



OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

DESERT RAMBLINGS

FALL + WINTER 2024 | VOLUME 37 • NO.2

WONDERS OF THE OWYHEE CANYONLANDS

A tapestry of cultural, historical and natural riches,
left unprotected.



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Backdrop: Western-Toad, Owyhee River Canyon near Rome.
Photo: Alan St. John

OVERHEARD

“I choose to support ONDA because they are a proven source of the power of individuals to make a change. What started as a grassroots organization has time and again fought to protect the high desert on a higher level.”

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Photo: Jim Davis



Birch Creek Ranch on Owyhee River. Photo: Devin Dahlgren

Dear Oregon desert advocate,

Although the waning days of summer will soon be behind us, our advocacy here at Oregon Natural Desert Association continues to ramp up as we push to secure important conservation wins before the end of the year.

Our collective action—whether on the steps of capitol buildings in Washington, D.C., or Salem, around a campfire with community leaders at Three Forks, or on the road in rural communities—is fueled by your unwavering commitment to a desert protected, now and forever, for its beauty, biodiversity, grandeur and cultural significance.

Your calls, emails, clicks and comments continue to fuel our determination to protect, defend and restore Oregon’s high desert for current and future generations. This year is pivotal as we advocate for new protections in the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor and we continue pressing on Congress and the President to take bold action to protect Oregon’s rugged and vulnerable Owyhee Canyonlands. These two endeavors feature some of the largest intact landscapes in Oregon, covering millions of acres of public lands combined.

In this edition of Desert Ramblings, we go deeper into the wonders of the Owyhee, exploring the geology, ecology, history and cultural significance with a closer lens than we have before. We pause to consider the 65 million years of geologic history, catch a fleeting glimpse of pollinators visiting one of the many rare plants, and honor the deep ties held by the tribal and indigenous communities who have thrived in this landscape since time immemorial.

We also highlight the wildlife and wildlands of the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor, share recommendations for where to enjoy fall foliage and provide an update on our summer work with Tribal Stewards—a group of young adults from the Burns Paiute Tribe working on conservation management in the John Day, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and the nearby national forest.

It’s always encouraging to look through this spread of promising campaigns and hard-fought work as we continue pushing forward in the season ahead. Thank you for your continued advocacy, volunteerism, financial support and dedication to conservation across the high desert.

For a wild desert,

Ryan Houston
Executive Director



Protecting Oregon's Wildlife

Your key role in caring for the state's most imperiled desert creatures.

By Renee Schiavone, Communications Manager

When it comes to protecting desert public lands, wildlife and waters we know and love, there is no advocacy more powerful than community action.

Oregon's high desert has no shortage of charismatic wildlife, fragile landscapes and vital waterways in need of safekeeping and vocal public support. To achieve the best results for this beloved expanse of wildlands, ONDA works at both the state and federal level to deliver the strongest possible conservation outcomes.

To care for our state's wildlife, every ten years the state of Oregon updates its "State Wildlife Action Plan" to protect and recover "Species of Greatest Conservation Need." Simply put, the plan outlines how the state will focus resources to support Oregon's most sensitive and imperiled species. Importantly, once completed, the updated plan allows the state to apply for millions of dollars of federal funding for wildlife conservation.

Known in our state as the "Oregon Conservation Strategy," the current wildlife action plan identifies dozens of animals, plants and insects of conservation concern in the high desert, including greater sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit, Lahontan cutthroat trout, Columbia spotted frog, black-necked stilt and more. It also maps a multitude of Conservation Opportunity Areas statewide—places where conservation goals could be best achieved to protect and recover these species. There are dozens of these locations in Oregon's high desert, which include key habitats such as sagebrush, aspen woodlands, streams and wetlands.



Beaver. Photo: Michael S. Quinton

As the state revises the Oregon Conservation Strategy this year, one of ONDA's priorities is to ensure beaver-managed habitats are added to the list of key habitats in the new plan. Beaver-managed habitats—defined as areas where beaver activity influences the hydrology and vegetation to provide habitat benefits—are beneficial to more than 100 species recognized in the plan. This includes several federally and state-listed endangered and threatened species.

