar which you should find in your mailbox very soon. A calendar brought to you again (of course) by a group of outstanding ONDA volunteers!



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

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Barksdale Brown, *Editor*
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ONDA Volunteers Make 2011 A Success

By Jefferson Jacobs, Stewardship Coordinator

Congratulations to ONDA's spectacular volunteers – the Wilderness Stewardship Program has been awarded the 2011 regional Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Program!

What a perfect way to end another fantastic field season. This year over 400 individuals spent about 5,000 hours working on projects to benefit eastern Oregon's public lands. These folks helped pull over 20 miles of fence, plant over 3,000 trees in riparian areas, survey nearly 400 miles of Oregon Desert Trail and monitor nearly 30 sage grouse leks. Volunteers also worked tirelessly at a variety of ONDA events including our open house and our Wild & Scenic Film Festival, and behind the scenes to help prepare maps, upload photos, and file data.

All of these contributions are critical to our success. To further recognize the "cream of the cream of the crop" we will formally announce our new Volunteer of the Year Award at the ONDA year end party in December. This honor will be awarded at our annual membership meeting in the spring, and members will have the opportunity to nominate volunteers who they believe have gone above and beyond the call of duty and deserve extra recognition. You will be able to learn more about this award and nominate volunteers on our web site starting this December.

Finally, our 2012 season looks to be as action-packed as 2011. Mark your calendars to check the ONDA website in early February when we will be publishing our trip list and opening registration. As you probably know, over the last few years trips have filled up quickly, so it definitely pays to make your plans early! We want everyone who is interested to have a chance to participate.

It is the ONDA volunteers that make our work in the field such a great success – **thank you!**



TOP: ONDA Volunteers Drew Swayne, Chad Delany and Tim Halloran. Photo: Maren Murphy. LEFT: The proud crew of the 5th Annual Last Hart Mountain Fence Pull. Photo: Joe Kresse.

ONDA, Business Owner Make Case In Washington

By Aaron Killgore, John Day Coordinator

ONDA staff shook off their hiking boots and sported some fine duds as they traveled to Washington, D.C. this fall to meet with the Oregon congressional delegation. On behalf of Oregonians that love the desert and enjoy the solitude of the wilderness, we thanked Senator Wyden and Merkley's offices for their continued leadership to protect the John Day Basin. The Cathedral Rock, Horse Heaven, and Sutton Mountain area wilderness proposals along with the Lower John Day River Wilderness Study Areas represent over 100,000 acres of the most stunning desert landscapes still unprotected by the wilderness designations that they deserve.

To provide some local perspective to the delegation on our wilderness proposals, ONDA staff was accompanied by landowner Aruna Jacobi who lives near Sutton Mountain. As a Wheeler County resident and business owner of the Painted Hills Vacation Rentals based out of Mitchell, Aruna joined ONDA at the Capitol to highlight the area as a growing destination for backcountry tourism. The delegation was told how nearly 60,000 people visited the Painted Hills National Monument last year, and pointed out that unfortunately only a select few of those visitors were aware that the public lands surrounding the Monument (Sutton Mountain, Pat's Cabin, Painted Hills and Dead Dog proposed wilderness areas) possess rich recreational experiences – hiking, wildlife viewing, hunting, geological formations, solitude, and breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape.

Aruna further shared her opinion with our Congressional leaders that significant growth potential for the local economy lies in its ability to provide services to visitors to public lands. Working with members of the community, ONDA has recently printed a Sutton Mountain Visitors Guide, and the City of Mitchell will release a new brochure, an updated website, and an application for a State Scenic Byway in the region. I know many of you spend time in Oregon's high desert frequenting places that you love. In the process, you are also frequenting local gas stations, restaurants and hotels. When the occasion permits, please don't hesitate to offer thanks to business and landowners such as Aruna that are supporting conservation of Oregon's desert lands.

Thanks to the support of neighboring landowners and local business owners, Governor Kitzhaber nominated Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven as "crown jewel" areas in Oregon that deserve permanent protection. This list was submitted in response to the Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar's request for each state to identify natural treasures on Bureau of Land Management lands in their states that should be considered for federal wilderness protection. Join us in thanking Governor Kitzhaber for his leadership and conservation vision for the John Day River Basin.

