

The background of the cover is a photograph of a desert landscape. In the upper portion, a rugged mountain with some green vegetation rises against a clear sky. Below the mountain, a dense forest of green trees and shrubs covers a hillside. In the lower portion, a group of seven hikers is walking through a field of tall, dry grass. They are wearing various outdoor gear, including hats, backpacks, and sunglasses. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a clear day in a desert environment.

OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

# DESERT RAMBLINGS

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SPRING + SUMMER 2025 | VOLUME 38 • NO.1

## THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE US

What fuels conservation success





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Backdrop: Ruddy duck in summer, Central Oregon Backcountry.  
Photo: Shannon Phifer

## OVERHEARD

“I love the wild areas, the subtle beauty, the unique geological history and the incredible living things that live and thrive here.”

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Cover: ONDA members engaging in impactful conservation work. Photo: Sage Brown



Mann Lake in winter, Steens Mountain. Photo: Greg Burke

Dear Oregon desert advocate,

Throughout nearly 40 years of advocacy, ONDA has been steadfast and clear-eyed as we navigate the inevitable twists and turns of our enduring journey to conserve millions of acres of the most beautiful, ecologically-important and unique landscapes that make up Oregon's high desert.

Over the course of just the past year we have successfully pushed back on misguided proposals, secured important new protections for millions of acres in the Owyhee Canyonlands and Greater Hart-Sheldon, helped guide responsible renewable energy development and restored important habitats throughout the region. Along the way, new community and Tribal partnerships have bolstered our collective resolve, as well as the strength of our grassroots support. This, above all, is the most important ingredient for long-term, community-led conservation success.

The months and years ahead will undoubtedly bring new challenges as decision-makers seek to dismantle science-based management, undermine the public's involvement in public land management, and weaken the foundational laws that protect clean air, clean water and the wild spaces that fuel our souls, support the wildlife we love, and benefit communities across the region.

As before, this will require commitment to collective grassroots engagement and activism. We must join together, building community and demanding real leadership from our elected leaders. And together we have never been in a better position to do exactly this: our goals are clear, our strategies are sound, and our community continues to grow with new, energized advocates joining in our determination to protect, defend and restore Oregon's high desert.

We will put recently-finalized conservation plans into action, grow community-led conservation initiatives, defend wildlife and wildlands, expand grassroots support for protecting the most important landscapes, and engage volunteers and local leaders to restore priority habitats.

These priorities, when fueled by your support and grounded in our unwavering values, give us the strength and determination we need to continue to succeed. We look forward to taking on new opportunities and advancing long-term priorities in the coming year, while opposing any emerging threats to the health and vitality of desert lands, waters and wildlife.

Thank you for your enduring commitment to Oregon desert conservation in 2025.

For a wild desert,

Ryan Houston  
Executive Director





## Sustaining Momentum

An update on our campaign to protect Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands.

By Ryan Houston, Executive Director

Last year began with exciting news for Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands as new protections for more than 417,000 acres of the most important wildlands in the Owyhee were finalized by the Bureau of Land Management. Decades of Oregon Natural Desert Association's field work and advocacy delivered more acres of protection for this landscape than in any other BLM district in history.

Building on this momentum, ONDA and dozens of partners representing millions of Americans advanced our campaign to protect 1.1 million acres as new wilderness areas or a national monument.



Balsamroots bloom in spring in Birch Creek, Owyhee Canyonlands. Photo: Rick Samco

Through this campaign, we developed a support network larger than we've ever seen in ONDA's decades of conservation advocacy in the high desert: 70,000 people signed the petition to protect the Owyhee; thousands of constituents called and wrote to Senator Wyden's office; Tribal leaders and other advocates joined multiple trips to Washington, D.C.; and hundreds of endorsements poured into our support book that ultimately totaled more than 800 pages of letters, essays, opinion-editorials, resolutions and other expressions of support.

While political dynamics in Washington, D.C., ultimately blocked the final step that would have put our campaign over the finish line in 2024, the grassroots support for protecting Oregon's Owyhee is now stronger than ever. Local leaders and Tribal partners continue to work closely with ONDA and our colleagues to refine the proposal, engage new supporters and build the groundswell of community support needed for ultimate success.