Formal recognition of the essential role of beaver in the ecosystem is scientifically sound, promotes biodiversity and recognizes the gravity of the climate crisis. An ONDA-led research project conducted in 2023 adds direct evidence to the growing body of work that calls for beaver restoration in Oregon's high desert.

What can you do to support Oregon desert wildlife?

The opportunity here is significant—and rare. In the year ahead, the public will have an important role to play in influencing the updated Oregon Conservation Strategy. The state will be updating the plan this year, and it will determine the state's eligibility to receive federal wildlife conservation funding for the next decade.

In the coming months, ONDA will be calling on Oregonians to advocate for the addition of beaver-managed habitats and other conservation priorities to the plan. Strong public engagement will ensure desert wildlife and crucial habitats are protected and that the state's land managers have the funds needed to take bold, well-informed conservation action.

Please be sure to watch for our alerts on this critical topic and take time to weigh in. ♦

Indigenous Youth in Conservation

Wrapping up the fifth season of our Tribal Stewards program.

By Gena Goodman-Campbell, Stewardship Director

This summer, nine Indigenous young adults with ancestral ties to Oregon's high desert spent six weeks immersed in Oregon desert wildlands completing vital stewardship actions such as restoring steams, collecting native seeds and monitoring wildlife as part of ONDA's Tribal Stewards program.



Tribal Stewards, Malheur NF. Photo: Sarah Lindsay

"I am extremely excited to see this opportunity for youth to work on our ancestral lands," said Tracy Kennedy, Chair of the Burns Paiute Tribe. "This is a great partnership and program that serves our youth, who represent more than half of our current membership, and paves the way for future projects that we can co-manage with our federal, state and local partners."

Oregon Natural Desert Association's Tribal Stewards program was launched in 2019 at the request of our Tribal partners to provide opportunities for Indigenous youth and young adults paid experience in conservation careers. This initiative helps build partnerships, supports emerg-

ing tribal leaders in conservation, provides a pathway to elevating tribal perspectives in land stewardship and opens the door to broader representation in the environmental sector.

ONDA carefully crafts each restoration project to blend the sharing of foundational conservation concepts with completing meaningful improvements to the landscape. Tribal Stewards work closely with ONDA staff, our partners at the Lomakatsi Restoration Project, as well as land management agencies and Tribal members, to gain multiple perspectives on land management. Supported by crew leaders and paid a competitive hourly wage, participants tackle some of the most

challenging environmental problems facing Oregon's high desert, such as drought, invasive species and climate change.

By weaving their new experiences working in the desert with their Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge—the time immemorial knowledge base acquired by the Northern Paiute and other Indigenous people through direct contact with their environment—these emerging leaders are uniquely poised to ensure that Oregon's high desert lands and wildlife thrive for generations to come.



Tribal Stewards conducting shorebird surveys. Photo: Gena Goodman-Campbell



Tribal Stewards take part in seed collection. Photo: Sarah Lindsay

Learn more and hear from past Tribal Stewards at [ONDA.org/tribal-stewards-program/](https://onda.org/tribal-stewards-program/). ♦



The endless sagebrush expanse of the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor. *Photo: Jim Davis*

The Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor

The Oregon desert wildlands between two iconic national wildlife refuges offer some of the best remaining wildlife habitat and connectivity in the West.

By *Anne White, Policy Manager and Mark Salvo, Conservation Director*

The sharp and woody aroma of sagebrush, baked by the heat of the day, perfumes the air. Here in the high desert, it is so quiet you can hear the sun's buzzing energy as it warms the air and births gusts of wind. By evening a seemingly endless expanse of sagebrush glimmers gold in the waning light of the setting sun, transforming to soft green with a hint of blue in the shadow of dusk.