If you would like more suggestions on how you can thank Senator Wyden, Senator Merkley and Governor Kitzhaber for their leadership, support local businesses near Mitchell, or get involved in ONDA's work in the John Day, please don't hesitate to contact me at akillgore@onda.org.



ONDA Ramps Up Efforts On Hart Mountain And Sheldon Refuges



ONDA volunteers pose for a group photo at the Sheldon Refuge after a work party. Photo: Brian Beffort

Continued from page 1

ort in coordination with other groups has resulted in nearly 300 miles of fence being removed from Hart Mountain Refuge. In 2012, there will be just a few isolated strands to haul out, and then we will have truly pulled the "last fence" at Hart Mountain.

In contrast to Hart Mountain, the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge (Sheldon NWR) still had over 150 miles of barbed-wire fence to be removed at the beginning of 2011.

Created in the 1930s the Sheldon Refuge is managed as a complex with the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). The Sheldon Refuge in northern Nevada was designated in 1936 to protect pronghorn and other native wildlife. The rich history of the Sheldon Refuge is still visible today in several historic ranch buildings, including the Last Chance Ranch, which was established in the 1880s by George Hapgood. In 1927 the Audubon

Volunteer Opportunities

If you're interested in volunteering at Hart or Sheldon Refuges in 2012 please contact: Devon Comstock, devon@onda.org

Society and the Boone & Crockett Club made the initial acquisition for the refuge, which included 2,900 acres of the Last Chance Ranch. The ranch served as refuge headquarters from 1928-1934.

This year, thanks to a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Society, ONDA was able to partner with the Friends of Nevada Wilderness (FNW) to dedicate an unprecedented amount of manpower to removing fences from the Sheldon Refuge. Despite being separated by over twenty miles and being in two different states, Hart Mountain and Sheldon Refuges are actually managed together, with one main office in Lakeview, Oregon. By partnering with funders and other stewardship groups ONDA was able



A historic building from the Last Chance Ranch on the Sheldon Refuge. The roots of the refuge are in 2,900 acres of the ranch, purchased in 1927 by the Boone & Crockett Club. Photo: Devon Comstock

to provide resources to an otherwise limited refuge staff. As part of this program, four seasonal staff were hired to work at the Sheldon Refuge over the summer to remove barbed-wire fence and help restore degraded springs. On top of this, 140 volunteers from Nevada and Oregon came to the refuge to help pull fence, resulting in over 70 miles of fence being removed.

A lot of people ask why ONDA puts so



Pronghorn on the move at the Sheldon Refuge in northern Nevada. Sheldon was designated a wildlife refuge in the 1930s. Photo: Jim Remington

much energy into removing barbed-wire fences. The answer is simple – removing barbed-wire fences has important benefits for wildlife. All too frequently ONDA staff and volunteers have come across animals that have become trapped or entangled in barbed-wire fences, leading to injuries which are often fatal.

“When we were pulling fence at Hart Mountain this year, we came across a pronghorn skeleton on the fence. It was an incredible experience to know that, because of our work, wildlife wouldn’t get trapped by these fences again”, said Bob Petit, who volunteered with ONDA this summer.

Studies on a ranch in Utah found that 18% of all sage-grouse mortality resulted from collision with fences. Another study

found that almost two pronghorn were killed for every ten miles of barbed-wire fence along roads in Colorado and Utah. These preventable mortality factors are easily reduced through removing unnecessary fences or installing high visibility fence markers.

Next year promises to be another monumental effort to continue both barbed-wire fence removal and restoring degraded springs at Sheldon Refuge. ONDA and FNW will be partnering to recruit seasonal crew members and volunteers to help with these projects.

An Area Rich With History And Wildlife

The Greater Hart-Sheldon landscape is

rich in both natural and cultural history. While the two refuges account for over 860,000 acres of public land, the supporting landscapes consist of almost 3 million acres of BLM land (including 1.2 million acres of Wilderness Study Areas) and 63,100 acres of Oregon Department of State Lands. These lands provide critical habitat for species such as pronghorn, greater sage-grouse, California bighorn sheep, American pika, pygmy rabbit, waterfowl and shorebirds, and the threatened Warner sucker.