Stay tuned as ONDA's unwavering commitment to protecting the Owyhee Canyonlands brings new opportunities in the years ahead.

Read more in our recent blog, "Owyhee Reflections," at <https://onda.org/owyhee-reflections/>. ♦





Fish Rim in Summer, Greater Hart-Sheldon. *Photo: Jim Davis*

## Expansive protections secured for the Greater Hart-Sheldon

Finally, a management plan for this iconic region.

By Mark Salvo, Conservation Director

Decades of organizing and advocacy paid off when ONDA secured a tremendous achievement for the Greater Hart-Sheldon in January. Renowned for its vast wild lands and world-class wildlife, this region spans over 150 miles from Fort Rock and Devil's Garden in the north all the way to the Nevada border. The Bureau of Land Management's final management plan for this iconic expanse protects and conserves more than 1.1 million acres of public lands.

This rolling sagebrush sea is home to pronghorn, greater sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit and dozens of species of migratory birds. Rich with cultural history, the region also supports extraordinary backcountry recreation and hosts the Oregon Outback International Dark Sky Sanctuary, the largest dark sky reserve in the world.

The BLM's new plan protects 415,679 acres of public

lands, while also conserving wilderness values and wildlife habitat on an additional 738,665 acres. These new protections build upon a half-million acres of wilderness-quality lands already designated in the region, so that more than half of all the public lands in the Greater Hart-Sheldon are now protected or conserved.

Conservation management of this landscape will promote habitat connectivity, bolster climate resilience, and preserve one of the most important wildlife migration corridors in the West.

This achievement is a direct result of ONDA's members, supporters, volunteers and advocates who invested years into surveying the landscape, advocating for conservation, and pressing for strong, science-based decision-making for the Greater Hart-Sheldon. ♦





Restoration can return vitality to the ecosystem at Robinson Creek. *Photo: Allison Law*

## A Community-driven Restoration Vision

Partnering with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs to create a resilient future for the Robinson Creek watershed.

By Gena Goodman-Campbell, Stewardship Director

Emerging from a high elevation ponderosa pine forest dotted with stands of quaking aspen, Robinson Creek descends through rugged canyons before assuming a more meandering path into rolling grasslands. The creek and the surrounding wildlands provide an essential migratory corridor for fish and wildlife during their seasonal movements across the John Day River Basin.

Robinson Creek flows through a 34,000-acre property owned and managed by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs (CTWS) known as Pine Creek Conservation Area. The CTWS, which include the Warm Springs, Wasco and Northern Paiute Tribes, has a rich history and tradition of stewarding the lands and waters across the vast territory that is now central and eastern Oregon.

Oregon Natural Desert Association has partnered with CTWS since 1999 to restore the Pine Creek property. Together, we've planted thousands of trees and shrubs along streams, removed over 100 acres of juniper from sensitive habitat, and eliminated more than 80 miles of obsolete barbed wire fence. These actions have enhanced wildlife habitat quality and connectivity.

Starting in 2023, ONDA and CTWS pooled our experience and knowledge to design an ambitious new

watershed restoration project for Robinson Creek. We investigated the current state of the stream channels and tributaries in the watershed and gathered data to inform where restoration could be most successful.

Overall, we found that in spite of the improvements to ecosystem health that past restoration work had catalyzed, more work is needed to help Robinson Creek fully meet the needs of the fish, wildlife and human communities that depend on it. Our new project is designed to build on our initial progress and address the root problems that are hindering the full recovery of this critically important ecosystem.

### Historic Impacts to Stream Flow

The story of Robinson Creek is one that mirrors that of many streams in Oregon's high desert. Over a century of intensive livestock grazing left the stream with very little streamside vegetation, and trappers removed nearly all of the beaver from the watershed. Without beaver dams to hold back water and without vegetation to hold soil in place, erosion accelerated to the point where Robinson Creek is now "downcut" and disconnected from its historic floodplain. As the floodplain dried out, juniper trees expanded toward the banks of the creek, changing habitat conditions while also using



more water than beneficial trees like willow, aspen and cottonwood. As a consequence, Robinson Creek no longer flows along its entire length year-round, trapping steelhead and other fish in small isolated pools as water levels drop during the summer months.