This public land between Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge and Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge—spanning more than 860 square miles in southeastern Oregon—provides essential, intact habitat for hundreds of species dependent on sagebrush ecosystems. The region's wildlife includes three esteemed ambassadors of the sagebrush steppe: the quirky greater sage-grouse, the fleet-footed pronghorn and the diminutive pygmy rabbit, all of which thrive in this sagebrush stronghold—the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor.

ONDA has launched a campaign to protect the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor and its essential wildlife habitat. Here, we profile the charming am-

bassadors that are in need of urgent conservation action to sustain their survival.

Protecting the Quirky Greater Sage-Grouse

There is perhaps no species more emblematic of the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor than the greater sage-grouse. These birds are well camouflaged in their high desert habitat, blending in with the sagebrush they rely on for cover, nesting and sustenance. However, each spring the males purposefully stand out as they perform their highly choreographed dance at leks in an attempt to impress potential mates. Young sage-grouse depend on the rich diversity of wildflowers—called forbs—and insects in the region, consuming as many as 34 species of forbs and 41 species of insects in spring and summer. Come winter, the diet for all sage-grouse is comprised solely of sagebrush, making healthy, robust sagebrush ecosystems critical to the survival of the species.

Sage-grouse populations have been declining in Oregon for decades, and the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor represents one of the six core habitats remaining for the species in the American West.

Protecting this large, intact expanse of sagebrush is crucial to conserving the grouse.

Connecting Habitat for the Fleet-Footed Pronghorn

Pronghorn are the fastest mammals in North America, capable of reaching speeds of more than 60 miles per hour. Poetically dubbed “prairie ghost,” pronghorn have been roaming the sagebrush steppe for 1 million years. Everything about pronghorn, from their oversized heart, lungs and trachea to their flexible spines and bulky leg muscles evolved to support high speed sprinting. Large protruding eyes allowing nearly a 360-degree field of vision and the equivalent of eight-times magnification allows pronghorn to easily detect danger from afar. These adaptations were key to escaping prehistoric predators such as the North American cheetah, saber-tooth tiger and hyena.

The wildlands in the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor support a vital migration corridor for thousands of pronghorn each year as they move between their summer and winter ranges on Hart Mountain and Sheldon refuges. Pronghorn have been documented traveling as far as 100 miles during their seasonal migration here, browsing on the abundant grasses and forbs the region has to offer. More than 8,000 pronghorn have been counted in the Conservation Corridor, though recent censuses have estimated the population has declined by nearly half.

Preserving Core Habitat for the Diminutive Pygmy Rabbit

Few are lucky enough to glimpse the elusive pygmy rabbit, which spends much of its time hiding in its underground burrow system. Weighing between a half pound to just over a pound, pygmy rabbits are the world’s smallest rabbit and the only rabbit in the U.S. that industriously digs its own burrow—mainly doing so beneath sagebrush plants. Pygmy rabbits are highly dependent on intact sagebrush, which comprises virtually all of their winter diet and provides essential cover from predators.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is reviewing whether the rabbit should be listed under the Endangered Species Act. Recent research has identified the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor as one of the most important core pygmy rabbit habitats in the West, providing a critical haven for this sensitive species.

A Landscape Worth Protecting

While the Hart and Sheldon refuges offer more than 840,000 acres of protected sagebrush habitat for

wildlife, the 550,000 acres of desert public land connecting these sagebrush reserves, the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor, is unprotected and vulnerable. The Corridor is currently available for mining, road construction and energy transmission. Should development proposals in this region gain traction, the refuges would become disconnected islands less capable of supporting wildlife. Protecting large landscapes is key to providing connected, climate resilient habitats wildlife need to survive. Proactive landscape-scale protections like those proposed for the Conservation Corridor are particularly important in a changing climate, where successful wildlife adaptation requires populations to move long distances to find food, water and needed habitat conditions.

