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Bureau of Land Management Finalizes New Plan Conserving More than 400,000 Acres in Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands

After more than two decades of research, inventory, public comment and analysis, the Bureau of Land Management has released a new plan to protect more than 400,000 acres of public lands for wilderness values, the most ever protected in a single BLM district.

The new final plan – the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan – will guide management of wildlands, wildlife, watersheds, recreation and multiple uses across this iconic landscape for at least the next 20 years. The area encompasses many recognizable and popular locations, including Jordan Craters, Three Forks, Leslie Gulch and the West Little Owyhee.

“The Bureau of Land Management’s decision to conserve more than 400,000 acres of ecologically important wildlands is monumental – at no other time in history has a BLM district decided to protect more unprotected public lands for wilderness values than in this new plan for Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands,” said Ryan Houston, Executive Director of the Oregon Natural Desert Association. “This reflects a conservation vision well-suited to this region known for its incredibly remote and wild landscapes. Anyone who has explored the rugged canyons, wandered the endless Sagebrush Sea or marveled at the dark night skies above the Owyhee knows this is truly a national treasure worthy of the highest levels of conservation.

“We applaud the BLM for recognizing both the conservation need and opportunity in Oregon’s high desert and we look forward to working with the administration and Oregon’s Congressional delegation to continue conserving the Owyhee Canyonlands for generations to come.”

Spurred by decades of advocacy by Oregon Natural Desert Association, the new plan is also a new precedent for the BLM for how it would manage 417,190 acres of “Lands with Wilderness Characteristics” for their wilderness values, protecting these public lands from development. This landmark result stems from ONDA’s decades of grassroots work inventorying these lands, advocating for their conservation, and pressing for strong, science-based and legally defensible management decisions.

Long-term conservation of this landscape will promote climate resilience, support recovery of key species like the greater sage-grouse, and provide for abundant backcountry recreation in one of Oregon’s most remote landscapes.

Even more of Oregon’s Owyhee Canyonlands are also proposed for permanent protection. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley’s legislation that would designate more than 1 million acres of wilderness in the Owyhee is currently awaiting a vote in the Senate, while a huge coalition of organizations and stakeholders has also proposed establishing an Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument on the landscape.

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