

**The Task Force in Opposition
to the
Wilderness/Monument Proposal of the Owyhee Canyonlands**

**Presentation to the Malheur County Court
25 November 2015
11:00 AM**

Thank you for giving us time today to address you on the status of your Task Force in Opposition to the Wilderness/Monument Proposal of the Owyhee Canyonlands Coalition. We want to give you an update on what your task force's has been doing along with presenting some options that we think are open to you as the County Court and to give some ideas to where we think this will go in the future.

We are more than happy to answer any questions that you may have for us as members of your task force.

Let's reviewing how we got here:

A coalition of outdoor recreation businesses and environmental groups are proposing to change the use on 2 1/2 million acres of BLM lands located in central and southern Malheur County. It is somewhat of a disjointed coalition due to the fact that in this case one of the members, ONDA continues to put forth a proposal of wilderness areas and national conservation areas that make up the 2.5 million acres and you can see from the map that they have connected all of the wilderness study areas that exist in that area today on BLM land into one area making up the 2.5 million acres.

Other coalition members such as Keen Footwear based in Portland, Oregon funded a campaign across the nation promoting and gathering signatures from any and all people that would listen on a petition to present to the President of the United States to declare these 2.5 million acres along with others throughout the west as a National Monument under the Antiquities Act.

Since publicly they are not promoting the same action it makes their proposal very difficult to talk about with anyone because no one is sure what the request is, what the plan is, or what they want. History does tell us that they have no interest in multiple use for that land. History also teaches us that the coalition will take any new status as long as it is not mutli-use and basically locks up the 2.5 million acres of our corner of the state. We should never lose sight of their larger focus which in time helps them connect the Owyhee Wilderness Lands in Idaho and the Steen's Mountain Wilderness Lands in Oregon, both already operating under special designations to each other for one large land mass of non-use in the Northern Great Basin.

The Task Force members have met many times and studied, discussed, argued and put a great deal of thought into this and we agree on the following facts:

- 1- This proposal for a Monument/Wilderness Area is a gross over-reach and miss-use of existing laws and policies. Which we cannot influence very effectively.

- 2- If made a Monument or Wilderness Area the health of the land will suffer greatly due to the progress just started on addressing the invasive species will be stopped or made cost prohibitive. Exotic Annual Grasses cover most of the lands in question and some also have issues with the Western Juniper encroachment.
- 3- A Monument or Wilderness area this size will greatly impact the economic future of our Industries, Tribes, Businesses, Disabled Veterans, Senior Citizens, Communities, Schools and our Children's future.

That the survivability and the sustainability of rural Oregon and its people and communities are in the same boat as the vast majority of the rural West and that is we are fighting for our lives and the future of our children. The citizens of rural Oregon and the Tribes of Oregon share a great deal. We all know what happens when people are moved off the land and away from their traditional and cultural uses and access to the land. That model has been proven to be a disaster by what was done to the tribes. It certainly has not worked for them so why do we believe that will work any better the second time around.

Those of us that live in the environment and open spaces of South East Oregon, share the belief that it is not land just to visit while on vacation. For all of us it represents our culture, our customs, its spiritual, it's our economics, it's our livelihood, it's our home while others see this land as only a place to occasionally recreate. By rafting a river if and when there is enough water in the spring or going for a hike and maybe a camping trip. Unfortunately the recreation that can occur and does occur today on this land for people that do not live here is mostly for wealthy people and does not have an economic benefit that the other side keeps promising.

The uses of this land if made a Monument or Wilderness will not be available for the poor, the at-risk the underserved the underprivileged inner-city, the disabled, none of those, only the well-heeled that don't care about rural communities, our children or the poverty that their regulations and environmental policies have created. Nor do they care about the human cleansing of the west that they and their ideas are facilitating.

Your Task Force recognizes there are three options:

- 1- Instruct us to do nothing and let what happens just happen.
- 2- Instruct the task force to continue to gather signatures in opposition, both hard copy and electronically. Continue getting letters of support of Malheur County's opposition from other County, City and Businesses to hold in the opposition package. Continue to attempt to get face to face meetings with the Secretary of Interior, both of Oregon's Senators and the White House before a decision would be made. None have been receptive to date.
- 3- Instruct us to set up a meeting with members of the coalition that is proposing this land-use change on the 2.5 million acres to see what the real request and/or want is.

Please do not mistake number three for a negotiation on what it anything our communities should give up or change. It would be simply a meeting to listen and learn what is truly being put forth.

What all of us have known for many years is that the other side of this debate is not going to go away nor are they going to change what they want, but only continue to evolve on how they try to accomplish their goal of locking up land from any economic use. For those reasons I think it is prudent that a County such as Malheur that has been targeted in the past is today and will continue to be in the future must have some kind of a long-term plan. As you know this will take a great deal of careful thought, negotiations, work and inclusion.

This is your report and those are the three options that we need directions on from you as the County Court.

Thank you for your time and interest. I would be remiss if I did not point out and thank the work done by the members of the Task Force and the leadership of Commissioner Wilson for making the Task Force happen.

I think the letters of support for the Counties position speak for themselves on the work being done and we also want to thank Rep. Cliff Bentz and you the County Court members for hosting the town hall meeting in Adrian last month. What a great turn out and it is safe to say that the citizens around here don't want a Wilderness or Monument of the kind being proposed.

We look forward to your directions.

Contact:

Andrew P. Bentz
Task Force Member
541-881-6320