

DESERT RAMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

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SAGE-GROUSE

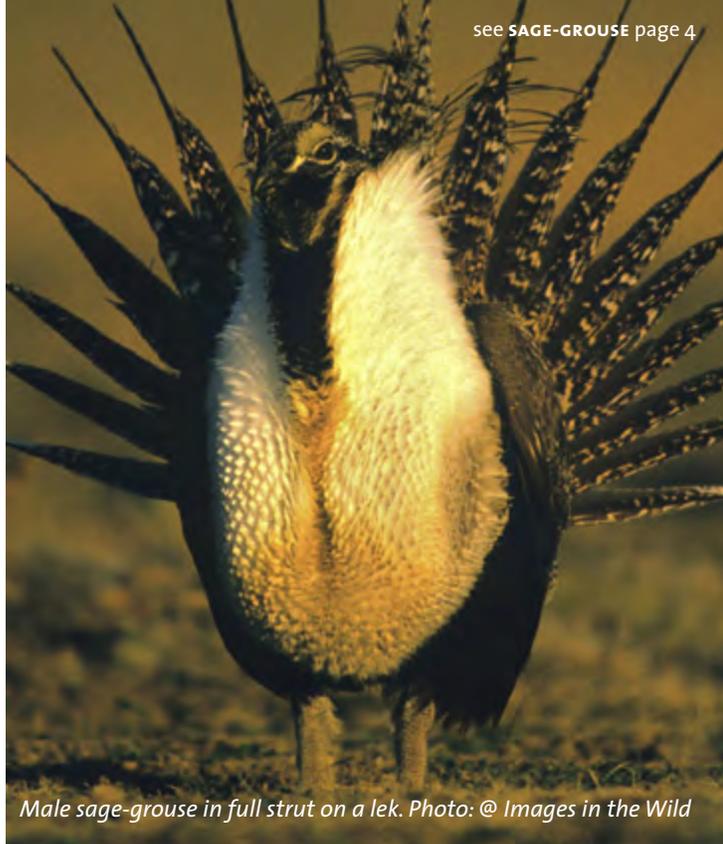
A Game-Changer for the High Desert

By Matt Little, *Conservation Director*
and Devon Comstock, *Hart-Sheldon Conservation Coordinator*

At one time, Greater sage-grouse could be found numbering in the millions throughout the western United States. Today, their habitat has been cut by more than half and their populations are on a steady decline. Sage-grouse require large expanses of healthy sagebrush habitat to survive, and are thus an indicator of the integrity of sagebrush landscapes, which are also home to species such as pronghorn, meadowlarks, and pygmy rabbits. The decline of the sage-grouse signals an urgent need to redress wide-scale habitat fragmentation and degradation. Efforts to change existing land use practices to conserve and restore sage-grouse habitats will have major implications for wildlife and land managers in the coming decades.

The Greater sage-grouse is the largest North American grouse species. Its range covers semi-arid sagebrush-steppe

see **SAGE-GROUSE** page 4



Male sage-grouse in full strut on a lek. Photo: © Images in the Wild

FROM THE OUTBACK

Kicking off a Quarter Century of Desert Conservation

By Brent Fenty, *Executive Director*

2012 marks a significant milestone for ONDA. This fall, ONDA will have existed for a quarter of a century. Such a milestone is no small feat and speaks to the dedication and passion of the thousands of people who have supported ONDA's effort to protect, defend and restore Oregon's wild desert lands over the past 25 years.

There are some numbers that seem more significant than others and, although perhaps truly no more significant than say 24 or 26, this milestone serves as a useful reminder to take stock of our successes and recommit ourselves to a bold vision for the future. ONDA's successes over the past 25 years are numerous. The permanent protection of Steens Mountain, Spring Basin and the Badlands; Oregon's only three desert wilderness areas. Removal of livestock grazing from sensitive fish and wildlife habitat on the Hart Mountain Refuge, the Donner und Blitzen Wild and Scenic River, and the Wild and Scenic Owyhee River. The removal

see **FROM THE OUTBACK** page 12

INSIDE DESERT RAMBLINGS



West Little Owyhee River. Photo: © Tim Neville

- > Pull a fence, plant a tree, or just walk with us in the wilderness. Join the team and make a lasting difference in Oregon's high desert. See the schedule of ONDA's 2012 volunteer trips, page 3.
- > Wild Owyhee field season outlook, page 7.
- > Help advance the John Day Wilderness campaign, page 8.
- > Whychus-Deschutes stewardship group forms, page 9.



25 Years On, ONDA's Guiding Principle Remains a Beacon

By Helen Harbin, *President*

Every organization needs a guiding principle. Ensuring 8 million acres of public land in Oregon's high desert is protected and home to healthy and diverse populations of wildlife is at the heart of all that we do at ONDA. Together, our community of members and supporters has furthered this aim since ONDA's founding 25 years ago. In that time we've made great strides, all thanks to your dedicated support.

ONDA has grown substantially in its 25-year history and our guiding principle to protect, defend and restore Oregon's special desert places remains ONDA's foundation. Whether it is expanding our efforts into the Hart-Sheldon Landscape and the Owyhee Canyonlands, continuing to defend Steens Mountain, restoring desert wildlands, or creating the 750-mile Oregon Desert Trail, the common thread is that the unwavering support of our members makes every achievement possible.

