

Conserving Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands

A summary of the Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act (S.1890)

June 9, 2023

Overview

Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands are one of the largest remaining conservation opportunities in the lower 48, with more than 2.5 million acres of wilderness quality lands, spectacular canyons, rich human history, huge expanses of intact habitat for imperiled species like the greater sage-grouse, awesome night skies, and unparalleled opportunities for solitude and backcountry recreation.

The Owyhee is also a vulnerable landscape, threatened by climate change, invasive species, fire, mining, and other industrial development that increasingly compromise the ecological integrity, wildlife habitat and wilderness values. Conservation organizations, Tribes, ranchers, sporting groups, recreationalists and others have been working for decades to improve conservation and management throughout the Owyhee Canyonlands. In early 2019, Senator Ron Wyden convened diverse stakeholders and Tribes to develop a proposal for the long-term conservation and management of more than 4.5 million acres of federal public land in Malheur County, Oregon, including the Canyonlands.

After more than four years of negotiations Senator Ron Wyden and co-sponsor Senator Jeff Merkley introduced the Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act (S.1890) in June 2023. The legislation:

- Designates ~1.1 million acres of Wilderness in the Owyhee Canyonlands and surrounding areas, building upon ~520,000 acres of adjacent Wilderness designated in Idaho's Owyhee Canyonlands in 2009;
- Moves ~30,000 acres of land into trust for the Burns Paiute Tribe;
- Establishes a flexible, science-based grazing management and monitoring program designed to improve the ecological health of public lands;
- Creates a consensus-based, multi-stakeholder organization – the "CEO Group" – to develop and fund restoration and management projects; and
- Supports economic development, tourism and recreational opportunities in Malheur County.

Map

An official map for S.1890 has not yet been produced by the Bureau of Land Management. The enclosed map is a preliminary representation of the anticipated proposal.

Section by Section Summary

Section 1. Title

“Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act.”

Section 2. Definitions

Definitions provided for “Long-term ecological health,” “Operational flexibility,” and “Program,” three terms important to the grazing management program established in Section 3.

Section 3. Malheur County Grazing Management Program

Establishes a Malheur County Grazing Management Program to allow for increased “operational flexibility” in grazing management to account for changing landscape conditions and to “improve the long-term ecological health of the Federal Land.”

Requires the Bureau of Land Management to include at least one operational flexibility alternative for analysis under NEPA when grazing permits are renewed, including consultation with interested parties and members of the public. Also allows for immediately-available interim operational flexibility for existing permittees, including 14-day adjustments to season of use dates, movement of water sources and other provisions.

Requires development and implementation of cooperative rangeland monitoring plans in consultation with interested parties to assess implementation of interim and permitted operational flexibility.

Requires the Secretary to review the program eight years following enactment and, if objectives are not being met, requires program modification or termination 10 years following enactment. Other provisions.

Section 4. Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Group

Establishes the consensus-based “Malheur Community Empowerment for Owyhee Group” (CEO Group), comprised of 10 voting members and 8 non-voting member, to develop and fund eligible restoration or management projects on public and private land within Malheur County.

Defines CEO Group membership, procedures, duties, and responsibilities, among other provisions. Requires that CEO Group meetings be open to public participation and that decisions be made through a defined consensus process. Authorizes appropriations.

Section 5. Land Designations

Designates a total of ~1,097,731 acres of Wilderness, and releases ~175,070¹ acres of existing Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Provides for management of Wilderness areas consistent with the Wilderness Act, and House Report 101-405. Other provisions.

¹ This is an estimate; Acreage to be verified by BLM.

Section 6. Economic Development

Establishes scenic “loop roads” using existing road networks to improve recreation and tourism, including loops identified as Owyhee Dam, Succor Creek, Birch Creek and Three Forks. Requires safety upgrades, and completion of feasibility studies to advance recreation, tourism and economic development. Authorizes appropriations. Other provisions.

Section 7. Land Conveyance to Burns Paiute Tribe

Transfers into trust ~6,686 acres of private land and ~21,548 acres of federal land for the Burns Paiute Tribe at the Jonesboro Ranch, and ~2,500 acres of federal land at Castle Rock. Also creates an ~10,500¹-acre Tribal co-stewardship area surrounding Castle Rock. Requires the Secretary to enter into agreement with the State of Oregon to conduct exchanges for state-owned inholdings. Authorizes appropriations. Other provisions.

