

Ramblings

DESERT RAMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

SUMMER 2012 EDITION • VOLUME 25, NO. 2

THE POWER IS IN THE PEOPLE

ONDA's Wilderness Goals and Programs in the John Day Basin



Horse Heaven Ridge looking towards Spring Basin Wilderness Area. Photo © Tyler Roemer

By Aaron Killgore
John Day Coordinator

On an early summer evening, sunlight bounces off columnar basalt cliffs. I stand knee high in the John Day River, its waters bubble quietly as I cast for small mouth bass. The memory of this day in 2008 is vivid because I had just started working for ONDA and was living at a rustic homestead along the river near Clarno. The focus of my position as John Day Coordinator was to build relationships between ONDA and the residents of the counties that make up the John Day River basin, some of the economically poorest and most remote areas in Oregon. A reminder of where we hoped to go with these conversations lay behind the house, the Spring Basin Wilderness Study Area. For nearly a decade, ONDA staff, members, adjacent landowners, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation, and Congressional delegation had worked to protect this area as Wilderness. Around nine months after this afternoon fishing in the river, Spring Basin would be designated as Wilderness, one of the first bills to be signed into law by President Obama.



Spring Basin is the first success story of over 100,000 acres of wilderness-quality lands in the John Day River basin that ONDA has been working to permanently

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FROM THE OUTBACK



George Reynolds.
Photo © Scott Bowler

Hart Mountain's **LAST** Fence Pull

By Brent Fenty
Executive Director

This summer marks a monumental success at Hart Mountain, one of the most beloved landscapes in Oregon's high desert. On July 29, ONDA's hard working volunteers were joined by US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff to pull down the last of the interior fences at Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge. When livestock were first removed from Hart Mountain in the early 1990s, volunteer George Reynolds had a vision that if all the fences were removed the cattle could never return and pronghorn antelope, the signature species of the Refuge, could run free. George and the Friends of Hart Mountain were among the first to organize fence removal on the refuge. Not long after, ONDA founding

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Deep Well of Knowledge Gives ONDA a Solid Foundation

By Helen Harbin
Board President



**FROM
THE DEN**

ONDA is a science based conservation group. That means we are committed to grounding our land management recommendations in the best, most relevant research. We've been fortunate to have an impressive depth of knowledge among our Advisory Council and Board members to contribute to that.

This year's massive fires in southeastern Oregon, like the Long Draw fire, will present new challenges. As federal and state land managers create fire restoration plans, ONDA must apply the best possible understanding of wildfire ecology, fire management and implications of climate change to make an articulate response. Strong understanding of these topics is critical to our credibility and ability to apply valuable insights to these important public land management decisions. We are always on the alert for members who can help guide and shape our approaches to these difficult issues. If you have some insights you would like to share, please contact us!



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

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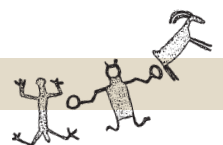
Oregon Desert Trail Inventory

Volunteer Pete Sandrock documents the Oregon Desert Trail route south of Hart Mountain. Photo © Jeremy Fox.



Volunteers documenting trail conditions in the Owyhee. Photo © Jeremy Fox.

