



Hello Desert Stewards,

As the plants and animals of the high desert hunker down for the cold winter months, ONDA's stewardship staff have retreated indoors to prepare for the bounty of restoration trips we're planning for the year ahead. Undoubtedly, the spring thaw that heralds our return to the desert will be here before we know it!

We accomplished a lot in 2023 using tried and true restoration methods: 213 volunteers contributed 6,467 hours of care to Oregon's high desert, removing nearly two miles of obsolete barbed wire fence and planting 5,985 trees.



Volunteers joined ONDA in the Badlands Wilderness, removing half a mile of barbed wire fence in one day, or 1130 linear feet per volunteer!



Planting culturally significant shrubs on the Burns Paiute Tribe's Jonesboro property along the Malheur River.

In 2024, volunteers will have several opportunities to put an innovative new restoration method into action on freshwater springs at Pine Creek Conservation Area in the John Day River Basin and at Beatys Butte in the Greater Hart-Sheldon. This new technique stems from a need for a better way to restore the small, spring-fed streams that are the lifeblood of Oregon's high desert.

The goal of these projects is to slow water down and help it spread back out across the floodplain, creating moister conditions throughout the year for important streamside plants to grow, and improving habitat conditions for desert fish and wildlife. We accomplish this by first removing woody vegetation, like juniper and sagebrush, that has moved into the stream corridor where it would not naturally grow and is reducing the amount of water in the stream. We then use these and other natural materials to build small structures in the stream. We will be monitoring these projects closely in the coming years to see how nature responds to our handiwork!

I recently had the opportunity to lead one of the first of these new restoration projects, and it was gratifying to see how fun and fulfilling ONDA volunteers found the work of building

these small, in-stream “speed bumps.”



Volunteers began the mesic habitat restoration process.



Handiwork included building structures to collect sediment and removing sagebrush from along the creekside.

When I asked Jefferson Jacobs, ONDA's restoration manager, if he had any specific inspiration for developing this new restoration technique, he said “Yeah: Beavers.” In the same way that beaver dams form wetlands that soak up water like a sponge, storing it and keeping it cool into the dry summer months, we aim for our projects to instigate the recovery of these essential water sources. He continued, “Our projects emulate the critical dam building work performed by beavers and jump start the stream recovery process.”

I hope you will join us in 2024 on one of several spring restoration trips to “be the beaver” and channel your inner ecosystem engineer for the betterment of Oregon’s high desert.

Thank you for being a part of another great year restoring Oregon’s deserts – we look forward to the next.

See you in the desert,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'gsc' followed by a long horizontal line.

Gena Goodman-Campbell
Program Director - Stewardship

Photos: banner - ONDA Staff, feature 1 - Renee Patrick, feature 2 - Gena Goodman-Campbell, feature 3 - Maureen Thompson, feature 4 - Evy Tirosh



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