Plans for Protection

ONDA has been advocating for protection of this vital corridor since the 1990s. Three decades of effort are now culminating in two major Bureau of Land Management planning processes: the Lakeview Resource Management Plan Amendment and the sage-grouse conservation strategy.

The Lakeview plan is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to finally protect the essential wildlife habitat in the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor. The onset of this planning process is entirely the product of ONDA’s conservation advocacy, and our campaign is pressing the agency to protect the Conservation Corridor to support biodiversity, mitigate climate change impacts and ensure this rich ecological community thrives for generations to come.

ONDA is also advocating for conservation outcomes in the BLM’s sage-grouse conservation strategy, which overlays the same region. These agency efforts are complementary as the sage-grouse strategy could fill potential gaps in the Lakeview plan, specially designating sage-grouse habitat and restricting land use and development deemed harmful to the species.

ONDA is deeply engaged in both of these processes so that sage-grouse, pronghorn, pygmy rabbit and generations of desert lovers may enjoy this quintessential landscape. Your advocacy during this rare window of opportunity will ensure a healthy and vital future for the Hart Mountain Conservation Corridor’s compelling wildlands and wildlife. ♦



Wonders of the Owyhee Canyonlands

A landscape rich with fascinating geology, a deep cultural history and uniquely diverse ecosystems.

By ONDA Staff

Deep in southeastern Oregon lies the dramatic Owyhee Canyonlands. Here, much of the land looks today as it has for generations. The Milky Way blazes across the night sky as desert rivers rush through rugged canyons, dazzling all who find themselves amidst this vast landscape.

Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands offers a story woven through millennia, where Indigenous peoples, geological marvels and diverse ecosystems converge. This wondrous region has captivated desert lovers, adventurers, Tribal communities, researchers, sportspeople and conservationists alike, inspiring a call to action to protect this national treasure.

Cultural Heritage: A Deep Connection to the Land

The Owyhee Canyonlands has been home to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Northern Paiute, Shoshone and Bannock Tribes have lived in harmony with this land and draw sustenance and spiritual inspiration from its plentiful resources. Cultural artifacts, found throughout the region, mark 13,000 years of human use and reverence of this region. Responsible visitors will admire this irreplaceable archaeology and leave it as they found it.

The Owyhee continues to provide culturally important

Spring sunset near Birch Creek Ranch.
Photo: Shane Davila



resources for Tribes today, including plants and animals, minerals, medicines and sacred sites that are integral to Tribal traditions and subsistence.

Human History: Settlers and Conflicts

The Owyhee Canyonlands is a rich repository of high desert history. Despite only five percent of the landscape being surveyed, more than 800 archaeological sites have been recorded. Homesteads like the Five Bar Ranch and Birch Creek Ranch mark early European-American arrival, while Spanish Basque culture continues to influence the region today.

The Owyhee also saw tumultuous conflict between settlers and Indigenous peoples during the Snake Wars (1864-1868). This brutal confrontation resulted in some of the most significant casualties of the period and displaced Indigenous peoples from the heart of the Owyhee.

Geological Wonders: A Land Shaped by Fire and Water

The geological history of the Owyhee Canyonlands is as complex as it is fascinating. Spanning more than 65 million years, the region's geological legacy rendered a region of silicic domes, calderas, basalt flows, ancient lake beds and welded ash-flow tuffs, dazzling visitors with a palette of vermilion hues and chocolatey browns tinted with brilliant green, yellow and orange. The Owyhee River and its tributaries carved deep, rugged canyons through this extraordinary geology, creating breathtaking vistas in a landscape revered as "Oregon's Grand Canyon."

This stunning array of rocks and minerals makes the Owyhee Canyonlands a hotspot for both academic and amateur geological study and exploration. The region is especially renowned for thundereggs, a distinctive type of geode and Oregon's state rock, which are found in abundance in the area.