Thank you donors, volunteers, members and advocates for partnering with ONDA. In the coming year you will be standing alongside us as we continue efforts to protect vast tracts of vital desert lands, travel to Washington, DC to meet with decision-makers, monitor land management practices, and work hard to improve fish and wild-life habitat. Your personal involvement with ONDA takes many forms. Each action you choose to take on behalf of our desert wildlands is a generous gift and a step toward our dream of expanded Wilderness and healthy desert ecosystems in Oregon.

Here's to another successful year conserving and enjoying the places in Oregon we all love. Thank you.



FROM
THE DEN



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

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SAVE THE DATE, SAVE THE DESERT

Pull a fence, plant a tree, photograph a grand vista, or just walk with us through the wilderness. Lend a hand, soak in the sights, soak in the hot springs! Join the team and make a lasting difference in Oregon's high desert.



An ONDA volunteer's view of the John Day River surveying wilderness North Pole Ridge Wilderness Study Area

ONDA 2012 TRIPS AND EVENTS

March 29-April 1	Hart Mountain Sage-Grouse Lek Monitoring
April 13-15	Owyhee Sage-Grouse Lek Monitoring
April 20-22	Annual General Membership Meeting: Hancock Field Station
April 26-30	Owyhee River Float: Rome to Birch Creek
April 27-29	Cherry Creek Riparian Planting
May 4-6	South Fork of the Crooked River Riparian Planting
May 24-28	Oregon Desert Trail Survey: Leslie Gulch to Owyhee State Park
June 1-5	John Day Float & Wilderness Inventory: Clarno to Cottonwood
June 2	Leslie Gulch Day-Hike
June 4	Oregon Desert Trail Survey: Training Day at Badlands Wilderness
June 8-10	Silvies Valley Ranch Aspen Planting
June 22-24	Sheldon Rendezvous: Fence Pull
June 28-July 2	Oregon Desert Trail Survey: Oregon Canyon Mtns to Trout Creek Mtns
July 26-July 30	6th Annual "Last" Hart Fence Pull and Celebration
July 25-30	Oregon Desert Trail Survey: Hart Lake to Hart Hot-springs
August 14-19	Steens Backcountry Fence Pull
August 24-28	Oregon Desert Trail Survey: Horse Butte to Newberry Crater
September 6-9	Southeast Oregon Wilderness Inventory
September 13-16	Owyhee Honeycombs Hiking Weekend
September 20-22	Wild & Scenic Film Festival and Desert Conference, Bend, Oregon
September 20-23	Pine Creek Conservation Area Fence Pull: High Ponderosas
October 5-7	Logan Valley Planting
October 11-14	Pine Creek Conservation Backcountry Fence Pull: Spring Basin Wilderness Boundary
October 12-14	Cherry Creek Ranch riparian planting

For additional information and registration visit us at onda.org or e-mail ONDA's Wilderness Stewardship Coordinator, Jefferson Jacobs at jjacobs@onda.org

Many of the favorite and familiar trips are here to enjoy again: Steens backcountry fence pull, lek monitoring and the float trips. This year though, even many of those familiar favorites will take you to new corners of eastern Oregon. This year we will float the John Day from Clarno all the way down to Cottonwood Canyon, stopping along the way for spectacular hiking to inventory the riverside proposed Wilderness Areas. There are also completely new offerings such as ONDA's first ever work trip in Grant County, to help restoration efforts in Logan Valley. Other new trips offered include exploring the Owyhee Canyonlands and a new long-term project to monitor a novel riparian restoration project in the upper Silvies River watershed.

2012 also represents the grand finale for some of our most popular efforts. It will truly be our last Annual "Last" Fence Pull at Hart Mountain (pending boundary changes or inholding purchases ... there's always a loophole!). 2012 will also mark the final season of large-scale surveying of the proposed Oregon Desert Trail route. All in all we will have over 25 different trips to volunteer on this season. Join your old friends, spread the word, and meet new friends as we come together again to Save the Desert!



SAGE-GROUSE

A Game-Changer for the High Desert

Continued from page 1

systems between 4,000 and 9,000 feet elevation throughout much of the West. As a sagebrush obligate, the sage-grouse is dependent on sagebrush for food, cover and reproduction. Every spring, males converge on display grounds called leks to show off and attract females. After mating, females establish up to 80% of their nests within five miles of a lek, which is considered to be the center of year-round activity for resident populations (*Holloran and Anderson 2005*). However, migratory populations can nest and use seasonal habitats far from their spring lek location.

The conversion of sagebrush to agriculture and other development resulted in the loss of at least half the historic sagebrush habitat across the West. Although agricultural conversion resulted in the

extirpation of sage-grouse in the Columbia Basin, Oregon still contains about 65% of its historic sagebrush-steppe. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates that Oregon's minimum spring population in 2010 was 24,000 birds and populations remain relatively stable. However, a 2009 study (*Garton et al*) found that populations in the Northern Great Basin have a 100% probability of dropping below sustainable levels within 100 years if their habitat continues to be lost.

Current Policies and Regulation

In 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reviewed historic and current range-wide estimates in sage-grouse populations and found a long-term decline due to habitat loss and degradation. It declared the sage-grouse to be warranted for protection

under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but precluded from such action because of the need to take action on other species facing more immediate threats. Under a legal settlement, the Fish and Wildlife Service has agreed to revisit the listing decision by September, 2015.