The history of the Greater Hart-Sheldon landscape spans many millennia of human habitation, from pre-Columbian Numic cultures of over 10,000 years ago,

see **HART AND SHELDON** page 6



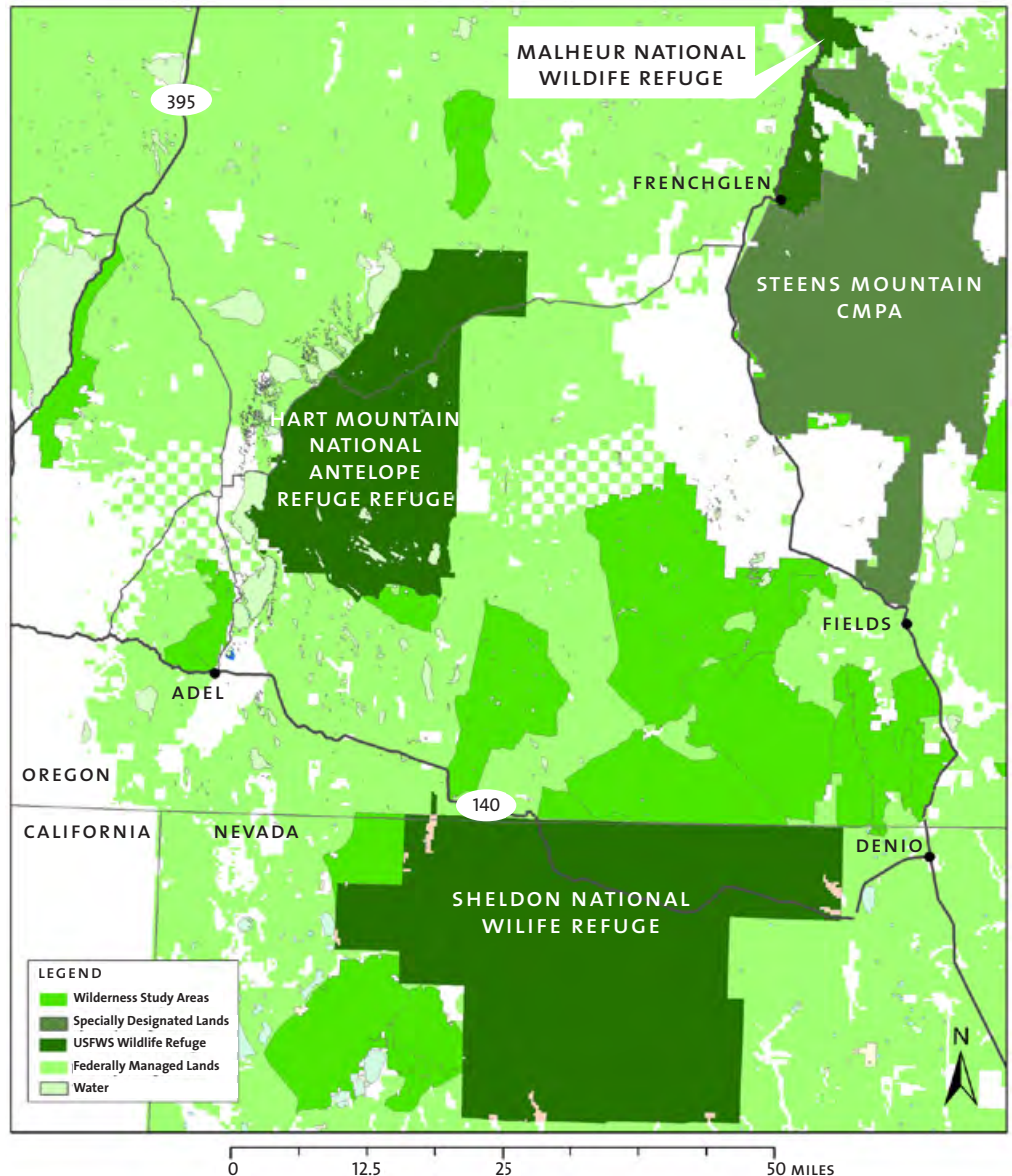
Hart And Sheldon Refuges

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to the pioneering prospectors and ranching barons of the West. One of the most important sites in the region being the rock art panels at Long Lake in Oregon. This site contains some of the oldest known petroglyphs in the United States, dating at least 6,800 years old, as evidenced by deposits of Mount Mazama ash, which buried some of the panels.