This is the ecological puzzle that ONDA and CTWS have been working to solve throughout our decades-long partnership. We envision a future where Robinson Creek flows throughout its entire historic length, with thriving and resilient habitat that meets the needs of fish and wildlife and supports sustainable traditional uses by Indigenous communities. To get there, we've thoughtfully designed the Robinson Creek watershed restoration project, which will unfold over the course of at least five years and multiple phases, and will require more volunteer power than any project ONDA has ever taken on.

### Restoring the Underground Stream

Much of our plans for the Robinson Creek restoration project focus on influencing what is happening underground, in the hidden yet essential world beneath the stream called the "hyporheic zone." When water from the stream infiltrates through porous sand and gravel in the stream bed, it flows below the stream where it is cooled, lowering the temperature of the entire stream once this water is slowly released back into aboveground flows. Water flowing underground also supports surrounding plants, creating a balanced cycle that is emblematic of a healthy stream system.

But when a stream channel has been eroded down below its floodplain, water doesn't reach as much of this underground area and native plants die off due to lack of water. With no beaver dams or woody debris in the stream to slow it down, water flows through quickly, taking all of the valuable sediment and nutrients with it and cutting the stream even deeper into the earth. Once a stream like Robinson Creek is in this state, it can become stuck in a detrimental cycle of erosion and

drying. But, by thinking like nature's best engineer, the beaver, we can help Robinson Creek get unstuck, and put it on a trajectory of self-sustaining recovery.

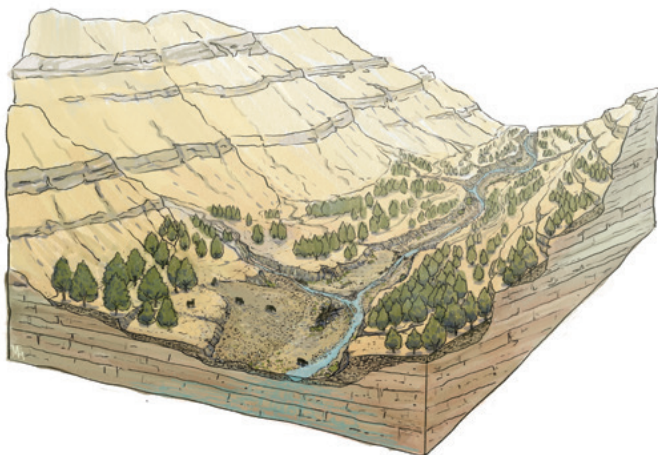
### The Project

We will start by installing a system of monitoring wells to track what is going on in the water table and to learn how this underground world responds to our restoration actions. Then, we will build hundreds of instream structures that mimic beaver dams and the natural accumulation of logs found in a healthy stream. By adding structure back into the creek, we will slow water down, capturing sediment and nutrients in preparation for future planting. This will raise the water table, filling the underground hyporheic zone and resulting in cooler and more consistent stream flows year-round.

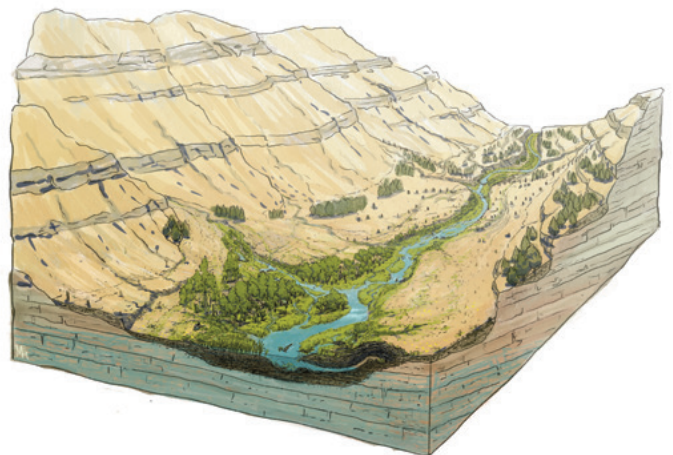
When we observe increased soil moisture during the driest parts of the year, we will know that the creek is ready for us to begin the next phase of the restoration project. At this time, ONDA will plant tens of thousands of trees and shrubs to restore the streamside forest that once made Robinson Creek a haven for fish and wildlife.