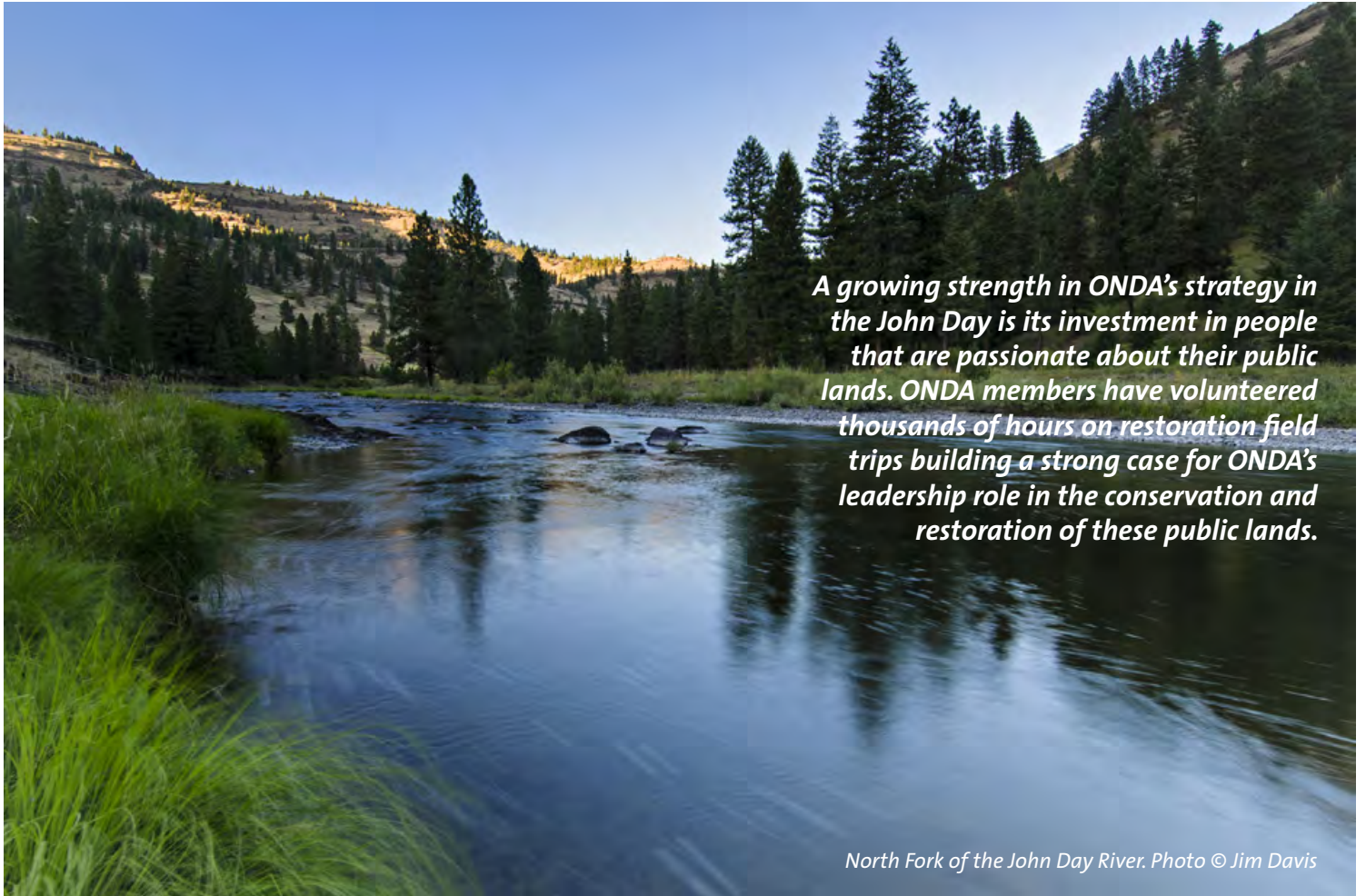
The proposed Oregon Desert Trail project has less than 200 inventory miles to go! During the first half of this summer, Inventory Coordinator Jeremy Fox, with the help of several volunteers and interns, documented and ground-truthed big sections of the route in the lower Owyhee, Abert Rim, Coyote Hills and Hart Mountain areas. The remaining sections to be inventoried include the Oregon Canyon and Trout Creek mountains, upper Owyhee, and near the Badlands Wilderness. When complete this undeveloped trail will provide non-motorized route options through so many of the high desert's iconic landscapes, for day-hikers and through-hikers alike.





THE POWER IS IN THE PEOPLE

ONDA's Wilderness Goals and Programs in the John Day River Basin



A growing strength in ONDA's strategy in the John Day is its investment in people that are passionate about their public lands. ONDA members have volunteered thousands of hours on restoration field trips building a strong case for ONDA's leadership role in the conservation and restoration of these public lands.

North Fork of the John Day River. Photo © Jim Davis

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protect for over two decades. Nearly all of the Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) provide critical habitat for Endangered Species Act-listed summer steelhead trout and the protection of these lands contribute to the recovery of numerous other fish species throughout the basin including spring and fall runs of Chinook salmon, Westslope cutthroat, interior redband, and the endangered bull trout. The very first objective in the Mid-Columbia Steelhead Recovery Plan is to "(p)rotect and conserve natural ecological processes that support the viability of populations and their primary life history strategies throughout their life cycle", and specifically, recommends the permanent protection of eligible public lands as Wilderness.

On private lands, protecting habitat for salmonids can be achieved by conservation

easements or acquisitions, as recently occurred with the establishment of the new Cottonwood Canyon State Park, the newest and largest state park in Oregon. Watershed Councils, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), land trusts, and land acquisition nonprofit organizations are key to the success of these conservation initiatives. However, for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in central and eastern Oregon, very little conservation advocacy exists outside of ONDA's presence. On BLM and Forest Service lands throughout the state, groups like ONDA advocate for special management designations (e.g. Wilderness, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Special Management Areas, and Wild and Scenic Rivers) or for improvement of the management of the lands through our participation in public land use planning processes. Acquisitions and

wilderness preservation have the highest "certainty of outcome" in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's analysis for accomplishing the fish recovery strategy. Protected lands set the stage for restoration projects that will have a permanent and lasting impact.

A growing strength in ONDA's John Day's strategy is its investment in people that are passionate about their public lands. ONDA members have volunteered thousands of hours on restoration field trips building a strong case for ONDA's leadership role in the conservation and restoration of these public lands. As John Day Coordinator, my focus is to reach out to the rural communities, adjacent landowners, hunters, boaters, and anglers to understand their perspectives and needs and involve them in decision-making about the future management of Wilderness Study Areas and other