Paleontological Treasures: A Window into the Past

Paleontological discovery in the Owyhee reveals a vibrant biodiversity from the Miocene epoch (extending from 5 to 23 million years ago). Fossils found in the region indicate the presence of a diverse array of prehistoric mammals that adapted to significant climatic change over millions of years. In fact, research suggests that the Owyhee underwent an immense ecological transformation during the Miocene, converting from forestlands to grasslands, causing grazing animals to replace browsing species on the landscape.

Ecological Richness: Abundant Flora and Fauna

While an arid region, the Owyhee Canyonlands is botanically rich with more than 1,200 species of vascular plants alone. Showcasing remarkable biodiversity from sagebrush communities and grasslands to woodlands, wetlands and meadows, these diverse habitats support an astonishing array of plant life. Owyhee clover and other rare and endemic species highlight the region's unique evolutionary history.

For wildlife enthusiasts, the Owyhee is a haven teeming with critters. Hundreds of species of wildlife, including mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, California bighorn sheep,



North Fork Owyhee River.
Photo: Michelle Adams

The Darkest Night Skies: Endless Stars

Gazing at millions of stars scattered across the inky night sky and seeing the Milky Way stretch from one horizon to the other is an awe-inspiring moment that few have the opportunity to experience. With some of the darkest night skies in the country, Oregon's Owyhee is ideal for stargazing.

Protecting the Wonders of the Owyhee

Given this rich tapestry of wonders, it is only natural that ONDA and our community of conserva-

tion advocates would seek to protect the Owyhee, now and forever. mountain lion, pronghorn, greater sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit and Lahontan cutthroat trout call this region home. Birdwatchers marvel at more than 150 species of birds that pass through the area, while insect lovers might spot rare gems like the *Andrena winnemuccana* bee and the majestic monarch butterfly. For those enchanted by the night, over a dozen species of bats take to the Owyhee's starlit skies.

tion advocates would seek to protect the Owyhee, now and forever.

Industrial development such as mining and energy exploration are creeping closer to the Owyhee, while climate change is warming this landscape faster than almost any other region in the country. The Owyhee Canyonlands is among the largest, intact natural expanses in the country,



Rafters float down the Owyhee River.
Photo: Vince Ready



The Honeycombs of the Owyhee Canyonlands.
Photo: Jeff Mann

and protecting this landscape will bolster its resiliency to an array of threats. As a natural climate refuge, protecting the Owyhee is key to local, regional and national climate and conservation goals.

ONDA has been committed to advancing conservation in the Owyhee for decades, and right now the Owyhee Canyonlands is the largest, most dynamic conservation opportunity in the American West. Less than five percent of the Owyhee is permanently protected, leaving vast expanses—and the hundreds of native species that call the land home and other sensitive resources and values—vulnerable to looming threats.

Today, our landmark campaign aims to protect more than 1 million acres of public land and 3,900 river miles in the Owyhee Canyonlands, while also ensuring that Tribal perspectives and preferenc-

es guide future conservation and management across the region. Our campaign leadership has resulted in hundreds of Tribal representatives, elected leaders, businesses, or-

ganizations and stakeholders joining more than 50,000 petition signers from across the country to call for the permanent protection of Oregon's irreplaceable Owyhee. We've seen unprecedented progress in the last year and will urgently press forward to secure much deserved and urgently needed protection for Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands.

From the ancient cultures that first called this land home to the geologists, naturalists and adventurers of today, the Owyhee Canyonlands in-

spires and captivates all who get to know this storied landscape. Thank you for your continued support of this iconic landscape and learn more at [ONDA.org](https://onda.org). ♦



Owyhee clover.
Photo: Matt Berger

Species Spotlight: Columbia Clubtail

A flashy prehistoric insect.

By Anne White, Policy Manager



Columbia clubtail. Photo: Cameron Eckert

Dragonflies are one of the most spectacular and striking insects in Oregon’s high desert, readily seen by their large, bulky bodies zipping through the warm summer air, flashing near-neon reds, blues, greens and yellows.