Hart Mountain Refuge is located on a massive fault block ridge that ascends abruptly nearly three-quarters of a mile above the Warner Valley floor in a series of rugged cliffs, steep slopes, and knife-like ridges. At the foot of Hart Mountain lies the Warner Wetlands, which contains some of the best wetland habitat in the state of Oregon, and it provides critical habitat for numerous species, including the state sensitive yellow-rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) and the threatened Warner sucker (*Catostomus warnerensis*). East of Hart Mountain lies the Guano Valley and Beaty's Butte, with the Spaulding and Hawk Mountain Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) to the south, all managed by the BLM. On the other side of the Oregon border, in northern Nevada is the 575,000-acre Sheldon NWR, in close proximity to the Massacre Rim WSA and Black Rock National Conservation Area. In contrast to the dramatic topography of Hart Mountain, Sheldon is primarily comprised of sagebrush-dominated tablelands incised with canyons. It has a large number of springs and seeps, playas, and some perennial streams.

The refuges and the surrounding public lands offer incredible recreation opportunities, including camping, hiking, wildlife watching, photography, rock hounding, kayaking, hunting and fishing. Developed camping at both refuges is accessible on graded gravel roads which are passable in the summer and fall by passenger vehicles. Hart Mountain has three designated campgrounds, while Sheldon Refuge has thirteen public campgrounds. Sheldon Refuge is bisected by Highway 140, providing reliable access year round.



Getting There

Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge:

Hart Mountain is located in Lake County, Oregon and is accessible by a graded gravel county road. From Bend follow Highway 20 East to Riley and turn south on Highway 395. After about 65 miles turn left on Hogback Road (towards Hart Mtn). Continue on Hogback Road following the signs to Hart Mountain. At County Road 3-12 turn left and follow the road up the steep grade to the top of Hart Mountain.

Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge:

The Sheldon Refuge is located in Washoe and Humboldt Counties, in Nevada. From Oregon, the easiest access is off of Highway 140, which passes through Adel. The Virgin Valley Campground at the refuge headquarters is accessible from Highway 140. Other campgrounds are accessible by gravel and dirt roads.

For more information and recreation maps please visit:

<http://www.fws.gov/sheldonhartmtn/>



It Starts With A Name: 'Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands'

By Chris Hansen

Owyhee Coordinator

You can't ask people to support a campaign to protect an area if that place does not have a name, and the name should resonate. That was the basis for the creation of ONDA's "Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands" campaign in Southeast Oregon. The name



includes both a cultural reference (a lost Hawaiian trapper) and invokes a major geologic feature. Of course, a successful campaign to protect the largest remaining swath of wilderness-quality land in the Lower 48 needs much more than a great name. It's going to take a lot of people saying

that name aloud to friends throughout Oregon, to newspaper editors, to Oregon's Congressional Delegation, and to the Secretary of the Interior, in order for us to reach our goal of ensuring this desert landscape is permanently protected for future generations.

So, say it with me now: "Oregon's oh-WYE-hee Canyonlands."

Over the last six months the Owyhee campaign has worked on building both name recognition for the campaign along with an identity to match this landscape. ONDA has developed a logo that captures the rugged canyon walls of the main Owyhee River and we have crafted a mission statement specific to the area that underscores the need to preserve ecological integrity, recreational opportunities, and traditional livelihoods for the people who call the Owyhee home. We have completed a 12-page color brochure that speaks to the self-reliant nature of the people, plants and animals living here and found support among a dozen other organizations. And of course you might have seen that New York Times article on a 40-mile adventure along the West Little Owyhee River.

A landscape this large deserves its own website, and we have just launched www.wildowyhee.org. (I'll pause so you can bookmark the website).

The great thing about this nascent website is that it will provide an opportunity for Owyhee enthusiasts to create the relevant content. Volunteers and activists and other desert rats who brave the hell-



Jeremy Fox takes a walk along the West Little Owyhee River. Photo: Chris Hansen

Oregon Owyhee Canyonlands website:
www.wildowyhee.org

ish Owyhee roads can bring back pictures of sage grouse, biscuitroot, and fantastic geological formations and upload them on the site. You may notice links on the webpage to places like Dry Creek and Cedar Mountain that don't have pictures yet. These are the places where the unknown canyon bends invitingly around the corner—they are spots waiting to be explored, photographed and written about by you!

There will be plenty of opportunities to visit the Owyhee throughout 2012. ONDA will be leading trips to witness the mating dance of the threatened Sage Grouse, discover the next leg of the Oregon Desert Trail, document the wild character of the rolling uplands, and raft the Wild and Scenic River. When the trips are posted later this winter, take heart if the adventure you had hoped for is full – contact us anyway and we'll try to connect you with other opportunities or help you coordinate a jaunt into the Owyhee country on your own!