THE POWER IS IN THE PEOPLE

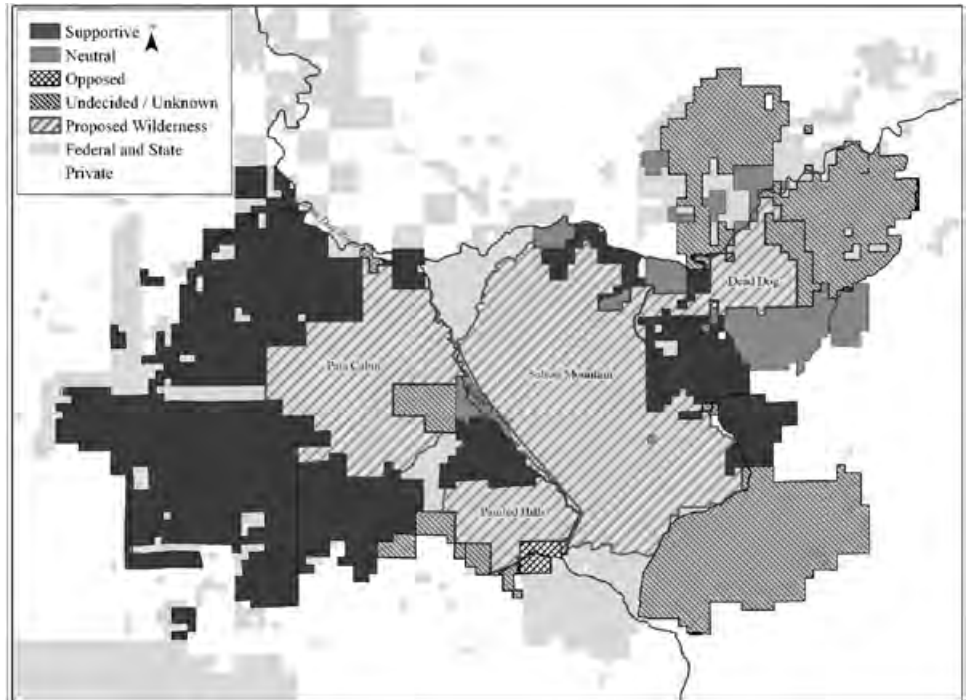
ONDA's Wilderness Goals and Programs in the John Day River Basin

federal lands. Having tough conversations about how to protect these lands and still respect the stewardship role of the hunters, cattlemen and boaters in the area has been the most integral, bipartisan way to build momentum for Wilderness designations.

In the case of the Sutton Mountain area, the results of this work have been tremendous. Dozens of local citizens have signed letters of support, and we have achieved endorsements by the Redmond Chapter of the Oregon Hunters' Association, rafting guides, local businesses, and – the most surprising – a majority of adjacent landowners have stated support for the designation of this area as Wilderness. In addition to support letters sent to Congress and newspapers by ONDA members and other conservation organizations, a diverse coalition of advocates continue to call for the permanent protection of Sutton Mountain, Pat's Cabin, Painted Hills, and Dead Dog proposed Wilderness areas.

Supporting Wilderness designation has been a hard sell for others in the area who feel that they have been good stewards of public lands, that BLM has been a less-than-consistent neighbor, and that ONDA has vilified their lifestyle by focusing on livestock grazing as a cause of degradation on BLM lands. State and federal resources channeled through the SWCDs and Watershed Councils have made significant progress towards the mitigation of the impacts of agricultural development on private lands by funding improvements on culverts for fish passage, water use efficiency projects, and plantings in riparian areas. While ONDA's history of successful legal action has resulted in some pockets of deeply rooted resentment and suspicion over any collaboration with ONDA, our legal program is vital to the defense of Oregon's high deserts. After years spent attempting to influence BLM management in the John Day Basin through public processes and collaboration, legal action has been necessary when BLM makes mistakes and refuses to correct its errors. One prime example where collaboration and public commenting have not been influential enough is on BLM-managed lands along the North Fork of the John Day River.

Adjacent Landowner Position for Sutton Mountain Wilderness Proposal



RMP protest to protect North Fork John Day lands

Over a decade ago, BLM acquired 24,000 acres on the North Fork of the John Day River near Ukiah through a Congressional Act directing management "primarily for the protection of native fish and wildlife habitat and for public recreation." It was a wise directive: four of the streams that weave through these canyons are listed as critical spawning habitat for summer steelhead and bull trout, and they include an abundance of wildlife habitat including important elk calving grounds.

Ponderosa pine canyons rise into bunchgrass buttes and juniper trees, and the Umatilla National Forest is visible in the distance to the north. A recently released BLM wilderness inventory for this area reports that nearly 24,000 acres of land, while admittedly possessing outstanding opportunities for solitude and for backcountry recreation, are unnatural – due purportedly to logged stumps on the landscape. Volunteers have spent hundreds of hours conducting inventory in the area to document the area. Only a couple of photo-

graphs, out of hundreds of photopoints taken by ONDA and the BLM, show signs of logging impacts. The finding of wilderness character by the BLM is critical. Without the interim protection that such a designation provides, this area could suffer from unchecked off-road vehicle (ORV) use resulting in degradation of this important area. Without specific management guidance, undeveloped trails and campsites can quickly become user-created roads and recreational vehicle pads, and can leave long-lasting impacts on these desert lands.

BLM's failure to protect such important places through administrative process obviously poses risks to these lands. ONDA members and staff have provided extensive comments and met with BLM to explain our position and try to understand the agency's. Ultimately, we strongly disagreed that this area was unnatural as claimed by BLM. Our only option at the conclusion of the agency's RMP planning process was to submit an administrative protest. With assistance from The Wilderness Society, we did just that in May, and are awaiting the

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BLM Director's decision from Washington, D.C. If the Director leaves the local office's flawed wilderness findings in place, our only remaining option to achieve interim protection of this area would be to file suit in federal district court.