Belonging to the same scientific order *Odonata* as damselflies (which are easily distinguished from dragonflies by their slender body and wings that close when resting), dragonflies are one of the oldest insects in the world. These prehistoric creatures evolved more than 300 million years ago—pre-dating dinosaurs by 100 million years—and look remarkably similar today as when they first appeared.

There are 87 known species of dragonflies in Oregon. Common names for the species are as fantastic and varied as the rainbow of hues they flaunt. Some names reference the ease with which they move through the air—glider, darner and skimmer—while others conjure images of intimidating appearance and strength—meadowhawk, snaketail and clubtail.

The Columbia clubtail (*Gomphurus lynnae*) in particular is one of the rarest and most recently described dragonfly species in Oregon. Although a clubtail specimen was collected in 1952 in Rome, Oregon, it was not identified in the state until 1993 after it was distinguished as its own species. Named for their distinctive club-like tail, both male and female Columbia clubtail have yellow and black patterned bodies with bright blue eyes.

In Oregon, Columbia clubtail is only found along three slow-moving rivers that wind through the high desert, including the Owyhee River. The species lays its eggs in the water, and larvae hatch into nymphs with gills for breathing underwater. This characteristic allows the dragonfly nymph to feed on other aquatic species, such as small fish and tadpoles. Clubtail larvae proceed through multiple instars (phases of development), taking as long as two years to fully mature. Adults feed on moths, butterflies, and smaller dragonflies and damselflies in shrubs along the shoreline, but the clubtail have also been observed feeding as far as six miles away from water.

Because the insect requires clean, cool water with ample prey, the presence of dragonflies indicates healthy streamside habitat. The impacts to both water quality and temperature caused by climate change, fire, invasive nonnative vegetation and other disturbances threaten the Columbia clubtail and other dragonflies. Providing lasting protections for Oregon’s crucial desert waterways will ensure that Columbia clubtail and other dragonflies persevere in the future—perhaps for another 300 million years! Learn more about landscapes where these insects thrive at [ONDA.org/regions/owyhee-canyonlands](https://onda.org/regions/owyhee-canyonlands). ♦

UPCOMING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Wild Desert Calendar Mailing Team

Flexible Hours | Bend

Spend 2-3 hours in our Bend office each week from October through the end of the year putting together calendars to mail to our buyers. Commit weekly through December or sign up for just a few weeks. Flexible scheduling available. No computer experience necessary.

Calendar Assembly Party

Wednesday, September 25 | 2-6 p.m. | Bend

Enjoy food, drinks and a sneak peek at the amazing images featured in this year's Wild Desert Calendar. This festive group will gather at our Bend office to count, sort and add inserts to the Wild Desert Calendar that will be shipped and sold by retail vendors around the state. No experience necessary.

Wild & Scenic Film Festival

Friday, October 4 | 4-8:30 p.m. | Bend

Volunteers will share information with event guests, sell raffle tickets and encourage attendees to give, advocate and volunteer. Enjoy the event for free when you volunteer!

2025 Wild Desert Calendar Release Party

Friday, October 25 | 2-6:00 p.m. | Bend

Celebrate the release of ONDA's Wild Desert Calendar. Meet the photographers featured in the calendar while setting up and breaking down, sharing information about ONDA and connecting community members to our conservation work.

High Desert Hootenanny

Friday, December 6 | 4:30-8:30 p.m. | Bend

Join ONDA, friends and supporters in celebrating Oregon's high desert and the conservation successes you've achieved this year. Volunteers will set up and break down, as well as share information about ONDA during the event.

Find more volunteer opportunities at [ONDA.org/volunteer](https://onda.org/volunteer).



Rita at Smith Rock. Photo: Stan Oliver

MEET RITA PEARSON

A friendly face at ONDA events

By Karina Diaz, Development Coordinator

Rita Pearson discovered Oregon Natural Desert Association during a night out at the Wild and Scenic Film Festival. The Bend resident was looking for ways to get more involved in the Central Oregon community after wrapping up a 14-year tenure working for the local school district, and ONDA's commitment to conservation was the right cause at the right time.