Because Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands is quickly becoming a landscape of national significance, we need new and existing members from Eugene and Salem, from

Corvallis and Portland, to lend a strong voice in our call for the permanent protection of the Owyhee. In particular, we need to make sure strong congressional leaders like Senator Ron Wyden hear how impressive and worthwhile the Owyhee is for permanent protection. We need Senator Wyden to recognize this as a place that defines Oregon's wildness and natural heritage. ONDA will have an interactive presentation in Portland in mid-January to get this message across.

In working on this campaign I have been humbled and impressed by the volunteers committed to Oregon's high desert. In order to take on the monumental challenge that is the Owyhee, we are going to have to harness that energy and direct its focus to the southeast portion of our state. It's going to take all of us - from the wizened stalwarts to relative newcomers like myself - to permanently protect this magnificent area.

For more information, visit our new website (www.wildowyhee.org) and join the mailing list. Journey out to the Owyhee and share your pictures and stories so that we can show the public that this is an area worth caring for, celebrating and protecting.

Remember, without your involvement, Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands is just another name.



Addressing Fire Management Concerns At Whychus-Deschutes

By Gena Goodman-Campbell

Central Oregon Coordinator

Anyone who has visited the stretches of Lower Whychus Creek or the Middle Deschutes River that are encompassed in ONDA's Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness proposal recognizes the unique and spectacular beauty that this area possesses. All it takes is one trip deep into these canyons to witness the wildness of this landscape. But ask an observer standing at the boundary of a private ranch, or in the backyard of one of the many homes surrounding the Whychus-Deschutes proposed wilderness area, and many will likely doubt that such a wild and untrammelled place could exist so close to human development.

Like the Oregon Badlands and many other desert wilderness areas, the Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Proposal challenges us to expand our definition of wilderness past the craggy peaks and alpine forests that are "typical" to our state. More so than any other low elevation wilderness in Oregon, this area also tests the theory that wilderness areas must be remote and hard to reach.

Although it is not unique to have homes and development right up to the boundary of a wilderness area (the Sandia Mountain Wilderness outside of Albuquerque is one example that comes to mind), the response from nearby landowners to a proposed wilderness area in their backyard is sometimes apprehensive, or even downright hostile. Of all of the issues that spark anxiety among landowners, wildfire is the paramount concern, and many hold the false notion that the default reaction to a fire burning in a wilderness area is a hands-off "let it burn" approach. This is part of the inherent conflict of having homes next to wild areas, and it is why special provisions are made in the management of wildlands to protect existing homes and development from fire.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 provides clear exceptions for wilderness managers to protect lives, safety and adjacent communities in the event of an emergency such as a wildfire in a wilderness area. The overriding policy on fire management across all public lands is very clear: the protection of people and their homes is every firefighter's number one priority. This is reflected in the Wilderness Act itself, and all relevant policies and laws that have come after it. Section 4d of The Wilderness Act states that even though motorized vehicles are gener-



Hiking through the recent Alder Springs burn. Photo: Gena Goodman-Campbell

... a backyard wilderness area is outside of the scope of most local residents' experience, and we recognize that permanently protecting the Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Area will likely only happen through a persistent combination of education, outreach and compromise.

ally prohibited in wilderness, this provision does not apply in emergencies, and any necessary measures can be used to fight fire in wilderness areas in order protect human health and safety.

Although ample documentation of this policy exists, and many examples of the use of helicopters, bulldozers and chainsaws in wilderness areas can be cited, it is clear that time and personal experience are often the only things that can change individual perceptions. The portion of the wilderness proposal that is directly adjacent to Crooked River Ranch (the largest subdivision in Oregon, with an estimated 4,600 residents) is a Wilderness Study Area managed as de facto wilderness since 1984, so in reality the transition to permanent wilderness status would be unnoticeable to most nearby residents. Still, a backyard wilderness area is outside of the scope of most local residents' experience, and we recognize that permanently protecting the Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Area will likely only happen through a persistent combination of education, outreach and compromise.