Since this happened, agencies have been scrambling to put into place protections for the sage-grouse to restore populations and avoid an ESA listing. Last year, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife mapped out sage-grouse habitat in Oregon and developed voluntary land management guidelines for these areas. However, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the agency which manages most of the lands containing sage-grouse and it has initiated its own process to determine appropriate standards. Scoping comments for this



*A male sage grouse displaying for a female on a springtime lek.
Photo © Images in the Wild*



SAGE-GROUSE

A Game-Changer for the High Desert

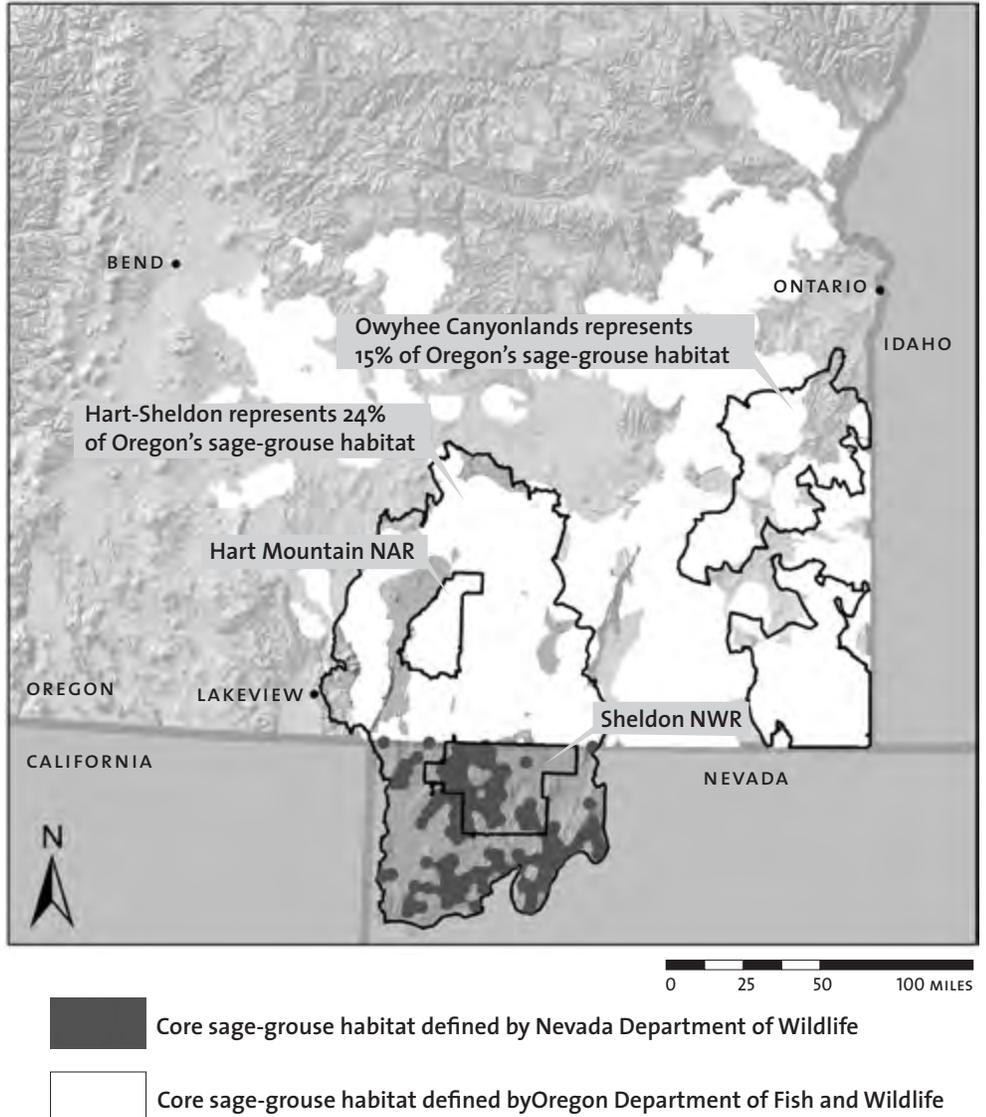
process were completed on February 7 and regional and state Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) will be completed by the end of 2014. These EISs will form the basis of sage-grouse conservation standards that the BLM must use to amend their regional resource management plans. BLM also has issued interim guidelines to regional offices, but they contain ambiguous language, so it will be partly up to citizens and groups like ONDA to ensure that decisions made by BLM truly protect and enhance sage-grouse populations.

Impacts to Sage-grouse

The sage-grouse is attracting so much attention because scientists, land managers, and land users are realizing how sensitive this species is to change and how many land practices affect the integrity of sage-grouse habitat. Throughout the year, sage-grouse move between different habitats and as mentioned before, some populations are migratory. Summer range consists of a combination of sagebrush and forb-rich areas, including wet meadows and creeks. "Forbs" include flowering plants such as blue flax and penstemon. In the winter, sage-grouse are dependent on taller sagebrush that is accessible under all snow conditions. Consequently, sage-grouse require vast expanses of intact and interconnected healthy sagebrush habitat. Among the many threats that fragment and degrade sage-grouse habitat are altered fire regimes, the spread of juniper and non-native weeds, climate change, road networks, energy development and transmission corridors, agriculture, grazing, and urban development. The following is a summary of only some of these threats:

Roads and Motorized Use – The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has determined that 95% of all sage-grouse habitat range wide is within 1.5 miles of a mapped road, and almost no sagebrush habitat is more than 4.3 miles from a road. Roads present a number of problems for sage-grouse including habitat fragmentation, mortality from motor vehicles, spread of invasive plants, and avoidance behaviors. Because the density of roads in some sage-grouse habitat can be as high as eight miles per square mile, there are opportunities for management

Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat within Owyhee Canyonlands and Hart-Sheldon landscape



Source: Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, 2011; Nevada Department of Wildlife, 2008.

agencies to consider seasonal or permanent road closures and careful road maintenance activities in sage-grouse nesting, breeding, and brood-rearing areas.

