

# NEWS

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Oregon Natural Desert Association

*To Protect, Defend, and Restore Forever,  
Oregon's Native Deserts*

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## **Conservation group sells critical inholdings in Steens Mountain Wilderness**

PORTLAND, OR. — The Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) recently sold 40 acres of land in the Steens Mountain Wilderness to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which automatically became part of the Steens Wilderness upon transfer to BLM. There remains 4,070 acres of private inholdings within the wilderness that still need to be acquired from willing sellers.

Based out of Bend, OR, ONDA is a grassroots group dedicated to the protection of Oregon's High Desert and lead efforts to secure the 175,000 acre wilderness designation on Steens Mountain in 2000. The transaction was a cooperative agreement between BLM and ONDA and helps resolve many continuous management issues, such as motorized inholder access and inappropriate development within the wilderness. The land was purchased by ONDA for \$9,241, and sold to BLM for \$10,000.

ONDA Executive Director Bill Marlett said that, "Eliminating all inholdings in the Steens Wilderness is absolutely critical if we are to avoid future conflicts in the Wilderness."

For the third year in a row since the passage of the legislation, the BLM has received no appropriations for land acquisition, even though the Steens Act authorized \$25 million for land acquisition and conservation easements from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This absence of federal dollars is threatening the integrity of the Steens Mountain Wilderness. The Steens Mountain Advisory Council—a 12-member citizen body appointed by the Secretary of the Interior to develop and implement a draft management plan for the mountain—is currently attempting to resolve the controversial issue of "reasonable" motor vehicle access to the remaining private inholdings.

ONDA and other groups have lobbied for federal appropriations to purchase these parcels, many of which have willing sellers. As a supplemental strategy to acquiring federal funds, ONDA has also sought conservation buyers to purchase these properties and transfer them to the public.

"Hopefully, Oregon's Congressional delegation will follow through and secure the funds promised in the Steens Act to purchase the remaining inholdings," Marlett said.