

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



CONTACT: Mark Salvo, Conservation Director, msalvo@onda.org | 541-330-2638 x 308

June 6, 2024

Bureau of Land Management Issues Framework for Conserving the Greater Hart-Sheldon

New plan will chart the future for 1.6 million acres of wildlands in Oregon's high desert

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has issued a new draft plan that will determine management and conservation of 3.2 million acres of public lands in the Lakeview District, including 1.7 million acres of wildlands inventoried by Oregon Natural Desert Association.

“Conservationists, ranchers, hunters and anglers, recreationists, and dark sky devotees agree: we want to keep the Greater Hart-Sheldon like it is,” said Ryan Houston, Executive Director of Oregon Natural Desert Association. “Protecting wild, roadless public lands will accomplish that goal and we’re hopeful the BLM will build on this draft to expand protection across more of this deserving landscape,”

The Lakeview District manages a huge swath of public lands connecting Hart Mountain and Sheldon national wildlife refuges, extending northward to Abert Rim and Lake Abert, over the Coglan Buttes to Summer Lake, then past Diablo Peak to Christmas Valley and Wagontire.

The region is vitally important habitat for pronghorn, greater sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit, and dozens of species of migratory birds that traverse the Pacific Flyway. It also provides for extraordinary backcountry recreation and preserves the Oregon Outback International Dark Sky Sanctuary, the largest dark sky reserve in the world.

“The Lakeview plan covers a vast landscape that retains great value for a number of important species,” said Julie Weikel, a large animal veterinarian and lifelong eastern Oregonian. “Careful management of this ecosystem is critical in the face

climate change and habitat fragmentation. The BLM has a special responsibility for laying out a long-term strategy to preserve wildlife habitat and migration corridors throughout this region.”

“The public lands in the Lakeview District offer incredible opportunities for primitive recreation, immersive solitude, and a glimpse into the incredible biodiversity of the sagebrush steppe,” added Renee Patrick, an outdoor recreation consultant and advocate for the Oregon Desert Trail, a 750-mile route that winds through the Greater Hart-Sheldon region. “Hikers from all over the world come to experience the unique vistas in this area like the Lost Forest, Black Hills, Abert Rim, and the Warner Wetlands.”

The Bureau is weighing options to protect [wilderness-quality public lands, as well as managing grazing and off-road vehicle use in the current planning process](#) as part of a settlement agreement with Oregon Natural Desert Association and partners in 2010. The new plan promises to deliver management that balances conservation of wildlife, watersheds and wildlands with continued multiple use of public lands for decades to come.

“As an outfitter and guide in the Lakeview District, I look forward to a final plan that will protect areas with wilderness qualities while still allowing for public use and enjoyment of public lands,” said Alison Jean Cole, who is also an author and avid rockhound. “Wild places nurture us, and so it's right to adopt a plan that nurtures them in return.”

“For sagebrush wildlife and wildlands, you can't beat the quality of experience offered in the Greater Hart-Sheldon,” said Karl Findling, a hunter, angler, owner of Oregon Pack Works and vice president of Friends of Hart Mountain. “As a sportsman, I support protecting the best of these public lands for future generations.”

Release of the new Lakeview Draft Resource Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement begins a 90-day public comment period on the six management alternatives proposed in the plan.

* * *

The Greater Hart-Sheldon is a quintessential landscape that supports one of the most important [pronghorn migration corridors in North America](#), [irreplaceable sage-grouse habitat](#) and a [core population of pygmy rabbit](#). The region is one of the last [sagebrush strongholds in the American West](#), essential to desert wildlife and [revered for its recreational offerings](#).

###