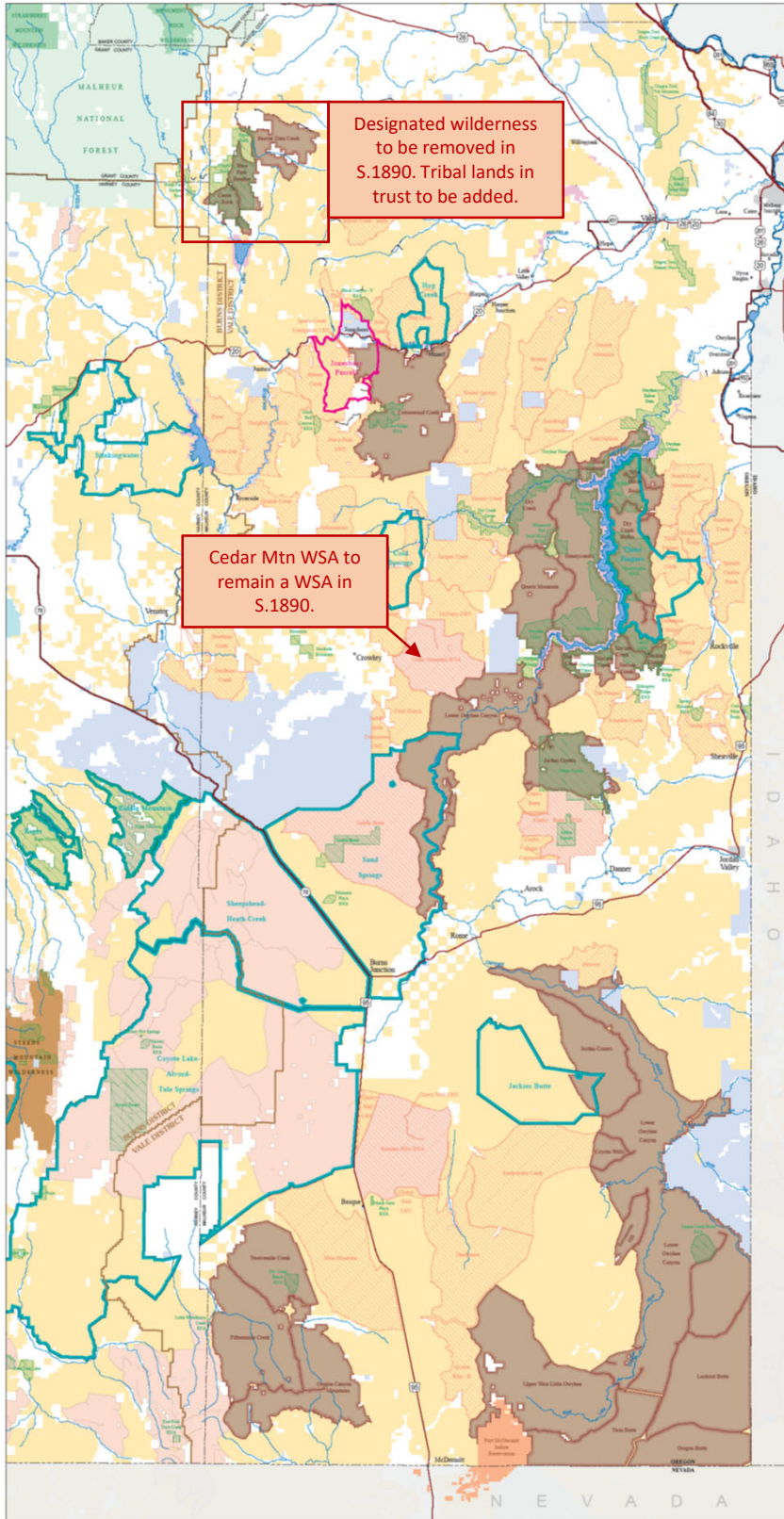
Section 8. Effect on Tribal Rights and Certain Existing Uses

States that nothing in this Act alters, modifies, enlarges, diminishes, or abrogates rights secured by a treaty, statute, Executive order, or other Federal law of any Indian Tribe, including off-reservation reserved rights. Other provisions.

Proposed Wilderness Malheur County

November 7, 2022

This map prepared at the request of Senator Ron Wyden



Designated wilderness to be removed in S.1890. Tribal lands in trust to be added.

Cedar Mtn WSA to remain a WSA in S.1890.

LEGEND

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Administered Land

- Proposed for Designation as Wilderness
- Proposed for Release from Protection under Wilderness Study Area (WSA) Designation or from Priority Protection of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC)

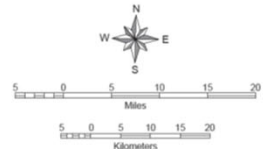
Administered Land

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- BLM Wilderness
- BLM Wilderness Study Area
- BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) or Research Natural Area (RNA)
- US Forest Service (USFS)
- USFS Wilderness
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Reclamation
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- State
- Private or Other

Jonesboro Parcels (Transfer)

Herd Management Area

This map accompanied an earlier version of the legislation introduced in 2022. An updated map for S.1890 introduced in June 2023 has not yet been produced but anticipated updates are marked.



Scale 1:275,000
when plotted at 34"x44"



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