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CONTACT

Owyhee@WeAreRALLY.com

Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument Campaign Launches

Campaign calls on President Joe Biden to work with Senator Ron Wyden and Senator Jeff Merkley to permanently protect Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands

Ontario, OR — A new campaign, [Protect the Owyhee Canyonlands](#), launched today calling for the Owyhee's permanent protection before the end of 2024. Founding campaign members include: [The Wilderness Society](#), [Oregon Natural Desert Association](#), [Conservation Lands Foundation](#), [Friends of the Owyhee](#), [People of Red Mountain](#), [Oregon League of Conservation Voters](#), [Sierra Club Oregon Chapter](#), [Great Old Broads for Wilderness](#), [American Whitewater](#), [Great Basin Resource Watch](#), and others.

The Owyhee Canyonlands is the [largest conservation opportunity](#) in the American West, boasting millions of acres of deep canyons, rolling sagebrush grasslands, and rushing rivers worthy of National Monument status. Today, only 5% of the Owyhee Canyonlands is permanently protected, leaving this natural treasure vulnerable to looming threats of industrial development and climate change. Despite its legacy of conservation, Oregon now lags behind other Western states, [ranking](#) near last in terms of public lands protected in the last decade.

The national monument campaign launches at a critical moment in the three-decades-long effort to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands. With [nearly 80%](#) of Oregonians in favor of protecting this land, after years of expert study and consensus-building, and with threats to the land only growing, the Owyhee cannot wait any longer.

For the third time in four years, Senators Wyden and Merkley introduced a [legislative proposal](#) to protect some of the most critical areas of the Owyhee while also supporting tribal priorities, improving land and recreation management, and promoting economic development. But if Congress won't act, then President Biden must work together with Oregon's Senators to guarantee the Owyhee's protection. While all previous legislative attempts have failed to advance through Congress, President Biden can use Senators Wyden and Merkley's recent proposal as a blueprint and secure the future of the Owyhee through National Monument designation.

The momentum to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands is undeniable, in large part due to Senators Wyden and Merkley's efforts to convene a broad, diverse coalition in support of permanent protection. In President Biden's first week in office, he signed an executive order establishing the nation's most ambitious conservation goal:

protecting 30 percent of the country's lands and waters by 2030. The Owyhee Canyonlands represents one of the country's greatest opportunities to meet that target. Today, the nation is led by a presidential administration committed to our public lands, and we must seize the opportunity to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands before it's too late.

Only permanent protection can secure the future of the Owyhee for generations to come. By protecting the Owyhee today, President Biden and Senators Wyden and Merkley can leave an enduring legacy for tomorrow.

Visit ProtectTheOwyhee.org to learn more.

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Statements of Support from the Protect the Owyhee Canyonlands Founding Campaign Members

"Formed over millions of years, the Owyhee Canyonlands is a wild and iconic landscape that deserves permanent protection as a National Monument. Fed by the vital Owyhee River, this area serves as a pivotal route for wildlife migration and is a sanctuary for hundreds of species, including the Redband trout, Greater Sage-Grouse, and fleet-footed Pronghorn. Now is the time to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands for future generations." — **Nicole Layman, Deputy Vice President of Conservation Campaigns, [The Wilderness Society](#)**

"ONDA has been committed to protecting millions of acres of the awe-inspiring canyons, expansive plains and intact habitats across Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands for decades. And we're deeply grateful that Senators Wyden and Merkley continue to be steadfast champions for the Owyhee, tirelessly leading community members in the development of a strong, broadly-supported vision for conserving this iconic corner of Oregon. But if Congress doesn't act, then President Biden can make their vision a reality by establishing an Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument." — **Ryan Houston, Executive Director, [Oregon Natural Desert Association](#)**

"The Owyhee Canyonlands is one of the most significant landscapes to my people. As the descendant of Paiute Chief Paulina and Chief Weahwewa, I carry the stories and legends from my grandmother and tribal elders of this place. I implore everyone to work together to protect these revered places with all your power so the land and its people can restore their relational balance. For the ancestors of the Owyhee and their future generations, we cannot wait any longer to protect this sacred land. The time is now." — **Wilson Wewa, Paiute Elder, Storyteller, Spiritual Leader, and Culture Keeper**

"The Owyhee Canyonlands is one of the largest conservation opportunities in the West to move our nation closer to reaching the goals laid out in the America the Beautiful initiative. After decades of efforts by our local Friends Grassroots Network members, Oregonians and Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, we are calling on President Biden to finish the job and designate the Owyhee Canyonlands as a National Monument. We must act now to secure the landscape's future for generations to come or risk losing it to threats of development, climate change, and inaction." — **Jocelyn Torres, Senior Conservation Director, [Conservation Lands Foundation](#)**