We are continuing to work with individual landowners and community leaders like the Crooked River Ranch Fire Chief to craft an alternative to our original Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Proposal. In spite of our assurances that a compromise is still in the works, the Crooked River Ranch Board of Directors and the Jefferson County Commissioners have both recently expressed their opposition to a Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Area. This only underscores the fact that a successful wilderness proposal must be supported and ultimately carried forward by community members themselves. In order to craft such a proposal, we are working with stakeholders to consider designations other than wilderness for areas within the wildland urban interface, which we hope will reduce conflict and address future management concerns. There is common ground in the desire to keep this area natural for future generations; through open communication and perseverance, ONDA is committed to bringing the community together around this goal.



CONSERVATION

DESERVES MORE THAN 2%*



Pronghorn

PHOTO © GEORGE WUERTHNER

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 \$68,000 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 efforts 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 \$68,000 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.



LEGAL DOCKET

Rare BLM Decision Reduces Grazing On Steens Mountain

By Mac Lacy, *Senior Attorney*

In October, the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) denied Roaring Springs Ranch’s request to graze 1,500 cattle within a 30,082-acre area on south Steens Mountain known as the Tombstone Pasture. The agency explained that it was legally bound, as a result of two court-approved agreements in recently successful ONDA legal actions, to not graze this area for at least three years.

First, in 2010, BLM entered into a settlement agreement with ONDA to resolve our litigation challenging 28 miles of illegal road construction work on Steens Mountain. BLM agreed to bar grazing until at least 2013 in areas reseeded as part of route rehabilitation actions. Some of the routes pass through the Tombstone Pasture, which includes parts of three citizen-proposed wilderness areas and the Blitzen River Wilderness Study Area, and also adjoins the Steens Mountain Wilderness Area, Blitzen Wild and Scenic River corridor, and the 97,000-acre No Livestock Grazing Area protected

BLM’s no-grazing decision is critical to protecting sage-grouse habitat on Steens Mountain, ensuring more continuous rest from grazing than this area likely has seen in more than a century.

by Congress in the Steens Act. Preserving large, roadless blocks of public land in this area is critical to ONDA’s long-term wilderness efforts on Steens Mountain.

Second, in June 2011, BLM agreed to stop all ground-disturbing work pending a merits ruling in ONDA’s litigation challenging the agency’s North Steens Juniper project. This included a prescribed fire BLM had planned to conduct in the Tombstone area. In May, ONDA had asked the court to issue an order enjoining project actions

harmful to the Greater sage-grouse, including large-scale prescribed burning that threatened the bird’s breeding, nesting, and brood-rearing habitat. There are at least half a dozen sage-grouse leks (breeding grounds) within several miles of the Tombstone area. Steens Mountain lies within one of just two remaining habitat “strongholds” for the sage-grouse, and recent population viability studies show the birds there are a critical population within this western stronghold. The juniper project decision requires BLM to keep cattle out of project units for at least one growing season prior to any burning.

BLM’s no-grazing decision is critical to protecting sage-grouse habitat on Steens Mountain, ensuring more continuous rest from grazing than this area likely has seen in more than a century. Of course, other threats to sage-grouse and unprotected wilderness remain. ONDA will continue to work to ensure BLM does not undo the benefits of this decision by turning around and littering the landscape with barbed-wire fences and cattle watering stations that destroy wilderness values and fragment sagebrush habitat.

Court Blocks Unlawful Road Construction On Steens Mountain

By Mac Lacy, *Senior Attorney*

In August 2011, federal Magistrate Judge Paul Papak issued an order barring BLM from upgrading 113 disputed routes totaling 90 miles on Steens Mountain. The Court also confirmed that BLM may

not conduct any mechanical maintenance on another 22 miles of routes within Wilderness Study Areas on the mountain. The order protects citizen-proposed wilderness areas on Steens Mountain from being splintered into roaded parcels ineligible for Wilderness protection from Congress.

After winning on the merits earlier this year in this challenge to BLM’s travel plan for Steens Mountain, ONDA had asked the court to enjoin BLM from mechanically maintaining routes that field data show do not exist or that have been naturally reclaimed on the landscape due to years of non-use. The court agreed that an injunction is appropriate while the case is on remand to the Department of the Interior for further proceedings based on the violations of law the court identified. The enjoined routes cover about one-fifth of the routes BLM had designated in its travel plan.

The injunction protects important roadless areas and wildlife habitat from further fragmentation and wilderness damage while BLM prepares a lawful plan, and is critical to ONDA’s ability to protect these roadless areas and secure further permanent, congressional Wilderness protection on Steens Mountain.