Rita moved to Bend in 1983 and soon discovered the diversity, vastness and beauty of Oregon's dry side. She loves hiking and enjoys the ancient junipers, volcanic rocks and abundant wildlife found in her favorite backyard wilderness, the Oregon Badlands. Rita also takes time out to explore the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, especially the Painted Hills. Both places have provided inspiration and rejuvenation throughout her life.

Ever since Rita made her first financial donation eight years ago, she has been amazed by how hard ONDA works to bring different groups to the table to protect Oregon's high desert. This pushed her to take the next step in her support and volunteer during events and participate in restoration projects so that she could play an even bigger part in furthering ONDA's conservation mission. To date, she's contributed over 50 volunteer hours!

"It's easy to get mired down by all the negative in the world. Being involved, even in a small way, to protect as many of the amazing places in Oregon for future generations focuses on positive energies and a sense of accomplishment," Rita shared as she reflected on her time as a volunteer and member. ♦

To contribute to efforts to protect and restore Oregon's high desert, visit [ONDA.org/donate](https://onda.org/donate).

UPCOMING EVENTS

For all details and our full list of events, visit [ONDA.org/events](https://onda.org/events)



Wild & Scenic Film Festival

Friday, October 4, 2024 | 6:00 P.M.
Tower Theatre, Bend and streaming online

Enjoy an evening of short films showcasing our earth's natural wonders and the stories of

activists working to conserve the environment. There will be an in-person show at the Tower Theatre in Bend as well as a virtual version streamed online.



Wild Desert Calendar Party and Online Gallery Premiere

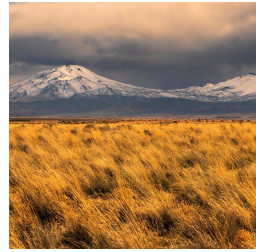
Friday, October 25, 2024 | 5:00 P.M.

The Barrel Room at Immersion Brewing, Bend and online

Gather in Bend to meet the

photographers behind the 2024 edition of our Wild Desert Calendar and admire exceptional high desert photography alongside fellow conservation advocates, or enjoy our online gallery.

Photos: Event 1 – Mark Darnell, Event 2 – Tyson Fisher, Event 3 – Steve Luther, Event 4 – Jim Oleachea



High Desert Hootenanny

Friday, November 15 | 5:00 P.M.
KEEN Garage, Portland

Friday, December 6 | 5:00 P.M.
Aspen Hall, Bend

Join our annual celebration of desert conservation!

Commemorate the wonders of Oregon's high desert and the many conservation successes achieved in 2024. Hear highlights from this year's work to protect and restore the state's dry side and learn about what's to come in the year ahead.



High Desert Speaker Series

February – April 2025 | Dates TBD

Our annual event series features diverse speakers, captivating stories, stunning photography and fascinating natural history from Oregon's high desert.

Attendees can expect to be inspired to conserve our public lands through events in Bend, Portland and online. Stay tuned for our full lineup of speakers and dates to be announced in early 2025.

FOND THANK-YOUS

This summer, we thanked our dedicated campaign manager, *Karly Foster*, for her leadership of our conservation work as she pursued a new opportunity to support youth outdoor education in Oregon. Born and raised in western Oregon, Karly loved sharing her passion for the high desert. In her two years at ONDA, she helped launch and manage an array of conservation initiatives, including our Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument campaign. We're cheering for Karly's continued success and are grateful for her contributions to ONDA's ambitious conservation goals.

In June, *Liliya Giroux* joined us as our summer 2024 Hillis Intern. Supporting long-term monitoring efforts and informing legislative and administrative policies affecting Lake Abert, Liliya spent her summer surveying and recording bird use alongside two expert ornithologists. Prior to joining ONDA, Liliya graduated from Northern Arizona University in June with a B.S. in Environmental Sciences. We thank her for a summer of impactful work and wish her luck on her next endeavor! ♦

**MORE THAN 50
BUSINESS MEMBERS
SUPPORT ONDA**

Visit us at
[ONDA.org/business-members](https://onda.org/business-members)
to learn more about
sponsorship opportunities.



