December 1, 2022

Honorable Joe Manchin, Chair
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable John Barrasso, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act (S.4860)

Dear Chairman Manchin and Ranking Member Barrasso:

Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) is pleased to support the Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act (S.4860), introduced by Senator Wyden and co-sponsored by Senator Merkley. This is important legislation reflecting many years of collaborative work by local, regional and national conservation, sporting and recreational organizations, ranchers, Tribes and other stakeholders.

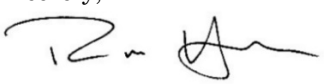
Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands are one of the largest remaining conservation opportunities in the lower 48 states, with over two million acres of wilderness quality lands, spectacular canyons, rich human history, huge expanses of intact habitat for imperiled species like the greater sage-grouse, and unparalleled opportunities for solitude and recreation. It is also a landscape vulnerable to myriad threats, including invasive species, mining, and other industrial development. Compounded by climate change, these effects increasingly undermine ecological integrity and wilderness values across the landscape.

While ONDA has been working to conserve the Owyhee Canyonlands for decades, this legislation resulted from a conversation that began in 2019 when Senator Wyden convened Tribes and a diversity of stakeholders to develop a vision for the long-term conservation and management of more than 4.5 million acres of federal public land in Malheur County, Oregon. S.4860 reflects the significant progress we have made over the past three years, which includes four key components:

- Designation of more than 1.1 million acres of Wilderness;
- More than 21,000 acres of federal land moved into trust for the Burns Paiute Tribe;
- Implementation of a flexible, adaptive grazing management program designed to improve the ecological health of public lands in a manner consistent with existing federal law; and
- Support for economic development and recreational opportunities in Malheur County.

Thank you for holding a full committee hearing on this important legislation. We look forward to working with the sponsors and Committee, and we look forward to working on improvements to the bill that support the Burns Paiute Tribe's needs for protection and management of important cultural and sacred sites.

Sincerely,



Ryan Houston, Executive Director
Oregon Natural Desert Association