Clearly these decisions have political ramifications for our relationships with other local stakeholders and it is our hope that the relationships we have built and continue to build help these stakeholders understand the thoughtfulness and commitment that ONDA brings to these difficult management issues. For many people who don't see the process that ONDA goes through to try to work out differences in management strategy with BLM, it can be seen simply as "ONDA sues again" and months of conversations may be necessary to try to explain our position.

Finding common ground

After nearly five years with ONDA I find hope in the places where diverse stakeholders have found a way to work together

John Day Campaign

For information about the John Day Campaign and how you can contribute to the protection of over 100,000 acres of wilderness, visit our website or email ben@onda.org.

www.onda.org

based on their common values and in spite of their divergent viewpoints and beliefs. Similar to our 2009 success at Spring Basin, a primary example is found across the John Day River at Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven. This effort represents years of long negotiations over land exchanges between public land stakeholders and private landowners and has involved all sides of the political spectrum. The ultimate solution will double public access, permanently protect the land, and resolve long-standing problems with trespass and poaching on adjacent private lands. The resulting two new Wilderness areas would protect six miles of the John Day River and the Cherry Creek watershed and represent another

step to fulfilling the goals of Mid-Columbia Steelhead Recovery Plan.

The tone of national politics is important to understand why, after over a year of being a priority for Senators Wyden and Merkley, the Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven Act of 2011 has yet to receive a mark-up and be passed into law by Congress. Unfortunately, Congress has been slow to adopt the collaborative tone represented by such an effort and that is unlikely to change in the next few months given election-year politics. Nevertheless, we knew that the protection of these areas would take time, and the time spent building strong relationships with non-traditional allies that become long-term partners in the stewardship of these lands is well worth the effort. We continue to meet with our partners, create new allies, build grassroots advocacy for the protection of these important places, and wait for the opportunity to give these and other areas the protection they need and deserve. Like Spring Basin, protection of places like Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven will soon be recalled fondly and used as models for our future successes.

Support for Oregon's desert gems sometimes comes in odd packages

Earlier this month, Senator Wyden's office received a suspicious package. Security was called in, and the small tubular package was eventually "cleared". By this point the senator's staff had gathered around to see what the item was. When opened, they were delighted and amazed to find that it was a 30 foot scroll painted by ONDA members. A note on hand-made paper explained that the scroll contained pictures and comments inspired by a recent float down the John Day River to document wilderness character of public lands that ONDA is working to protect.

The senator's staff was impressed by the artwork and the sincerity of the comments, but more than anything the originality and impact of the delivery! That the group could spontaneously and independently be inspired to create something such as this carried a lot of weight. The scroll was quite a topic of conversation and it is clear: ONDA members know how to get people's attention.

Now, we aren't suggesting that everyone needs to send 30 foot scrolls. The lesson to be learned is that ONDA members do a great job of finding new and interesting ways for getting their point across; and that taking the extra time to do something sincere goes a long way in getting an issue noticed and making an impact. If you have been wondering if it is worthwhile to put forth the effort to write a personal letter in support of Wilderness, to make a call to your representative, or better yet, create some more individualized way to convey your feelings about Oregon desert issues: Please do it! These are the actions that get things to happen and making things happen is what ONDA is all about.



Scroll: Photo: ONDA



The crew for the Last Hart Mountain Fence Pull. Over 20 years, volunteers removed nearly 250 miles of wire and approximately 78,500 posts. Photo © Jesse Laney

Hart Mountain's Last Fence Pull

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board member Craig Miller began bringing volunteers to Hart Mountain for annual fence pulls. Other groups also came and helped remove fence over the years including Mazamas, Wilderness Volunteers, and the Sierra Club.

This volunteer effort spanning two decades has had a monumental impact on the refuge and its wildlife. This year USFWS counted a record 3,700 pronghorn on Hart Mountain, all of whom can now run unimpeded across the refuge. I was lucky enough to attend this year's final fence pull, get my share of cuts and bruises, and watch the pride and commitment of ONDA's volunteers, several of whom have been pulling fence on the Refuge for over a decade.

On Saturday evening, Refuge Manager Jeff Mackey tallied the results of this effort. During the nearly 20 years of effort, volunteers have removed nearly 250 miles of barbed wire fence and approximately 78,500 metal posts from Hart Mountain. This represents the removal of over 2,400 tons of metal from the refuge, which has either been recycled or resold. Incredibly, this is the whopping equivalent of twelve Boeing 747 airplanes (weighing in at 205 tons each).

The fence removed by volunteers is long enough to reach from Hart Mountain to Bend (205 miles) or from Portland to Pendleton (208 miles). In reality and as any accomplished fence puller will tell you, the total barbed wire fence is approximately four times that length since a mile of fence



John Katzenstein rolls barbed wire at Hart Mountain in June. Photo © Jesse Laney

typically has four strands of fence on it. Put simply, volunteers have pulled enough fence (over 800 miles in total) to stretch across the entire state of Oregon twice or to reach from Oregon's coast past the Rocky Mountains.

In a couple months, Hart Mountain's sister refuge, the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in northern Nevada, is also expected to gain fence-free status, with over 150 miles of fence removed in the last two years. The two refuges will combine for almost 800,000 acres of fence-free wildlife

habitat, and we hope, burgeoning populations of native wildlife like pronghorn and sage grouse.