Energy Development – Industrial energy development in Oregon can impact sage-grouse in a number of ways. The most obvious is the direct loss of available sagebrush habitat. Energy developments

are also accompanied by roads, transmission lines, vehicle activity, and noise which fragment habitat and harass sage-grouse. Studies have shown that sage-grouse avoid standing structures, which might serve as perching sites for raptors. With energy development, standing structures include power lines and poles, wind turbines,

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SAGE-GROUSE

A Game-Changer for the High Desert

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buildings and fences. The impacts on sage-grouse are not always immediately apparent, but evidence suggests that energy development near lek sites can cause sage-grouse to abandon the area within three to four years. Energy development within sagebrush communities will need to be avoided or sited very carefully, including proactive mitigation measures to ensure the long-term viability of local sage-grouse populations.

Livestock Grazing and Associated Development – Livestock grazing is the number one land use on public rangelands in Oregon. Livestock consume grasses and forbs, alter nutrient cycles, trample soils and plants, act as vectors for weedy plants, and disrupt fragile soil crusts. At unsustainable levels of grazing, these changes can lead to an overall loss of vegetative cover, reduced water infiltration rates, and increased soil erosion (*Society for Range Management 1995*). Beyond the direct effects of livestock grazing, the range developments necessary to manage livestock, such as fences, roads, and water developments can also negatively impact sage-grouse. Sage-grouse mortality due to fence collisions is most problematic when fences are located near lek sites. Studies have shown that marking fences with reflective flagging can significantly reduce this risk, but avoiding fences in the first place is the best solution. The high density of livestock water developments throughout sage-grouse habitat not only creates areas of highly-degraded sagebrush habitat, but also creates warm, stagnant pools of water, which are ideal for mosquitoes that carry the West Nile Virus – a disease sage-grouse are highly susceptible to. Deep water troughs, with inadequate escape ramps can also lead to drowning deaths. New recommendations for water trough design and placement can help reduce these risks.

Fire and Invasive Species Management – Fire suppression, drought, and increases in invasive species have drastically altered fire regimes in sagebrush ecosystems. The historic fire cycle in sagebrush ecosystems is reported to be between 70 to 240 years for big sagebrush, but the introduction of

pervasive weeds, such as cheatgrass, has shortened fire cycles in certain areas to as little as 1 to 5 years. The recovery period needed for some sagebrush species may be between 35 to 120 years; therefore, wild-fire may be detrimental if sagebrush has not had time to fully recover from previous disturbances, or if it destroys native understory plants. Another concern is when agencies “stabilize” an area susceptible to cheatgrass with other non-native species like crested wheatgrass and forage kochia, that are less prone to fire and do not spread easily. However, these projects often do not include long-term plans to return the area to healthy, native sagebrush habitat, and this is a practice that must change in order to maintain sage-grouse populations into the future.

A related concern, which has been getting a lot of attention, is the great expansion of juniper woodlands throughout Oregon as a result of fire suppression, overgrazing, and climate change. There are currently many initiatives that allow land managers and owners to remove younger juniper where it is encroaching on sagebrush. However, problems can arise when these treatments are not well-designed, closely monitored, or fire is employed too aggressively.

Opportunities

Though public lands make up the vast percentage of sagebrush habitats in the West, these lands are interspersed with large, privately-owned parcels and ranches. Many programs are available which offer financial assistance to landowners willing to manage their land to improve and preserve sage-grouse habitat. Since much of the lowland areas and water sources are privately owned, it is critical for agencies and organizations to partner with landowners to ensure that wet meadows, springs, and creeks are functioning and available for sage-grouse use. By encouraging landowners to put land into conservation easements, or maintain native vegetation, a network of public-private partnerships can preserve the connectivity of sage-grouse habitats. Land exchanges or the purchasing of inholdings for conservation can also help make land management more consistent across critical sage-grouse range.

ONDA has been working for years to protect key landscapes and wildlife corridors that overlap with Oregon’s largest sage-grouse strongholds. The Greater Hart-Sheldon Landscape and Owyhee Canyonlands together provide 39% of Oregon’s sage-grouse habitat (under Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s “core” and “low-density” habitat models released in 2010) illustrating that federal land conservation efforts are essential to maintaining some of Oregon’s most concentrated sage-grouse populations. Wilderness Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Research Natural Areas, and Special Recreation Management Areas are all tools that can be used to protect sage-grouse habitat. ONDA also works closely with the State of Oregon to monitor sage-grouse populations each year including spring lek-monitoring trips planned in Hart-Sheldon and Owyhee that you can participate in as a volunteer (see ONDA Volunteer Opportunities, page 3 of this newsletter).

Over the last decade, the plight of the Greater sage-grouse has come to the forefront, initiating wide-ranging changes in land management. ONDA is working closely with our conservation partners and the BLM to ensure that the agency develops sound, scientifically-defensible approaches to sage-grouse conservation in Oregon. You can join us in these efforts by following and commenting on sage grouse guidelines as they are developed by BLM at www.blm.gov/sagegrouse. If you sign up for our “SageNet” e-mail action alerts on ONDA’s homepage, we will also let you know when there are opportunities to comment.

