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

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Oregon Celebrates 25 Years of Protection for Steens Mountain

Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act Marks Major Milestone

This month marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act, landmark legislation that permanently protected Oregon's incomparable Steens Mountain in southeastern Oregon while also setting a national precedent for collaborative conservation and public land stewardship.

"Steens Mountain is iconic in Oregon's high desert, beloved and enjoyed by people from all walks of life," said Ryan Houston, executive director of the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA). "Here at ONDA we continue to celebrate the solutions-oriented, collaborative approach that resulted in the passage of the Steens Act and has guided the management of this region for the past quarter century."

Signed into law on October 30, 2000, [the act designated the Steens Mountain Wilderness, the first and largest wilderness area in Oregon's high desert](#), as well as the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA). The CMPA protects natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources on 425,000 acres of public lands on the mountain while also promoting cooperative stewardship among conservationists, ranchers, tribes, and government agencies. The Steens Act is an enduring example of how diverse interests can come together to manage and conserve one of the West's most treasured landscapes.



An icon of Oregon's high desert, Steens Mountain attracts more than 100,000 visitors annually.
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<https://www.flickr.com/photos/blmoregon/9683735042/>.

Innovative Conservation

The Steens Act created new protections for Steens Mountain and the Alvord Desert that have conserved wildlife, wilderness values, and cultural resources across this unique and fragile landscape. These include:

- 1,148,158-acre mineral withdrawal that protects Steens Mountain and the Alvord desert from mining and geothermal energy development
- 496,135-acre Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area, encompassing all land ownerships
- 174,744-acre Steens Mountain Wilderness, Oregon's first and largest congressionally designated desert wilderness
- 99,859-acre livestock-free area within the Steens Mountain Wilderness, the first and only Congressionally legislated livestock-free wilderness in the country

- 28.5 *additional* miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers. Steens Mountain now features 105 miles of federally protected rivers and streams
- the nation's first and only Redband Trout Reserve

These protections have prevented improvident land use and development on the mountain for a quarter century, creating the space and opportunity for collaboration to solve conflicts and test and apply new management tools to advance conservation on the landscape.

Looking Ahead

Oregon Natural Desert Association is proud of our role in enacting the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act 25 years ago and our continuing work to address emerging threats to the ecosystem. We have especially appreciated our partnership with the Bureau of Land Management and other stakeholders to devise new ways to manage for invasive species, conifer encroachment, and wildfire that also preserve wilderness values and wildlife habitat on Steens.

“Communication and collaboration will continue to be key to conserving, restoring and defending Steens Mountain from an array of complex new threats,” said Mark Salvo, conservation director for Oregon Natural Desert Association. “The Steens Act gives us the tools to accomplish that task over the *next* twenty-five years.”