

Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal

Guiding Principles



Below are the guiding principles of the Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal. Taking stakeholder input into consideration, the proposal seeks to protect 2.5 million acres of public land in Malheur County, Oregon for the benefit of wildlife habitat conservation, pristine waterways, and backcountry recreation opportunities, while respecting private property rights, improving public land access, enabling effective fire management, and supporting and diversifying local economies.

National Conservation Area and Wilderness Designation: The proposal would establish the Owyhee Canyonlands National Conservation Area and designate over 2 million acres of public land within the NCA as Wilderness Areas.

Since 1996, the BLM has managed 23 Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in the Owyhee Canyonlands for their wilderness values. Until Congress makes a decision on the permanent status of these WSAs, the BLM will continue to manage them to maintain their eligibility for wilderness designation. The proposal will resolve the status of 23 WSAs by establishing a National Conservation Area and designating wilderness areas.

Protection of Wildlife Habitat: The proposal will preserve key habitat for federally and state-recognized sensitive species, including the Greater sage-grouse.

The Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal encompasses a diversity of habitat types including deep riverine canyons, riparian areas, grasslands, and sagebrush steppe. These lands provide important habitat for over 200 species of wildlife, including the imperiled Greater Sage-grouse, brown trout, redband trout, Bighorn sheep, golden eagles, red-tail hawks and peregrine falcons. Other species include chukar, pheasants, pronghorn antelope, mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk. More than 28 plants found only in the Owyhee Canyonlands, including Packard's blazing star and Etter's groundsel, would be protected.

Protection of Pristine Waterways: The proposal will designate more than 50 miles of additional Wild & Scenic Rivers.

The wild waters, deep gorges and canyon walls of the Owyhee River mark the heart of this incredible landscape. Wild and Scenic River designations for eligible segments will ensure the river canyons of the Owyhee are protected and their important values are highlighted for the public.

Opportunities for Backcountry Recreation: The proposal will result in increased opportunities for rafting, hiking, backpacking, hunting, fishing, hot springs and camping on public lands, and will protect solitude and primitive recreation in a remote natural setting.

Public lands within the Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal offer Southeast Oregon residents and visitors outstanding opportunities to enjoy traditional recreation activities on our public lands. By designating these lands as an NCA and/or Wilderness, rafting, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, backpacking, and hiking opportunities will be preserved for today's families and adventurers and for generations to come.

Maintain and Improve Access to Public Lands for All: The proposal will ensure areas that people care about – such as Leslie Gulch, Birch Creek, Three Forks, Owyhee Overlook and Anderson Crossing – remain accessible to the public.

In the proposal, existing, maintained and legal roads to desired destinations will remain open to the public and continue to provide access to both popular and more remote areas. Segments of non-navigable, non-existent and/or illegal routes will be closed, improving safe travel throughout the area and reducing the need for search and rescue services. In some cases, routes in key habitat areas or the Wild & Scenic River Corridors will be modified into single track trails or closed to improve and protect water quality and wildlife habitat. In these cases, non-motorized access will be maintained.

Respect for Private Property Rights and Access: The proposal will ensure that private property owners maintain adequate access to their land, and will not affect or impede activities on private land.

NCA and Wilderness designation applies only to public lands. Activities on lands outside of these boundaries will not be impeded by the designations. Where private lands are surrounded by the NCA or a wilderness area, the property owner's access route will be clearly identified on all maps, and the owner will be assured adequate access.

Creation of Wilderness & Fire Management Plans: Local communities and the public will have the opportunity to guide the future of natural resource management on proposal lands.

Once these areas are designated as NCA and/or wilderness, the BLM will continue to manage them. The BLM will be required to develop a Resource Management Plan and Wilderness Management Plan to specify how it will manage the uses and natural resources within the wilderness, including fire management, noxious weed control, and public access. Guidance and input from local governments, recreationists, grazers, fire districts and other stakeholders will play an important role in this process.

Continuation of Historic Livestock Grazing: The proposal will preserve livestock grazing as a valid use on lands within the NCA and/or designated as wilderness.

In keeping with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and subsequent wilderness legislation and policy, the Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal will "grandfather in" grazing as it is permitted at the time of designation. This includes continued use and maintenance of facilities such as water lines, wells, stock ponds, and fences. As authorized in grazing permits, motorized vehicles and heavy equipment can continue to be used for maintenance when necessary.

Economic Diversification for Malheur County: The proposal will extend visitor stays in the county and increase tourism-driven economic activity.

Thousands of visitors come to Malheur County each year to hunt, fish, raft and camp in the Owyhee Canyonlands. In 2008, over \$9 million was spent by recreational visitors. Conservation of this area has significant economic benefits for communities in and near Southeast Oregon, including Rome, Nyssa, Adrian, Ontario, Jordan Valley and McDermitt that provide key destinations for fuel, gas, food, lodging and local culture and history. Tourism and recreation are one vital component of the economy, and a promising area for future economic growth.