### A Community Effort

This project is the result of ONDA's experience and lessons learned over the course of more than 15 years of restoration work in the high desert. ONDA and CTWS have come this far in our aim to restore the essential ecosystem of the Pine Creek Conservation Area thanks to the support of volunteers who contributed countless hours of work, as well as the thousands of members whose financial support fueled this project. And it will take the involvement of even more people to accomplish our ambitious vision for Robinson Creek. Volunteers will have the chance to be involved in every stage of this project and will experience the deep satisfaction that comes from being a part of a community working together to create a healthier and more resilient future for Oregon's high desert. ♦



An illustration of what the degraded landscape looks like, before restoration. *Illustration: Maisie Richards*



An illustration of what the restored landscape is expected to look like, post restoration. *Illustration: Maisie Richards*





# The People Who Make Us

What fuels conservation success.

By Renee Schiavone, Communications Manager

I traversed a mile across a hilly, sagebrush-speckled landscape to find the group and was already sweating before the real work began. When I finally spotted them, it was like I'd descended upon a hive of busy bees, welcoming me into their colony. While some carried piles of tree branches twice their size across precarious side hills, others dug up pounds of mud in the sun or snipped hundreds of juniper saplings with sticky clippers. They eagerly greeted me as they shuffled by amidst their work. This was my first Oregon Natural Desert Association stewardship trip, and along with 14 volunteers, I was here for

a weekend of restoration work in Oregon's high desert.

That night around the campfire, I heard people of all ages and walks of life tell stories of their greatest high desert memories and misadventures. I saw a group of strangers come together seamlessly over a shared love for this place, laughing like they'd known each other for ages. When a car rolled up alongside our fireside chat to see about a campsite, the driver asked if we were a family.

"In a way," one of us said.



People seen and unseen bring their values forward to support Oregon's high desert.  
Photo: Sage Brown



### **From the Beginning**

Thinking back to that first stewardship trip I attended, each person possessed a similar conservation ethic, yet was so diverse in what they brought to the table. From our skills to our backgrounds, each of us offered something different, yet valuable, to the project. When combined, we created a steadfast team with a shared goal.

And that's how it all began for ONDA. Some four decades ago a scrappy group of people assembled, each committed to the belief that Oregon's high desert needed

stronger caretaking than federal agencies were providing. They all kicked in \$5 to get started on their work to protect, defend and restore Oregon's high desert.

The people I met on my stewardship trip are just a few of the 6,000+ members, 20,000 supporters and countless partners who make up ONDA's community. Yet this group was the perfect representation: they were hard working, unrelenting, filled with passion and cared deeply about Oregon's high desert.

It's always been the people, from the beginning and through to today, who define ONDA.

### **Who They Are**

Today, when I look at ONDA's community, I see dedicated individuals who selflessly come together and go to great lengths to achieve conservation success. We're proud of the active, engaged community we've built. Every action and gift, no matter the size or scale, moves our conservation goals forward.

People fuel our work, and there are so many ways to get involved—none more important than another.

There are people who donate their crafts, like writers, photographers and videographers who contribute their art to inspire others to support desert conservation. There are people who donate their time, like those who choose to volunteer at ONDA events, in our offices or in the desert. And, there are people who advocate from near or far, signing timely petitions or reaching out to elected officials.

People seen and unseen bring their values forward to support the conservation of Oregon's desert. We're profiling just a few of these people (*see pages 10-11*) whose engagement, much like yours, has resulted in so many successes for the lands, waters and wildlife we love.

### **A Strong Community**

Participation in ONDA's conservation community creates a healthy, thriving Oregon desert for all to enjoy. Whether it's online advocacy from your armchair, writing a letter to a newspaper editorial board, sending in membership dues, or testifying in front of congress, each action enables us to reach new milestones for desert conservation.

