



Oregonians Applaud New “Public Lands Rule” that Could Protect Local Lands

Policy will Rebalance BLM’s Focus on Recreation, Conservation, and Climate Impacts

Contact:

Renee Schiavone, Oregon Natural Desert Association, communications@onda.org, (541) 330-2638, ext. 303

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Bend, Ore. (March 30, 2023) - The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) [announced](#) today a new “Public Lands Rule” to promote healthy landscapes, abundant wildlife, clean drinking water, and balanced decision-making. The rule clarifies conservation, which includes restoration and protection, as a multiple use within the agency’s management framework, and will ensure America’s public lands can be managed to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity for current and future generations. The public has 75 days to comment on the Rule.

This long overdue policy is needed to update BLM’s policy framework to address modern land management challenges, including rising temperatures, drought, and loss of nature.

In Oregon, the [BLM manages 15.7 million acres of public land](#), including extraordinary places like the Owyhee Canyonlands that draw outdoor enthusiasts and star gazers, and the Greater Hart-Sheldon, which encompasses a unique sagebrush steppe ecosystem providing essential habitat for pronghorn, pygmy rabbit, greater sage-grouse, and hundreds of other sagebrush-dependent plants and animals.

*“The Greater Hart-Sheldon is one of the last sagebrush strongholds left on earth, a place where sage-grouse, pronghorn and countless other wildlife still have intact habitat and wide open spaces they need to thrive,” said **Mark Salvo with the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA)**. “As one of the most threatened ecosystems in North America, we must have the foresight to protect and conserve sagebrush habitats like the Greater Hart-Sheldon wherever possible. The Bureau of Land Management’s proposed new rule can help to do just that.”*

These lands provide places for people to hike, fish, camp, and hunt – helping fuel Oregon’s economy, with [\\$15.6 billion](#) spent by recreationists in Oregon in 2019 on trip related costs,

equipment, apparel, and gear. Consumer spending on outdoor recreation supports local business and employment throughout the state.

*“BLM Lands across Oregon are the backbone of our local economies,” said **Tim Davis with Friends of the Owyhee**. “People come from near and far to hunt and fish, hike and bike, raft and camp, and more on these lands. And with these activities come critical dollars spent in our stores, our hotels, and with our outfitter guides. A strong BLM Rule will ensure that our local communities can continue to thrive and grow for generations to come.”*

With mounting impacts on the nation’s public lands, and the growing importance of protected areas for recreation and conservation, the proposed rule would help ensure that the nation’s BLM public lands continue to provide abundant and well-connected wildlife habitat, supply clean drinking water, and power local economies.

***Liz Hamilton, the executive director of Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association (NSIA)**, added, “The Bureau of Land Management has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to protect Oregon’s public lands, including the incredible high desert habitat. This remarkable area where we fish and hunt supports our communities and our way of life. It is time the BLM recognizes the cultural, economic, and environmental necessity of prioritizing conservation as our legacy and gift to future generations.”*

The proposed new rule elevates Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) as the primary tool to protect places with important historical, cultural, and scenic values, or fish and wildlife or other natural resources and provides consistent direction to land managers to prioritize ACECs. Oregon currently has 210 ACECs, including [Table Rocks](#) and [Borax Lake](#).

Tribal organizations have recognized particular shortcomings in the BLM’s regulations, such as inconsistent management of ACECs. Both the [Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians](#) (ATNI) and the [National Congress of American Indians](#) (NCAI) have passed resolutions requesting that BLM promulgate regulations to improve ACECs.

Oregonians are hopeful that a new Public Lands Rule will help the agency better implement and balance its multiple use and sustained yield mission.

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National Facts About the Bureau of Land Management

- BLM manages 245 million acres of ecologically rich deserts, canyons, mountains, and forests across the United States.
- These lands provide habitat for 245 threatened and endangered plant and wildlife species, 800 rare plants, including 450 of which are found only on BLM-managed land.

- BLM lands contribute \$11.4 billion to the national economy, through the more than 80 million recreation visits to BLM lands annually.
- BLM lands contain historic and cultural resources and provide outdoor recreation and opportunities for communities to experience nature.
- Despite these values, less than 15% of BLM-managed lands are protected, and more than 90% are available to be leased for extractive industries such as oil and gas development and mining.