ONDA Wins Case Protecting Oregon Spotted Frog

By: Laurie Rule, *Advocates for the West*

ONDA received a strong ruling from Magistrate Judge Mark Clarke in July finding that the Forest Service was violating the law by not protecting rare plants and animals from cattle grazing in Central Oregon. The Chemult Ranger District on the Fremont-Winema National Forest contains a unique expanse of wetlands that provide habitat for a remarkable number of rare plants, mollusks, and the Oregon spotted frog. Many of these species, which are designated as Forest Service sensitive species because of their rare status and declining numbers, were just discovered in these wetlands in the last few years. But instead of immediately protect-



The Oregon spotted frog

ing these sensitive plants and animals from cattle that trample them and destroy their habitat, the Forest Service made no changes to its livestock grazing management.

Judge Clarke ruled that the agency violated the National Forest Management Act and the National Environmental

Policy Act by ignoring the harm that was occurring to these newly discovered rare species and simply authorizing the same grazing to continue to occur. The Judge also ruled that the Forest Service violated the National Environmental Policy Act by reauthorizing grazing in Round Meadow, an area the Forest Service had closed to grazing for years to restore the natural wetlands in the meadow. The Judge ruled that the agency had to prepare an environmental analysis before it could authorize grazing in Round Meadow. In response, the agency reduced grazing by one third for the 2011 grazing season and again closed Round Meadow. The Forest Service is in the process of completing a long-term management plan for the entire area, which Judge Clarke is asked the agency to complete in a “timely” manner.



Your Donation At Work In Oregon's High Desert

By Allison Crotty
Development Director

So far this year...

- 20,000 acres of potential Wilderness has been inventoried, 30 Greater-sage grouse leks monitored, 3,000 trees planted, 20 miles of fence removed and 33 multi-day field restoration volunteer trips are planned for 2012.
- 1 new website launched, www.WildOwyhee.org, to facilitate communication, education and strategic partnerships to promote the largest remaining conservation opportunity in the lower 48 states, 2 million acres of pristine desert wildlands in the Owyhee Canyonlands region.
- 411 miles of the proposed 700-mile Oregon Desert Trail route, stretching from Bend to the Idaho border, have been inventoried with the help of 31 new field volunteers.
- 250 Oregon desert-lovers and conservation advocates have become new ONDA members, lending their voice to the chorus of our member base that has expanded to nearly 1,700 individuals and families.
- 300,000 acres of ecologically vital public lands in the John Day basin and Central Oregon region will be protected as a result of widening support for ONDA conservation initiatives.

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

Planned Giving: A Gift You Can Afford

Did you know that you could support Oregon Natural Desert Association and improve your financial security at the same time? With a planned gift, you can.

Have you heard the term "planned giving" but weren't sure what it means? Or maybe you've always thought planning giving is only for the wealthy. Let's take a moment to clear up this up. Planned giving is quite simple and is accessible to most people, even those of modest means. It is a method of supporting a nonprofit organization that you care about by using a giving method that enables you to make a larger gift than you could make from your day to day income.

A planned gift is any significant gift, made in lifetime or at death, as part of a donor's overall financial or estate planning. You may use cash, appreciated stock, real estate, personal property, life insurance or a retirement plan to make your planned gift.

The benefits of planned giving are many. Your planned gift can return an immediate tax deduction to you, plus provide a lifetime income for you and a loved one and long-term financial support to ONDA. That's right, with planned giving you benefit, your loved ones benefit, and ONDA benefits.

How is this possible? By taking advantage of incentives the IRS provides, we can craft a gift that delivers benefits to Oregon deserts and to you. With thoughtful planning, you can fulfill your personal giving goals and create a legacy that will endure forever. To learn more about how a planned gift can work for you, talk to your financial planner or call ONDA at 541.330.2368.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good Bye And Good Luck Alexa!



Alexa Bontrager

After two years with ONDA as our Restoration Coordinator, Alexa Bontrager is moving to the bright lights and big city of Chicago to pursue other opportunities. During her time with ONDA, Alexa coordinated our John Day Basin Wild Steelhead Project to bring back riparian vegetation and beavers to John Day tributaries, which are critical to the recovery of threatened steelhead and salmon populations. Alexa has helped organize hard-working ONDA volunteers and various agency partners to improve these streams. Thank you Alexa for all your efforts to improve Oregon's high desert watersheds!