The future of sage-grouse populations in the United States will depend on our ability to work across organizational and political boundaries and employ new science to improve land management. Ultimately, our success will be defined by the wide open spaces we protect and the growing populations of sage-grouse that occupy Oregon’s high desert.





The Coming of the Owyhee Season



Confluence of the Main Owyhee and West Little Owyhee. Photo © Tim Neville

By Chris Hansen
Owyhee Coordinator

Oh how many a desert rat longs for the first signs of spring! That yearning to glimpse an awkward antelope on the heels of its mother and smell the wet sage. Winter rears speculation over four dark months. What will the run-off be like for the rafters this year on the Owyhee? Will



the road to Anderson Crossing be open in early May? Will there be enough moisture to produce insects for the next brood of chukar? How many tires might it take to reach the leks off the Crowley Road? Who can really say?

At ONDA we ask these questions on behalf of our members and supporters. We know of the others out there longing for the jarring dirt roads and a sweat-stained bandanna underneath a wide brim hat. We have seen our fellow desert rats who come back grinning with dust in their teeth, skin wizened and tan, the crow's feet etched off the sides of clear

eyes. These are marks of character. If we are lucky we have gone with them to brush aside rattlesnakes with the walking stick and rise at the first meadowlark's call. We know there are others who have caught this subtle arid nimbus. And for the 2012 field season, we want you to help us introduce your friends to the Wild Owyhee. Some don't even know what they're missing.

In April, we'll be fulfilling our "legacy lek" commitment to monitor sage-grouse with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. For many years ONDA volunteers have made their presence felt counting birds at Hart Mountain. We are seeking to build on that visible presence in Malheur County by coming back to the same leks year after year, just like the birds.

After our gathering at the Annual Meeting, we'll once again offer our beloved rafting trip on the Lower Owyhee Wild and Scenic River from Rome down to Birch Creek. Our five day, four night adventure through the heart of the Wilderness area continues to amaze and inspire new volunteers and advocates. This year we'll be working closely with the many outfitters and guides on the river to build a bigger network of boaters concerned about the future of the Owyhee Canyonlands.

The month of May brings an opportunity to discover the next leg of ONDA's Oregon Desert Trail (ODT). Our inventory trip last year for the ODT left behind five wet, bruised and battered men who couldn't help but beam at the site of the Main fork of the Owyhee and tell the *New York Times* all about it. Will this year's jaunt to the trail's final endpoint at Lake Owyhee State Park produce a similar result?

Finally, a trip to the Honeycombs WSA in September will showcase some of the more spectacular and remote country in the northern part of the Owyhee. If you've been to Leslie Gulch, think on a larger scale and more remote and you'll have Painted Canyon. To find a new video that documents a previous trip down Painted Canyon, visit the Wild Owyhee Facebook page. We hope you "Like" us.

All of the mentioned trips are ONDA-sponsored trips, but there are always opportunities to take in the Owyhee with an independent group. Give Chris a call at 541-709-1576 for the latest weather and road information and to get in touch with other folks heading east to the desert country. Take pictures, take friends, tell stories, and bring the Owyhee to those who haven't seen it yet. You'll make a friend for life.



Three Steps You Can Take to Protect John Day Wilderness

By Aaron Killgore

John Day Coordinator

As we transition into a new year with the John Day wilderness campaigns, ONDA's members and partners have a lot to show for their tremendous effort over the past year. The Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven Wilderness Act of 2012 is moving forward in the US Senate thanks to the leadership of Senators Wyden and Merkley. When mark-up of this legislation occurs in 2012, it will have passed a crucial step towards becoming law and the permanent protection of this breathtaking area. Our next steps are to watch for opportunities to package the Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven legislation with other public lands bills so it can receive a floor vote in the Senate, and to urge Representative Walden to support companion legislation in the House.

That brings us to the **first** thing you can do. If you haven't already, please take the time to write Oregon's Congressional delegation and encourage them to protect these amazing areas at:

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

An incredible amount of support also exists for the protection of Sutton Mountain, Pat's Cabin, Painted Hills and Dead Dog proposed wilderness areas in Wheeler County. For those of you that have taken photographs at the Painted Hills National Monument, or floated the John Day River at Twickenham, you've enjoyed the dramatic backdrop of Sutton Mountain rising away from red and greenpainted desert hills. A broad network of hunting and fishing organizations, adjacent landowners, boaters and outfitters, local

business owners and conservation organizations support wilderness designation of these areas. The time to protect this area is now, and we need your help.

The **second** thing you can do? Please support this campaign by signing our petition to Senator Wyden at:

www.change.org/petitions/sen-ron-wyden-designate-the-sutton-mountain-area-as-wilderness

Further downstream, we are working to build awareness of the incredible wildlands on the John Day River between Clarno and Cottonwood Bridge. The 40,000 acres of basalt-walled canyons along the North Pole Ridge, Thirtymile and Lower John Day Wilderness Study Areas enable the serene floats that many of us have shared. Wild steelhead trout runs and world-class scenery accompany herds of California bighorn sheep, as chukar and golden eagles call in the distance. This is the John Day River at its best and deserves no less than to be forever wild.

Third, we continue to depend on your stories and experiences to raise awareness of the need to protect these amazing areas. So after your first two tasks, if you still have a few moments, please sit down and write a letter to your local newspaper calling attention to these important areas and the need to protect them for current and future generations. Without your voice and advocacy for Oregon's high desert, permanent protection will never be achieved.