There is no way we can adequately honor the volunteer effort and leadership provided by people like George Reynolds. He is an inspiration to all of us who share ONDA's goal to protect, defend and restore Oregon's high desert for current and future generations. He also represents an ideal that was so clearly stated by Margaret Mead and that ONDA lives by, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." George's vision and tenacity is something that we all aspire to and it is for these qualities that we were thrilled to honor George with the 2012 Elshoff Desert Conservation Award, an award for those people who have consistently gone above and beyond in their effort to protect Oregon's deserts.

Despite the fact that Hart Mountain has no more fence to remove, there is plenty more work to be done at Hart Mountain and other critical areas. The work does not end but it's critical that we take a moment to celebrate this success and recognize folks like George Reynolds, stellar USFWS volunteers Morrie Chappel and Bob Witherell who are there to help coordinate pulls and run the heavy machinery, and all of you who make a difference. Thank you George and thanks to all of you who have pitched in over the years! We look forward to seeing you on other projects out in Oregon's high desert in the months and years to come.





A Spring of Hope in the Deschutes Canyon Area

By Gena Goodman-Campbell
Central Oregon Coordinator

As green shoots of bunchgrass and purple blossoms of lupine and phacelia emerged from the fire scars at Alder Springs, we were given many reasons to hope for a brighter future in the Whychus-Deschutes area. Steelhead and salmon are finally returning to their home waters of Whychus Creek and the Deschutes, Crooked and Metolius Rivers after a 40-year absence. To welcome these native fish home, a new local group has emerged to help steward the public lands of the Deschutes Canyon Area.

The Friends and Neighbors (FANs) of the Deschutes Canyon Area came together last year over their shared love of the wild river canyons in their backyard. Including treasured places such as Steelhead Falls, Alder Springs and the Lower Crooked River Canyon, the focus area of the FANs is as fragile as it is popular.

Since their founding late last year, the FANs have lead educational hikes, pulled out noxious weeds on Whychus Creek and developed a website: www.fansofdeschutes.org. They have tackled the momentous task of cleaning up the Peninsula area between the Crooked and Deschutes River Canyons, packing out tons (literally) of broken glass, shattered skeet, rusted metal, old tires and bullet casings. This stunning grassland with panoramic vistas of the Cascades and majestic river canyons on either side has suffered years of



FANs Board member Marilynne Keyser tackles decades' of trash and litter from target shooters on the Peninsula. Photo © Robert Windlinx Jr.

abuse and neglect; garbage dumping, target shooting and off-road vehicle abuse have marred the landscape. By beginning to heal the damage and showing that this is a landscape worthy of our respect and care, the FANs hope to slowly set a new standard for the treatment of the public lands throughout the Deschutes Canyon Area. They have installed a kiosk with informa-

tion about the FANs and the regulations in place, and are planning another clean-up for September 23 to maintain the hard work already invested in the Peninsula.

Another much-loved area where the FANs hope to contribute is Alder Springs. Those who have hiked the trail to Alder Springs this year surely noticed the damage done by last September's fire. Alongside trails specialists from the Crooked River National Grasslands, a few volunteers did some light trail maintenance and assessed the damage shortly after Alder Springs re-opened in April. Though the trail is in relatively good shape, a lot of volunteer might is still needed to stabilize the trail in burned areas and clear thick brush along the creek to keep the trail passable. In the coming year, the FANs will depend on more friends of Alder Springs to get involved in efforts to keep this area wild and beautiful.

Those attending ONDA's Desert Conference will have a chance to hear more about the Friends and Neighbors of the Deschutes Canyon area and how to get involved. FANs president Cindy Murray will be participating in the "Updates from the Field" session from 8:30-9:30 AM on Saturday, September 22. We look forward to a lively discussion of how we can unite the community over the preservation and stewardship of this irreplaceable landscape!



Middle Deschutes Canyon below the Peninsula



LEGAL DOCKET

Long Draw Fire Compounds Need for Sage-Grouse Protection

By Mac Lacy
Senior Attorney

The largest wildfire in Oregon's recorded history swept across a half million acres of wilderness and priority habitat for Greater Sage-grouse when lightning struck near McDermitt on the Oregon-Nevada border on July 8, 2012. Branded as the Long Draw Fire, it raced from west to east across the landscape and within a few days had reached the West Little Owyhee River canyon rim. The burned area spread into the Louse Canyon Geographic Management Area (LCGMA), a BLM administrative unit at the heart of the western

ONDA will monitor as BLM plan's to restore habitat affected by Long Draw Fire. Page 10.

stronghold for the imperiled sage-grouse – and at the center of ongoing ONDA litigation challenging a BLM livestock grazing plan that failed to take into account the im-

periled bird's habitat and population viability requirements.