Together, we're a force to be reckoned with, and we will meet every challenge ahead fueled by our incredible community, channeling the power of the people to protect, defend and restore Oregon's high desert. ♦



## Mary Powell

Day after day, a little bit of everything goes a long way. In simple, kind and quiet ways, Mary gives, advocates and volunteers for ONDA on a near daily basis. From lending a hand at countless events, to getting her hands dirty on stewardship trips, to taking part in online advocacy, she does it all. Perhaps her most impactful contribution has been her significant financial gift in honor of her late husband, Harv. Her generosity allowed ONDA to create the Hillis Internship, a paid opportunity for early-career individuals to participate in Oregon desert conservation efforts.



## Myron Smart, Ka'ila Farrell-Smith, Gary McKinney, Wilson Wewa

Indigenous leaders are visible and vital advocates for landscape protection in Oregon's high desert. A small group went so far as to travel to Washington, D.C., to encourage decision makers to permanently protect the Owyhee Canyonlands. Home to the Northern Paiute, Shoshone and Bannock peoples since time immemorial, the Owyhee continues to hold deep, ancestral reverence for Tribes and Indigenous communities across the region. Empowered by a knowledge of place, these Tribal leaders spoke directly and from the heart to elected leaders about the immeasurable cultural, social and ecological importance of conserving this sacred landscape.

## Jackson Gango

Many creators are forced to draw lines between work and advocacy, as they love to create for the things they care about but also need to pay the bills. Despite this, Jackson is generous and selfless with his art, offering many hours to shoot, edit and produce video content for ONDA. From taking his camera to catalog restoration work, to interviewing staff for short films, to capturing member at events, thanks to his work, we are able to tell visually compelling stories that attract new conservation advocates.







Photo: Dan Holz

### Julie Weikel

Hailing from southeastern Oregon, Julie has spent a lifetime committed to safeguarding the high desert. A tireless volunteer and advocate, she has worked on innumerable initiatives, sharing her valuable local perspectives and inspiring all of us with her passion along the way. One of her most recent and notable contributions stemmed from her service on the Southeastern Oregon Resource Advisory Council. Alongside ONDA, Julie and the council was instrumental in shaping a new federal management plan for the Owyhee Canyonlands that specially protects more than 400,000 acres of public lands across the landscape.

### Karl Findling

People enjoy and support public lands for all sorts of reasons. As a sportsman and small business owner, Karl promotes getting outside in healthy, thriving environments. That's why he's an ONDA supporter—and why he's bridging the gap between recreationalists and conservationists. From gathering recreationalist's endorsements for the Protect the Owyhee campaign, to weighing in on environmental concerns to guide the Bureau of Land Management's solar development in Oregon's high desert, he speaks on behalf of sportsmen, vocalizing our shared interest: protecting high desert public lands.



Photo: Karl Findling

### Alison Jean Cole

While many conservationists speak on behalf of wildlands and wildlife, Alison speaks for what's happening under our feet. As an avid rockhound and conservation advocate, Alison has a unique perspective on the state of the desert. She shares this with others to inspire activism, as she did as a presenter at our 2024 High Desert Speaker Series event. She also serves as an advisor to land managers in southeastern Oregon, offering her expertise as an outfitter guide throughout the region. In coordination with ONDA and others, these efforts contributed to new protection achieved in the Lakeview Resource Management Plan



Photo: Robbie Augspurger



## Species Spotlight: Redband Trout

Conservation efforts targeting this iconic desert fish give us hope for a bright future.

By Scott Bowler, ONDA Volunteer



Redband trout. Photo: Fish Eye Guy Photography

Chances are, if you come across a native trout in a river east of Oregon's Cascades, it's a redband. The gorgeous Great Basin redband trout, *Oncorhynchus mykiss newberrii* ssp., are a tough subspecies of native rainbow trout. They evolved in a harsh and changing environment, developing unique strategies to contend with challenging conditions on the way to their modern distribution. Today, this species is remarkably adapted to the high desert, but they will need our help to continue to survive as a cherished icon of Oregon's dry side.