"The conservation of the Owyhee Canyonlands is vital to our community. Not only are we protecting the land for future generations, but we are also growing our economy, protecting local interests, and preserving a way of life. We stand united in our unwavering support for robust protections for the Owyhee region. The Friends of the Owyhee are dedicated to conserving the rich landscapes, cultural heritage, and natural treasures of this extraordinary area. Supporting these vital protections is a crucial step towards preserving the Owyhee's unique beauty and ensuring that future generations can experience its wonders. We firmly believe that safeguarding this cherished land is a responsibility we bestow upon our children and the generations to come." — **Tim Davis, Founder and Executive Director, [Friends of the Owyhee](#)**

"The Owyhee Canyonlands is the original homelands of the Northern Paiute, Shoshone, and Bannock peoples. The places within these vast lands are all significant to our people; telling our creation stories, holding the first foods, medicines, hunting grounds and sacred spiritual places for our past, present, and future generations. These important lands are also under threat from development interests, extractive industries, untethered recreation, and urban expansion. We support the Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument to ensure our lifeways, culture, tradition and legacy is ensured for our people to continue thriving on our lands now and forever." — **Fort McDermitt Paiute-Shoshone Tribal Descendants, [People of Red Mountain](#)**

"Conservation for the irreplaceable Owyhee Canyonlands has been decades in the making. Oregonians from rural to urban communities in every corner of the state have been calling on leaders to ensure this wonder of our state's southeastern perimeter is permanently protected. Senators Wyden and Merkley have championed legislation for the last several years, bringing together a coalition of diverse advocates honing in on various needs for a viable future of these lands. If Congress fails to enact this important vision for the Owyhee, the Biden administration should continue the Oregon Senators' legacy for all Oregonians to enjoy this treasured place, forever." — **Lindsey Scholten, Executive Director, [Oregon League of Conservation Voters](#)**

"The Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club recognizes the unique qualities of the Owyhee Canyonlands of southeastern Oregon, one of the state's most stunningly beautiful natural areas. The beauty is not only in the vast expanse and beautiful mountains and canyons, but in the unique plants and animals that thrive in this dry ecosystem. Yet this area is threatened by mining and many other incompatible activities. The Owyhee landscapes deserve the highest levels of protection, today! We support efforts to protect this ecosystem now and for many generations to come." — **Mathieu Federspiel, Executive Committee, Juniper Group, [Sierra Club Oregon Chapter](#)**

"The Owyhee Canyonlands is one of the most iconic sections of the 750-mile Oregon Desert Trail. I love hearing hikers gush about their experiences there, and I also enjoy returning again and again to hike among the towering rock pillars and elusive Owyhee clover; I can always find something new to marvel at. Permanent protection for this landscape will ensure that this place will be enjoyed by recreationists in a balanced way, forever." — **Renee Patrick, [Oregon Desert Trail hiker](#)**

“One of Oregon’s greatest treasures, the Owyhee Canyonlands, is a recreational wonderland; from rafting, to hiking, to camping, to hunting and fishing. I have rafted the wild Owyhee waters for decades and experienced the grandeur of the place that is worthy of the nickname ‘Oregon’s Grand Canyon.’ It is essential that we guarantee its protection so generations can continue to explore and enjoy this outdoor gem forever” — **Mary Fleischmann, Bitterbrush Chapter Leader, [Great Old Broads for Wilderness](#)**

“Such places as grandiose as the Owyhee Canyonlands are rare in our modern world. These vast rugged canyonlands have long protected Oregon’s most remote southeastern corner. But new, and more potent threats now claw at the Owyhee’s edges, imposing invasive forces onto her heartland. This intact landscape cannot be replaced if we one day decide it was a mistake not to protect it. I’ve visited, valued, and advocated for this unique place for over five decades. Today, I am proud to join the chorus of voices urging the President and Oregon’s Senators to finally protect it— because the Owyhee cannot wait any longer.” — **Julie Weikel, longtime southeastern Oregon resident and Owyhee advocate**

“The Owyhee Wild and Scenic River was designated as a Wild and Scenic River in 1984. While this protective designation specifically recognizes the regionally and nationally significant values for geology, prehistory, recreation, scenery, and wildlife of the Owyhee River, the protection for the narrow river corridor does not extend to the broader landscape. The landscape that the river flows through represents one of the largest and most critical conservation opportunities in the nation. For several years we have supported a legislative effort to protect the Owyhee Canyonlands for future generations and we appreciate the continued leadership of Senator Wyden in partnership with Senator Merkley to advance this legislation. If Congress continues to delay passage of legislation however, we support executive action by the President to establish the Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument.” — **Thomas O’Keefe, Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director, [American Whitewater](#)**

“The significance of the Owyhee Canyonlands to the larger Great Basin ecosystem can not be understated. We know that ecological systems and watersheds do not stop at political boundaries, and thus it is imperative to think of protection in terms of ecosystems! The immense ecological integrity of these lands continues to support wildlife migrations, connects important habitats, and support cultural needs of Great Basin communities. It is essential we continue to protect intact cultural and physical landscapes to honor Indigenous traditions, curb biodiversity loss, protect water resources, and preserve essential carbon sinks. Protecting the Owyhee through a National Monument will make the Great Basin region one of the most intact landscapes of the American West.” — **Kassandra Lisenbee, Outreach and Just Energy Transition Director, [Great Basin Resource Watch](#)**