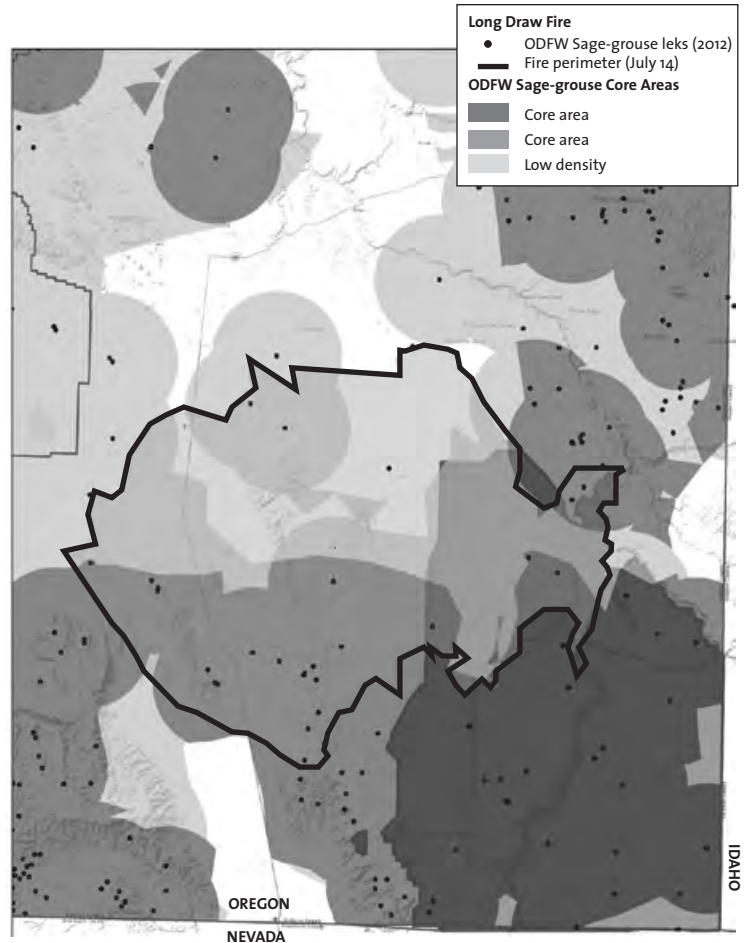
By the time the fire was contained on July 15, it had burned 558,196 acres – an area larger even than the massive LCGMA – and had scorched wilderness and wildlife habitat alike. The burned area includes more than 106,000 acres of Wilderness Study Areas (WSA), more than 206,000 acres of other wilderness-quality lands, and more than 491,000 acres classified as habitat critical to the survival of the sage-grouse. The fire burned across at least 20 sage-grouse leks (ancestral breeding sites) including three within the LCGMA.

The fire came less than two weeks after ONDA had filed a brief requested by U.S. District Judge Michael Mossman addressing West Nile virus and sage-grouse population viability issues. BLM's plan to lure cattle to new watering stations spread throughout LCGMA poses a substantial West Nile threat to sage-grouse. Virtually all 529,000 acres of the planning area are easily accessible to West Nile virus-carrying mosquitoes, with thousands upon thousands of cattle footprints available for colonization. The sage-grouse is in the midst of an unremitting, long-term decline and the most recent research shows high potential for local population extirpation in Louse Canyon unless current habitat degradation is ceased. This, combined with BLM's admitted absence of key habitat and population data, makes it, as sage-grouse expert Dr. David Dobkin has concluded, a "scientific certainty" that the level, timing, and locations of grazing BLM is conducting in Louse Canyon is likely to cause significant adverse effects on sage-grouse population persistence.

That was before the Long Draw Fire made the situation even more dire for the sage-grouse.

Earlier in the litigation process for LCGMA, Dr. Dobkin had highlighted the role of fire and its relationship to expansion of invasive plant species such as cheatgrass. He explained that BLM had greatly underestimated the potential risk of wildfire and cheatgrass and how the latest science has projected that the entire LCGMA is climatically suitable for cheatgrass invasion and expansion "under all predicted scenarios for changes in temperature and precipitation in the Intermountain West."

Dr. Dobkin also explained that one of the most significant spatial scales for environmental predictors of sage-grouse lek persistence or abandonment relates directly to fire. Sage-grouse avoid burned areas in sagebrush landscapes because habitat characteristics im-



portant for nesting, brood concealment, and food are destroyed by fire and have slow recovery rates. In fact, the most recent studies show that even small increases in burned area within a remarkable 33.5 mile radius of leks have a large influence on the probability of lek abandonment.

Losing so much habitat through the Long Draw Fire has considerably increased the need to protect remaining habitat within Louse Canyon and beyond. (And simultaneous with the Long Draw Fire, the Miller Homestead Fire west of Steens Mountain burned another 160,000 acres, 95% of which was classified as core sage-grouse habitat.)

Now, BLM is evaluating restoration options for the burned landscape. Given the unprecedented magnitude of the Long Draw Fire, ONDA has urged BLM to undertake a detailed environmental review before acting. The best available science emphasizes the importance of re-establishing native plant communities and resting the area from further disturbance, including removal of livestock, until it has fully recovered.

The Long Draw Fire was typical of sagebrush fires, which are nearly all high-severity or stand-replacing, not low- or mixed-severity. In most sagebrush taxa, the plant is killed because most taxa do not resprout after fire. Although individual sagebrush plants are able to grow from seed to full maturity in a relatively short period, full coverage of mature plants across a burn is the

see **SAGE-GROUSE**, page 10



Adding Fuel to the Fire

By Chris Hansen
Owyhee Coordinator

The evening of July 8 saw dark clouds on the horizon in a remote area of the Owyhee Canyonlands south of Burns Junction. The annual grasses that had grown thick near Jackie's Butte waved amidst swirling winds; regrowth from a heavy water year in 2011 but tall tinder thanks to below average precipitation in the spring and summer months. Dry lightning from the passing storm soon ignited a wildfire west of Highway 95. The Long Draw Fire moved quickly, pushed by winds in excess of 35 mph and fire whirls that flung burning sagebrush over half a mile.