SAVE THE DATE

ONDA And Commute Options Ribbon Cutting

Thursday, November 3rd
Chamber Ribbon Cutting at 4:15–5 PM
After party 5–7 PM
ONDA & Commute Options office,
50 SW Bond St., Ste. 4, Bend

You're invited to join ONDA and Commute Options for our Bend Chamber of Commerce Ribbon Cutting event. A great opportunity to connect with the local business community, the event includes a brief presentation, door prizes, and a small after-party from 5–7 PM. Beer and wine provided by ONDA, light snacks provided by Commute Options. Both ONDA and CO will also be offering business memberships at 50% off.



The 2012 Wild Desert Calendar

Wild Desert Calendar Exhibits

ONDA Wild Desert Calendar Exhibit in Bend
November 4th, First Friday, 5–8 PM
Common Table, 150 NW Oregon Ave., Bend
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! Stay tuned for details on a possible Portland calendar exhibit in January!

ONDA Year-End Celebration!

Friday, December 2nd, 5–9 PM
ONDA office, 50 SW Bond St., Ste. 4, Bend

Join ONDA staff, Board Members, and friends at our Year-end Celebration! You'll hear about ONDA's accomplishments for the year, as well as the progress and role of volunteers on the Oregon Desert Trail (ODT) project. The event is also the finale of ONDA's 2011 Membership Drive and includes a grand drawing of fabulous prizes from six categories: biking, kayaking, trail running, hiking, family adventure, and desert solitude – all experiences to enjoy on the ODT! Beer, wine, and finger-foods provided by ONDA and music from our bluegrass favorite, Truck Stop Gravy.



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

OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION



DESERT RAMBLINGS

FROM THE OUTBACK

Governor Honors ONDA Volunteers

FROM THE OUTBACK from page 1

eagerly rose to the challenge and developed creative and inspiring ways to volunteer by establishing now-classic events such as the Hart Mountain Fence Pull. Volunteers Jim Davis, Greg Burke, Mike Sequeira and Thomas Osborne have produced the ONDA Wild Desert Calendar every year for the past eight years to make clear that Oregon's deserts are worth cherishing and worth protecting; because of their great work, many of us eye our mailbox anxiously every November until our new calendar arrives. Others like Fred Sawyer, Bill Crowell, Gary Beaudoin, Miriam Lipsitz, Julie Weikel and John Katzenstein have never found a task that they weren't up for. You name the task; they will get it done. Given the hundreds of volunteers that give their time to ONDA and Oregon's high desert every year, I could go on and on. Whether you have spent one hour or hundreds of hours volunteering, I offer my greatest thanks!

ONDA has also been blessed with incredible staff over the years that have worked hard to grow ONDA's cadre of volunteers and make sure that, whatever the task, ONDA will find a way for our members to help. A new office? Here is a paintbrush. A mailing? Here is your stack of envelopes and stamps. A couple hundred miles of barbed wire fence? Here are some gloves and a fence tool that might come



ONDA volunteer Richard Brandt loads up on gear to haul out of the Spring Basin Wilderness during the 2011 Barbed Wire Rodeo. Photo: Craig Terry.

in handy. ONDA staff like Gilly Lyons, Erin Barnholdt and, now, Jefferson Jacobs have done an incredible job doing what we all should do, empower other people. It is for

this reason that they are beloved by ONDA's ever-expanding legion of volunteers and thanks to their leadership, ONDA boasts an incredible litany of volunteer successes on an annual basis (for an accounting of 2011 efforts, see page 3).

Such incredible volunteer work merits recognition and who better than Oregon's own Governor to celebrate the thousands of hours of work that ONDA volunteers do every year. Last month, the Governor's office announced ONDA's Wilderness Stewardship program as a regional recipient of the 2011 Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Program. The award is a testament to the enthusiasm and energy of the hearty souls who have heeded the call to protect, defend and restore Oregon's high desert. This wild corner of the state would not be nearly as wild without you.

As they say, one good turn deserves another. So please extend thanks to Governor Kitzhaber for this tremendous honor, and while you're at it, it couldn't hurt to ask the Governor to call for the permanent protection of places like the Owyhee Canyonlands (page 7) or Hart-Sheldon (page 1). After all, advocating for the protection of Oregon's high desert is yet another thing that ONDA volunteers do so well.