Looking for some extra credit? Please don't hesitate to send me an e-mail at akillgore@onda.org and I will be happy to find other ways you can get involved.

Photos Sought for Next Year's Wild Desert Calendar

ONDA is requesting submissions of photos to be considered for our 2013 Wild Desert Calendar. The chosen photos will be printed in the calendar, which we plan to release in August 2012.

High priority areas are:

1. Hidden Springs (Hampton Butte, Cougar Well, South Fork Crooked River, Gerry Mountain, and Sand Hollow WSAs)
2. The Deschutes Canyon and Steelhead Falls WSAs, Lower Whychus Creek (including Alder Springs)
3. Owyhee Canyonlands (Dry Creek WSA & Blue Canyon WSA)
4. Steens Mountain
5. John Day River (Cathedral Rock Proposed Wilderness and Lower John Day, North Pole Ridge, and ThirtyMile WSAs)
6. Sutton Mountain & Pat's Cabin WSAs
7. Native wildlife and wild flower photos
8. Hart Mountain and Sheldon Refuges
9. Area between Hart Mountain and Sheldon Refuge

Please submit no more than ten (10) of



ONDA's 2012 Wild Desert calendar

your highest quality photographs, using the following guidelines:

- Transparencies: 35MM, 2-1/4, 6 x 7 or 4 x 5.
- Digital images: Minimum 300 DPI 9 x 12 inches in TIF format
- Mandatory: include printed proof sheet(s) with 2 x 3 inch (or larger) thumbnail images for digital submissions.

Please send large-scale, horizontal, landscape images (which may include people as small elements) for the large (9 x 12) full-page sheets, and smaller scale vertical or horizontal (details of flowers, wildlife, etc.) for the inset images on the calendar grid. Be sure that a description of each photograph is provided, either on the photograph itself, or on a separate sheet with corresponding numbers.

The calendar will be printed in CMYK, which has a smaller color gamut than the RGB palette. Therefore, please be conservative with saturation increases and do not sharpen files.

Please include a self-addressed envelope with your submission to ensure proper protection and return of your images.

Please submit images by no later than June 1st, 2012 to:

ONDA
c/o Calendar Images
50 SW Bond St., Suite 4
Bend, OR 97702

Or email images to: katya@onda.org
For questions contact Katya Spiecker at (541) 330-2638 or katya@onda.org.



Volunteer to Help Keep Central Oregon Wild!

By Gena Goodman-Campbell
Central Oregon Coordinator

Opportunities abound to explore and restore the wild deserts of Central Oregon with ONDA in 2012. With the development of a new stewardship group focused on the Whychus-Deschutes landscape, and our second annual riparian tree planting at the Jake Place on the South Fork Crooked River, we will need plenty of volunteers to help us set these landscapes on the course to recovery.

Jake Place planting May 4-6

Nestled along the banks of the meandering South Fork Crooked River, the Jake Place is a private ranch whose current owner has a major commitment to conserving and restoring his property. With its location just outside of the Wilderness Study Area, this section of the river represents a prime opportunity to improve habitat for native trout, deer, elk and beaver.

On our first ever planting trip at the Jake place last March, we saw ample signs of the busy beaver, including the remains of one not-so-lucky little fellow who had been swept up in the tumultuous spring floodwaters. While the South Fork Crooked River has the potential to provide a vital habitat for these critters and many others, it is lacking the mature woody vegetation (aka willow, dogwood and cottonwood trees) along the banks that beavers need to munch on and build their lodges. That is where ONDA volunteers come in!

Our trip last spring got us started on the task of re-vegetating the banks of the South Fork, but unfortunately due to the flashy conditions on the river last year, some of the trees we planted were swept away. We now have a better idea of the prime places to plant, and have scheduled the trip for a



To improve habitat, ONDA members plant trees along the South Fork of the Crooked River. A second tree planting trip is schedule for May 4-6. Photo © Gena Goodman-Campbell

later date this year in hopes that the river won't flood before our trees have a chance to put down roots.

As we will be car-camping on private land, space may be limited. Call ONDA today or sign up at www.onda.org to reserve a spot!

FANs of Whychus-Deschutes

A handful of volunteers and landowners surrounding the Whychus-Deschutes proposed wilderness area have formed a group to keep watch over this special landscape and help the BLM and Crooked River National Grasslands accomplish some much needed restoration. The Friends and Neighbors (aka "FANs") of Whychus-Deschutes will work to preserve and restore the wild landscapes of the Lower Whychus

Creek and Deschutes River Canyons through stewardship, outreach, education and advocacy. The FANs also hope to foster better communication between federal land management agencies and the communities surrounding Whychus-Deschutes, to ensure that land management decisions are in the best interests of both surrounding landowners and the wild landscape they love.

A website for the FANs is in development and will outline volunteer projects and other opportunities for ONDA members to get involved in this fantastic new group.

If you would like more information about the FANs and how you can help restore and protect the Whychus-Deschutes canyons, please email ONDA's Central Oregon Coordinator, Gena Goodman-Campbell, at gena@onda.org.

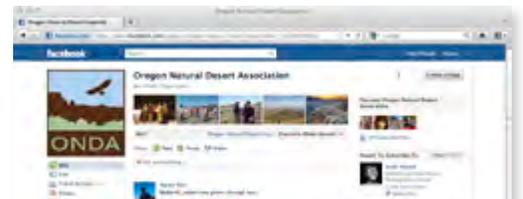
ONDA

on the web



onda.org

The Oregon Natural Desert Association website is the official source for information about ONDA, membership and programs.