By the time fire crews contained the Long Draw Fire some eight days later, 582,313 acres had been charred. It has been called the largest wildfire in Oregon history over the last 150 years. Even more disturbing for lovers of Oregon's high desert, the fire greatly impacted core sagebrush steppe ecosystems – those stands of Wyoming and mountain sage that provide key habitat for species like bighorn, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope. And as for the most threatened of all sage-brush obligate species? Well, the Long Draw Fire marked a turning point for the population of Greater Sage-grouse in the Western portion of its historic range. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife calculated that over 84% of the burned area is "core" or "low-density" grouse habitat. That works out to be approximately 490,000 acres of what is deemed the best remaining habitat for sage-grouse. This is especially concerning considering the bird's range has been steadily shrinking due to energy development, transmission, and the spread of invasive annual grasses like cheatgrass and medusahead.

In the weeks ahead, the Vale District of the Bureau of Land Management will undertake a plan to restore this important area. This Burned Area Recovery Plan can prescribe native plant treatments instead of row upon row of crested wheatgrass. It can and the science supports the need to defer livestock grazing until native plants return to the range with "health and vigor". There are already some arguing to immediately return livestock grazing to this sensitive area and to plant non-native species like crested wheatgrass that provide livestock forage have limited if any value for native wildlife. These approaches have been used in the past with poor results. As my father says, "If you think the things you've always thought, you'll get the things you've always got." The agency has the tools to get it right and we will be working hard to ensure that this important area is recovered for the benefit of native wildlife such as sage-grouse. For updates on this important issue, please sign up at wildowyhee.org.

Fire Compounds Need for Sage-grouse Protection

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best measure of actual recovery. Mountain big sagebrush and Wyoming big sagebrush require between 25 and 120 years for full recovery.

Large fires like the Long Draw Fire are the key fires that likely shaped sagebrush landscapes under the historic range of variation (HRV) for fire return interval. A few large fires are the ones that control nearly all of the reshaping of landscape mosaics that is done by fire. Large fires can burn much of the total sagebrush cover, leaving few unburned islands of surviving shrubs. In areas like southeast Oregon, where there has been too much fire relative to the historic range of variation (estimated to be 200–350 years), cheatgrass invasion and degradation by livestock is significant – issues Dr. Dobkin highlighted in the Louse Canyon area even before the Long Draw Fire.

The most important restoration needs in sagebrush are to control invasive species and to restore the diversity and cover of native plants while retaining sagebrush cover. Reintroduction of grazing before the native or reseeded plant community has developed can result in increased levels of exotic grasses and failed rehabilitation efforts. Areas invaded with cheatgrass may even reach potentially irreversible states. BLM must ensure the native plant communities have recovered to a high level of health and vigor before evaluating whether to resume livestock grazing.

In the meantime, ONDA stands ready to work with the BLM on restoration of this important area and, where possible, to facilitate voluntary retirement of federally-issued grazing permits in sensitive habitats thereby prioritizing those areas for native wildlife habitat. ONDA expects a ruling from the court by this fall.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



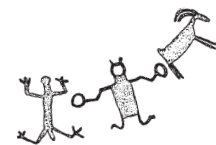
Matt Little

Thanks Matt!

After two years as our Conservation Director, Matt Little is leaving to take on the much more challenging management of his two young daughters as a stay at home dad. We are very thankful for Matt's efforts to keep ONDA's conservation programs efficient and effective and for his strong representation of ONDA on Steens Mountain and throughout Oregon's high desert.

At the office we will miss Matt's continuous efforts at promoting staff cohesion and morale through his 'Captain Fun' initiative. For those of you who had the pleasure to meet Matt, I'm sure you remember he was quick with a smile and thoughtful in his approach to desert conservation. ONDA thanks Matt for his services and wishes him luck in raising his two wonderful daughters.

ONDA would also like to acknowledge and thank ONDA interns, Scotty Ferguson, Chris Moore and Max Brunke for all their work this summer. Scotty and Chris worked in the field on a variety of campaigns, pitched in to review reports and process data, and helped us with our GIS work. Max Brunke assisted Senior Attorney Mac Lacy as a legal intern out of our Portland Office. Alas, they are headed back to Willamette University, Washington and Lee University, and the University of Vermont School of Law. We were lucky to have them and hope they will come back for a visit soon!





SAVE THE DATE



Desert Conference XXVI

September 20-22, 2012
Bend

The Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) and fellow conservation partners are excited to announce the return of the Desert Conference this fall, sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Sierra Club. 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, habitat conservation and much more.

The Wild & Scenic Film Festival will kick off the Conference on the evening of September 20 and panels will run September 21–22. This year's conference features Keynote speaker and Distinguished Professor of Philosophy Kathleen Dean Moore, guest speaker and honored poet Ursula K. Le Guin, music by local bluegrass band Truck Stop Gravy, plus panels on topics covering a variety of desert issues.

For more information and to register, go to www.onda.org/desertconference or call the ONDA office at 541-330-2638.



ONDA & E2 Solar present: Wild & Scenic Film Festival

September 20, 2012
Doors at 6:30 pm, show at 7:30
The Old Stone Church,
157 NW Franklin Ave., Bend
Ticket cost: \$10

ONDA is excited to announce the return of the Wild & Scenic Film Festival to Bend with another impressive selection of films to change your world. Enjoy stellar filmmaking, beautiful cinematography and passionate storytelling that informs, inspires and ignites the activist in everyone.