As the name suggests, these fish exhibit a rosy red swath along their sides, with orange and yellow tints along the belly. Prime trout habitat is clear, clean and cold, with a complex array of riffles and pools and abundant streamside vegetation.

Once upon a time, around the end of the last ice ages, there was a lot more water in the Great Basin—the large, arid geographic region of the middle western United States with no outlet to the ocean, which includes Oregon's high desert. Huge lakes filled most of this expansive basin, fed by and feeding hundreds of rivers and streams, with virtually all these waters populated by redband trout.

Over eons, changing climate and drought increasingly isolated redbands, spurring them to develop traits suitable for desert survival: smaller size, tolerance of warmer temperatures and alkaline waters and changes in coloration. During wet cycles, trout re-colonize streams, expanding distribution. But during drought years, distribution constricts as streams dry and become uninhabitable. Many landlocked basins, like those in Oregon's high desert, have become so dry that redband trout are isolated in remaining streams at higher elevations, no longer connected to lakes, rivers or other fish.

This increasing isolation produced the many redband populations now inhabiting Oregon high desert waterways, such as the Chewaucan River, Greater Hart-Sheldon creeks and lakes, streams flowing off Steens, Pueblo and Trout Creek mountains into the Alvord basin, and McDermitt Caldera creeks connecting to the Quinn River.

Today, redbands occupy less than 45% of their original range, and all remaining populations are known to be sensitive or threatened, indicating a risk of further decline due to habitat loss. Oregon Natural Desert Association has been working for decades to protect, defend and restore the high desert's most vital fish and wildlife habitat, and new protections gained for millions of acres in the Owyhee and Hart-Sheldon offer new hope for this iconic and beautiful desert fish. ♦



## FOND THANK-YOUS



As 2024 came to a close, we said farewell to long-time ONDA board member *Gilly Lyons*. Since joining our board in 2009, Gilly has been a valuable voice in guiding our mission and values. She served

as Board President and Secretary over many years, bringing a passion for conservation and boundless enthusiasm to her work for ONDA. Gilly currently works for the Pacific Fishery Management Council and previously worked for Pew Charitable Trusts in Portland. Prior to joining Pew, she spent six years as grassroots coordinator for ONDA in Bend and Portland. We'll greatly miss having Gilly on our team!



At the end of last year, we also said goodbye to our stewardship coordinator, *Sarah Lindsay*, who connected hundreds of volunteers to the high desert with her earnest passion for its wildlands,

flora and wildlife (especially insects!). In her time with ONDA, she acquired a number of fans as stewardship trip participants raved about the fun and sincerity she brought to our restoration work. We're wishing Sarah the best as she heads back to her favorite place, the red rock country of southern Utah, to work on forest conservation management projects with the state of Utah. ♦

## JOIN US

Are you or someone you know looking for communications, development and event experience in a conservation nonprofit setting? Gain a broad range of experience in our 2025 Hillis Internship. We're offering paid summer experience starting in mid-June. Applications open April 1, 2025. Check out [ONDA.org/careers](https://onda.org/careers) for more info and how to apply.



Photo: Gregg Kantor

## MEET GREGG KANTOR

**Doubling impact through a matching gift program**  
By Claire Cekander

Gregg Kantor's connection to conservation began during his childhood, when he moved from Portland, Oregon to southern California. There he saw the impacts of urban sprawl and recognized the importance of protecting natural landscapes. Since then, Gregg has valued the preservation of wild lands and waters, particularly in Oregon's high desert, where he frequently fly fishes on the Deschutes and Metolius rivers. "For me, it's about ensuring that wild and undeveloped areas are well-managed and preserved," he said.

As a retired CEO, Gregg has been a strong advocate for conservation-focused nonprofits like Oregon Natural Desert Association. At his company, he helped establish a matching gift program, a corporate philanthropy program where a company matches employee donations to charitable organizations. And, Gregg continues to support desert conservation by making donations that are matched.