Facebook

ONDA is on Facebook. To find the ONDA Facebook page, search for "Oregon Natural Desert Association."



LEGAL DOCKET

By Mac Lacy, *Senior Attorney*

ONDA has won or successfully settled 85% of its federal court cases since 2001.

Legal action plays a number of roles when it comes to protecting our public lands. It can legitimize environmental complaints. It can expose wrongdoing. It can reverse administrative rollbacks. Often, citizen enforcement is the only meaningful enforcement. Where the legislative branch has passed a law directing how the executive branch is to protect our environment, the judicial branch serves to resolve conflict when government agencies fail to faithfully execute the law.

Over the past decade, ONDA has achieved a remarkable record of success in upholding the laws intended to protect our environment. ONDA has won or successfully settled 85% of its federal court cases since 2001. Our cases have protected cherished places from short-sighted development and resource extraction. They have helped set imperiled species back on the path to recovery. And they have ensured that citizens retain access to a federal court system that serves as a neutral arbiter and an important check on agency management of resources that belong to all of us, and to future generations. Last year was no exception.

ONDA Wins Sage-Grouse Case after Two Courts Reject Agency's Attempt to Evade Judicial Review

In November, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with ONDA that we are entitled to court review of our claim that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) failed to properly study the impacts of livestock grazing to Greater sage-grouse in the Owyhee uplands. Then, on remand to the district court in February, Judge Michael W. Mosman granted summary judgment to ONDA after BLM waived its right to defend a landscape-level grazing plan for a half-million acres of core sage-grouse habitat in the Owyhee uplands.



Greater sage-grouse. Photo: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

ONDA first submitted the case to the district court on the merits in late 2010. BLM attempted to evade a court ruling by claiming to have "superseded" the challenged grazing decisions with new ones. The "new" decisions, however, continued the grazing scheme essentially unchanged. Among other things, BLM continued to extract water from natural springs into a network of cattle troughs that left sage-grouse throughout the half-million acre area vulnerable to exposure to deadly West Nile virus. At BLM's request, the district court dismissed ONDA's case as "moot." ONDA immediately appealed.

In November 2011, the Ninth Circuit agreed with us that the district court was wrong to dismiss our case. The Ninth Circuit remanded to the district court to rule on the merits and to consider our request to limit grazing and water development and barbed-wire fence use while BLM prepared a lawful environmental review. The district court ruled in favor of ONDA and our co-plaintiff, Western Watersheds Project, in February, and directed the parties to submit a proposed remedial plan to the court.

In addition to protecting wilderness values and core sage-grouse habitat within the 523,000-acre Louse Canyon area, we hope this case will clarify BLM's responsibility to undertake an honest and robust analysis of the significant, landscape-level impacts of grazing management in close to four million more acres of public land managed by the agency's Vale District. The Louse Canyon plan is one of the first of 17 such plans in this 4.6 million-acre administrative unit.

Ruling Furthers Agency Accountability for Steelhead Habitat

In January, District Judge Ancer Haggerty rejected the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) request for a further, lengthy extension of time to issue a new biological opinion evaluating the impacts of livestock grazing on hundreds of miles of steelhead streams on the Malheur National Forest.

Recognizing that NMFS and the Forest Service have known for five years that the previous biological opinion was set to expire in October 2011, the Court granted NMFS only a short extension, until April 2, 2012, to complete the new document. The ruling preserves the public's ability to engage in a meaningful evaluation of federal grazing management along streams critical to the survival and recovery of native trout. Importantly, the Court also directed NMFS to provide ONDA with a draft copy of the document ahead of time, given the agencies' continued inability to meet statutorily- or court-imposed deadlines. This will allow ONDA and its partners, Center for Biological Diversity and Western Watersheds Project, to begin reviewing the agencies' plan prior to the potential turnout of livestock this spring.

This ruling represents one more step toward agency management of public resources that is driven by the law – which requires that endangered species be given the "highest priority" – rather than by a litigation strategy calculated to minimize public accountability and judicial review.



Steelhead trout on the John Day River. Photo © Greg Burke



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome, Katya Spiecker

Yes, it's true. Katya is by no means new to ONDA. You may have seen her working the ONDA table at local events, collecting comments for Badlands Wilderness, or coordinating volunteers at ONDA events. Katya's first involvement with ONDA began in 2008 as a volunteer for the Badlands Wilderness campaign, eventually leading her to coordinate volunteers and events, and organize production of the Wild Desert Calendar. It is our pleasure to formally welcome Katya to the team as ONDA's new Development Coordinator.



Katya Spiecker

Katya is a native Central Oregonian who grew up just a stone's throw from Badlands Wilderness. This ancient Juniper landscape provided her an inviting playground, cherished sanctuary, and welcomed teacher. Throughout her life she has embraced the challenge and camaraderie of team sports and cherished the tranquility of gardening, more recently exploring organic farming practices in Germany and Italy. Nothing has influenced Katya more, however, than her adventures backpacking and hiking in Nature's wild places. Her passion for desert conservation runs deep, the stoic beauty of Oregon's deserts providing ample inspiration for her work with ONDA.

Katya holds an environmental science degree and a certificate in conflict negotiation and resolution from Oregon Institute of Technology. She is grateful for the opportunity to unite her dedication to conservation with her passion for working with people, and looks forward to connecting with and growing ONDA's loyal member base.