In addition to entertaining films, the event features giveaways, a raffle and opportunities to get involved in local conservation efforts. All event proceeds benefit ONDA.

Tickets available online at www.onda.org/wildandscenic and at the ONDA office starting August 15. Tickets will sell out. Advance purchase is encouraged.



ONDA Wild Desert Calendar Exhibit in Bend

Opening Night: First Friday Art Walk,
October 5, 5 – 8 pm
FootZone, 845 NW Wall St., Bend

Celebrate the beauty of Oregon's High Desert with a selection of images from ONDA's 2013 Wild Desert Calendar. Calendars and canvas prints will be available for purchase as well as new membership opportunities unique to this event.

Your Donated Dollars at Work through ONDA

By Allison Crotty
Development Director

So far this year...

- 250 miles of fence and two decades of back-breaking work culminated in July when volunteers returned to Hart Mountain National Antelope refuge to lift the last barbed-wire fence from the landscape.
- 1.9 million acres of wild and rugged country in the Owyhee Canyonlands is poised for protection. Do you love Oregon's high desert? Advocate for protections at: ONDA.org/TakeAction.
- 26 years of education and inspiration at Desert Conference will be marked when the event returns to Bend this September. Register today at ONDA.org/DesertConference.
- 500 miles of the proposed 750-mile Oregon Desert Trail have been surveyed, with a goal of 250 additional miles by the end of this year.

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

Contribute to EarthShare at your Workplace: It's Easy

Threats to our natural world are growing, as are demands on the lands, water, food, energy and other resources people and wildlife need to thrive. EarthShare is working to engage people at their workplaces and bring new support to environmental organizations, like ONDA.

ONDA is a proud member of EarthShare Oregon. What does this mean to you? If you work for the State of Oregon, the



Federal Government, Kaiser Permanente, NW Natural, PGE, or one of more than 100 EarthShare partner companies, you can choose to have your ONDA donation sent automatically through workplace giving. It's an easy way for you to contribute to the protection of Oregon's High Desert.

Please consider investing today in a workplace giving campaign. With your contribution through EarthShare, you can share in the responsibility for protecting Oregon's natural legacy. For more information, contact Jan Wilson at [EarthShare:\(503\)223-9015](mailto:EarthShare:(503)223-9015) or jan@earthshare-oregon.org; or visit www.earthshare-oregon.org.



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OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION  DESERT RAMBLINGS

ONDA, Others Remain Committed to Stopping Steens Wind Project

By Matt Little
Conservation Director

As many of you know, Oregon has an industrial-scaled wind project slated to go on top of one of our most iconic natural wonders: Steens Mountain in Southeast Oregon. Last December, the Secretary of Interior rushed a final decision to approve this project which promotes renewable energy at all costs. ONDA remains determined to stop this project, while striving to promote the responsible siting of carbon-free energy sources elsewhere.

To recap the history of this project, we go back to 2007 when developers first proposed Steens Mountain for wind development. Privately, plans were created to develop a large project of over 400 megawatts (MW) and approximately 200 wind turbines. In order to avoid more rigorous state-level review, they segmented the project into four parts and moved the first project of 104 MW through the County permitting process.

With the full intent of developing the other segments of the project, the developers began going through the process of getting federal approval for a massive transmission line. This line would not only be large enough for multiple future wind projects around Steens Mountain, but under an agreement with Southern California Edison, it would send the electricity generated to California. This line would cut across important sage-grouse habitat, as well as the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area, a beautiful area protected by Congress in 2000. ONDA and other partner groups commented at every step of the approval process that Steens Mountain is inappropriate for this type of development.

The Bureau of Land Management completed environmental review of the project in October of 2011. Unfortunately, the BLM failed to fully take into consideration important wildlife species and habitats that would be directly impacted by the larger project, as well as wilderness and other recreational values we all enjoy. A Record of Decision was signed in December without avoiding imminent conflicts or determining adequate mitigation to compensate for these lost values.

In April 2012, ONDA and the Audubon Society of Portland joined forces to litigate this ill-conceived project with legal assistance from Advocates for the West. Soon the parties will have the opportunity to present their arguments to a federal judge who will



Steens Mountain Wilderness. Photo © Bruce Jackson

determine if the agencies erred in their decision to approve an industrial project in this special place.

The reason why we are in this situation today is because clear guidelines were never developed at the state or federal levels to tell developers where they should and should not site energy developments in Oregon. In response, ONDA created a wind report (www.onda.org/what-we-do/energy) to show where wind resources are strong and where conflicts with ecological and social values are low. Unfortunately, no regulatory agency has taken a similar approach in this state and we have urged Governor Kitzhaber to include this direction in his new 10-year energy plan.

Please write to the Governor and tell him to avoid future battles over places like Steens Mountain by implementing a system that gives developers certainty by telling them which places are off-limits to industrial-scale energy development and which places are more appropriate. We all want to promote renewable energy sources, but not when they cancel out their benefits by destroying other resources. You can send a comment via ONDA's website at www.onda.org/get-involved/take-action.

Thank you for being an ONDA member and helping us protect special places like Steens Mountain for future generations!