Gregg particularly values ONDA's work supporting conservation efforts that work alongside rural communities. He recognizes that community engagement helps safeguard high desert's ecosystems, ensuring critical areas are restored and that water, a vital and finite resource, is well-managed for future generations. "I give to ONDA because of its ability to collaborate with a diverse set of stakeholders on solutions that protect Oregon's high desert. There aren't many organizations that can find win-win solutions like ONDA," he notes. ♦

To explore ways to support conservation, including claiming a match from your employer, visit <https://onda.org/6waystogive/>



COMING UP

## SPRING + SUMMER EVENTS

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



Wildhorse Lake, Steens Mountain. Photo: Cliff Volpe

### Sagebrush Socials

Tuesday, June 3, 2025 | 5-7 p.m. | Portland  
Thursday, June 5, 2025 | 5-7 p.m. | Bend  
Tuesday, September 9, 2025 | 5-7 p.m. | Eugene

Save the date! Join fellow ONDA members, staff and supporters for these casual summer celebrations of the dedicated community who supports high desert conservation. Catch up with other desert enthusiasts and learn about upcoming conservation initiatives. More details to come.

## CALL FOR PHOTO SUBMISSIONS:

OPENS  
APRIL 1, 2025

Enter your best high desert photos for a chance to be featured in our annual calendar, bi-annual newsletter, social media or other publications.

Photo submissions begin April 1, 2025. To be considered for the 2026 Wild Desert Calendar, submit your photos by June 6, 2025.

Shots of winter scenes, areas of conservation importance, desert plants and wildlife, or people appreciating desert beauty are particularly favored. Follow the tips and guidelines on our website for more information on what and how to enter, as well as rules and details: [ONDA.org/submit-your-photos](https://ONDA.org/submit-your-photos).



Photo: James Parsons



Photo: Christof Teuscher



Photo: Tara-Lemezis



## Watch the Desert's Dawn Dancers

By Anne White, Policy Manager

### TRIP DETAILS

**Where:** Southeastern Oregon contains some of the most intact and highest quality sage-grouse habitat remaining in the American West, with Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands hosting the highest density of leks in the state. The McDermitt Caldera, in particular, supports nearly 100 known leks in the caldera and adjacent Trout Creek Mountains. Several new leks were recently identified in the area, confirming the importance of the vast, healthy expanse of rolling sagebrush steppe in the caldera to sage-grouse.

**When:** Although sage-grouse are well camouflaged in the high desert, the males stand out during their seasonal courtship displays, making the breeding season, from early March to mid-May, a unique and popular opportunity to see this charismatic species.

**How:** Observing dancing sage-grouse requires persistence and planning. Reaching the Owyhee and the McDermitt Caldera is likely to require a long drive from just about anywhere, and late-season snow or heavy rain in March and April can make access roads impassable. Sage-grouse are sensitive to disturbance and may abandon a lek if approached too closely or startled by loud noises, so watching a lek requires arriving before dawn, often in freezing temperatures, and watching from afar until all of the grouse have left the lek for the day.



Sagegrouse at sunrise. Photo: Doug Greenberg

Each year as the crisp winter chill yields to the warming promise of emerging spring, greater sage-grouse congregate in the early dawn light to dance. In this annual tradition, male sage-grouse strut on flat clearings in the sagebrush called "leks," loyally returning to the same location every spring for their entire life. With their tail feathers fanned and wings brushing against their chest, these flamboyant performers rapidly inflate and deflate yellow air sacs on their chest to emit an utterly distinctive echoing sound. The males will display for hours every morning, week after week, in their tireless attempt to impress females watching these choreographed exhibitions from the cover of sagebrush around the lekking ground.

To protect sage-grouse, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife does not publicize lek locations. For those interested in observing the birds in action, the state organizes an Adopt-a-Lek program that trains community volunteers to check in on dancing sage-grouse in remote areas of southeastern Oregon and report what you see to the statewide effort to track sage-grouse populations. For more information, contact [adopt.a.lek@gmail.com](mailto:adopt.a.lek@gmail.com). ♦

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





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# Love Oregon's High Desert Lands, Waters and Wildlife?

Add a gift to your will now to ensure future generations can appreciate the high desert.



Protecting, defending and restoring Oregon's high desert since 1987. Learn more at [ONDA.org](http://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.