See Fall Color in the High Desert

By Scott Bowler, ONDA Volunteer



Aspens change color with the season in the Steens. Photo: Dan Hawk

As temperatures cool and daylight shortens in Oregon's high desert, deciduous plants begin to metabolize and withdraw certain leaf pigments and sugars, altering their complexion. As pigments like green chlorophyll leave plants, other colors begin to dominate their appearance. Each plant will have a different sequence with varying color dominance. As time, elevation and water levels change, continual new opportunities to explore colorful scenes appear.

While Oregon might not have the species diversity and abundance that gives the East Coast its iconic fall show, you'll find the state's high desert has longer autumnal seasons and gorgeous color-viewing experiences. Mountain-side aspen groves, hot spring meadows and streamside trees aflame are some of the best parts of the season on Oregon's dry side.

As summer fades, plan your color safaris around elevation changes and waterways. Get up into the high country first to look especially for aspen groves, which can be magnificent and quite varied in color. Along desert streams, look for beautiful strips of several varieties of willow, cottonwood, red stem dogwood and hackberry trees. Meadows and "ecotones," where one habitat changes into another, can be amazing in their diversity, as grasses, forbs and shrubs all begin to change color at different times and locales.

If you are looking for day or weekend adventures, here are several places to start exploring, listed in more-or-less seasonal progression.

Steens Mountain: The crown jewel of our high desert, fall color is among this region's most spectacular attractions. The mountain's huge groves of aspens color up significantly, along with willows and more varieties surrounding the few small lakes and creeks, putting on a great show. Fish Lake is a popular, larger campground, but the tiny campground in Jackman Park further up the road is glorious. For more color, explore the summit area and hike the various trails. Also consider exploring Trout Creek and Oregon Canyon mountains to the east of Steens.

Hart Mountain: Home to vibrant aspen groves, there's much to enjoy here in the fall. The Hart Mountain Hot Springs campground sits amidst beautiful willows and shrubs like wild roses, all coloring up throughout the season. And, of course, there's a hot spring to enjoy in the middle of the meadow.

Winter Rim: Sitting high above Summer Lake, Winter Rim is a diverse area that can be gorgeous in October as aspens up high and willows and grasses of valley floors all turn color synonymously. Camp or rent a cabin at Summer Lake Hot Springs to fully explore the area. There is also a lot of beautiful camping throughout Fremont-Winema National Forest.

South Fork Crooked River: The South Fork Crooked River and much of the upper John Day River have beautiful riverside and wetland areas. In October and later, these areas will be colored by willows, cottonwoods, several shrubs and many different grasses showing a wide variety of hues. Cottonwood Canyon State Park is an excellent location to stay by the upper John Day River during this time of year. For a place to stay near the South Fork Crooked River, Congleton Hollow is a primitive camping spot with no amenities but plenty of solitude.

Note: Since fall brings different hunting seasons, it's a good idea to wear bright colors while out hiking and to keep your kids and dogs close. ♦

For more desert outings, check out our Visitor's Guides at [ONDA.org/guides](https://onda.org/guides).



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Protecting, defending and restoring Oregon's high desert since 1987. Learn more at ONDA.org.

Oregon's high desert is the homeland of a diversity of Indigenous people, including the Northern Paiute, Shoshone, Bannock, Wasco, Warm Springs, Yahooskin, Cayuse, Walla Walla and Umatilla peoples organized within several Tribes. These include the Burns Paiute Tribe, Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribes, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation, the Klamath Tribes, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and others.

ONDA is committed to collaborating with these communities and eager to continue learning more about how our conservation mission can complement Tribal and Indigenous conservation goals.