Welcome, Michael O'Casey



Michael O'Casey

Michael O'Casey is ONDA's newest addition to the Wilderness Stewardship team! Michael is a native Oregonian, familiar with the high desert as well as being a skilled outdoorsman and field biologist. His work experiences span the West and extend from Alaska to Costa Rica. After several weeks of volunteering for ONDA we knew that his combination of abilities, energy and jolliness were just what we were looking for in a volunteer trip leader. We hope you have a chance to get to know Michael on an ONDA trip in 2012!

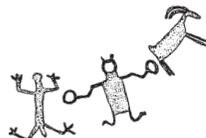
SAVE THE DATE

Desert Conference XXVI, September 20 – 22, 2012

ONDA is excited to announce the return of the Desert Conference this fall! Since 1978, the Desert Conference has served to bring together, inspire and educate those who care about the high desert of the Great Basin and beyond. The conference provides a forum for land-managers, conservation organizations, academics and advocates alike to educate and inspire one another, and collaborate on critical desert issues.

Panel topics include: Sage-grouse management and conservation, beaver recovery and stream restoration, public lands stewardship, renewable energy and habitat conservation, and much more.

Desert Conference XXVI will take place where the sagebrush meets the mountains in idyllic Bend, Oregon. Registrants will be responsible for their food and lodging. Dates for the conference are September 20 – 22, 2012. Please check our website, www.onda.org, and email alerts for more details coming soon!



Your Donated Dollars at Work through ONDA

By Allison Crotty
Development Director

So far this year...

- 25 volunteer work trips in Oregon's high desert are planned for 2012. Be a steward of vital desert lands while having a fun and inspirational experience. Sign up today on our website, www.onda.org.
- 496,000 acres on Steens Mountain remain protected from habitat fragmentation and damage to wilderness values by winning a court order limiting maintenance on 100 miles of disputed routes.
- 100 people in a week showed their support for efforts to protect 17,000 acres at Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven in the John Day area by signing ONDA's petition. Advocate for the places you love when you sign up for action alerts on our website and follow all of the latest ways to get involved on Facebook.
- 22 new members joined ONDA in the first month of 2012. A heartfelt welcome is sent to our new supporters and a thank you is shared with each of our over 1,700 members, many who have been with ONDA for the entirety of our 25 year history. Let's keep up the momentum. Introduce a friend to ONDA today.
- 1 powerful voice, thousands strong, dedicated to ensuring 8 million acres of desert wildlands along the John Day River, at Hart and Steens Mountains, in the Owyhee Canyons and Central Oregon are protected and home to healthy and diverse populations of wildlife.

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



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



Annual Meeting set April 20-22

You are invited to join ONDA staff, Board of Directors and members for our Annual Meeting and to help remove old barbed-wire fence at the 35,000-acre Pine Creek Conservation Area near the John Day River and owned by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. This is an excellent opportunity to learn more about ONDA and enjoy the beauty and solace of the high desert. After a day of restoration projects our hard work will be rewarded with a salmon bake by tribal members, and an evening of good company and music by bluegrass band, Blackstrap.

We'll be staying at the Hancock Field Station, just two miles from the banks of the John Day River near Clarno, Oregon. The beautiful high desert setting is complemented by comfortable facilities. We'll be sleeping in wooden A-frame cabins, all of which have 12 bunk beds, electricity, and heat. Alternatively, bring your own tent and camp out under the stars. Hancock's dining hall serves homemade meals. All meals are covered by the registration fee (there will not be a meal Friday night).

ONDA'S 2012 ANNUAL MEETING

Hancock Field Station, near Clarno, Oregon
 April 20-22, 2012

AGENDA

Friday, April 20:

Check-in and Orientation

Saturday, April 21:

Restoration work followed by salmon bake, conservation updates and live music.

Sunday, April 22:

Breakfast, check-out, optional day hikes or explore on your own

INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION

Cost:

Registration is \$75 per adult, \$45 per child (under 14) and \$210 for a family of four (2 adults, 2 children under 14)

Contact:

Katya Spiecker at (541) 330-2638 or katya@onda.org

Register online:

onda.org/get-involved/events/ondas-2012-annual-meeting

FROM THE OUTBACK

Kicking off a Quarter Century of Desert Conservation

FROM THE OUTBACK from page 1

of enough barbed-wire fence to stretch across the entire state of Oregon. The restoration of dozens of miles of streams throughout Oregon's high desert.

Unfortunately, 25 years after the founding of ONDA, Oregon's high desert continues to face degradation from those who see the area as a resource to be extracted rather than wildlands to be protected. Species like sage grouse will only survive if we are successful in protecting "The Big Empty" places such as Hart Mountain and Sheldon and the Owyhee Canyonlands which provide the basis for their existence (see article, page 1). And these places will only be protected if we continue to band together to give voice to this landscape that is so precious to each of us.

2012 provides another year for us to show our mettle. The change we seek will only come if we force our elected officials to pass laws that protect the places we care about, if we get out on the ground to care for the places that need our help, and if we help others understand the incredible importance of what remains a largely unknown and misunderstood part of Oregon. There are lots of opportunities to get involved this year and I look forward to working with you and the rest of ONDA's 4,000 members and supporters to ensure that 2012 is a year to remember!

As you flip your 2012 ONDA Wild Desert calendar to the month of October this year, please take a moment to reflect on all that we have accomplished. Together, we have provided a voice for the wild places and wildlife that cannot speak for themselves. Oregon's high desert is a wilder place because of your and ONDA's efforts.

