

ONE YEAR REVIEW OF OMNIBUS PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT ACT OF 2009 AND OWYHEE PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT PROVISIONS

Nearly one year ago President Obama signed the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. That legislation was a dramatic step forward in implementing the Owyhee Initiative Agreement, the product of an eight-year collaborative effort launched by the Owyhee County Commissioners and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes and championed by Senator Mike Crapo. The legislation also set in motion opportunities for the collaborative effort that produced the Owyhee Initiative Agreement to continue.

The Omnibus Public Land Management Act:

- designated 517,000 acres of wilderness and 316 miles of wild and scenic rivers.
- instantly “released” nearly 200,000 acres of wilderness study areas from the requirement to be managed to protect wilderness characteristics.
- authorized a science review and a conservation center in Owyhee County to address natural resource management issues.
- authorized the Secretary of the Interior to accept the voluntary donation of livestock grazing permits and to permanently retire grazing in and adjacent to wilderness areas.
- created an account to fund the purchase of lands or interests within or adjacent to wilderness areas in Owyhee County with the proceeds from public land sales elsewhere within the BLM’s Boise District.
- directed the Secretary of the Interior to coordinate with the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes in the implementation of the Shoshone-Paiute Cultural Resource Protection Plan.
- directed the Secretary of the Interior to complete travel management plans for Owyhee County.

Even before the Omnibus Act passed, the organizations that participated in the collaborative effort had agreed they would stay together to help implement those parts of the Owyhee Initiative Agreement that were in the legislation as well as those elements that were not part of the legislation. **In 2009, the Owyhee Initiative Work Group filed incorporation papers to become the Owyhee Initiative Inc. Board of Directors. The group is moving forward to establish itself as a 501(c)3 organization.**

The voting members of the Owyhee Initiative Board of Directors include the Owyhee Cattlemen’s Association, the Owyhee County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Owyhee Farm Bureau, the Owyhee Borderlands Trust, the Nature Conservancy, The Wilderness Society, the Wild Sheep Foundation, the Idaho Conservation League, the Back Country Horsemen of Idaho, the Sierra Club, Idaho Rivers United, Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association, and the Southwestern Idaho Desert Racing Association. The

Owyhee County Board of Commissioners and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes are non-voting delegates to the Owyhee Initiative Board of Directors.

After the passage of the Omnibus bill the members of the Owyhee Initiative Board of Directors began working with Senator Crapo's staff to secure funding for implementation of the legislative provisions.

- **\$300,000 was appropriated by Congress to fund the science review program, administered in coordination with the University of Idaho.**
- **In FY10, the BLM Washington Office allocated \$232,000 in one-time funding for cultural resource management.**
- **In FY09, the BLM Washington Office allocated \$267,000 in one-time funding for Wild and Scenic River management, and \$401,000 in one-time funding for Wilderness management**
- **\$650,000 of one-time funding was allocated to initiate travel planning in Owyhee County.**

As per the Omnibus legislation, an Owyhee Land Acquisition Account has been established, and currently contains approximately \$850,000. These funds are to be used to purchase private lands or interests within or adjacent to wilderness areas.

Conservation groups have secured \$2 million in private foundation money to compensate grazing permittees for the donation and subsequent permanent retirement of livestock grazing permits in and adjacent to wilderness areas.

The Wilderness Land Trust is an organization dedicated to working with willing private landowners with inholdings in wilderness areas to acquire those inholdings for public ownership. The WLT was brought to Idaho by the conservation groups on the Owyhee Initiative Board of Directors and are meeting with landowners who have indicated an interest in selling their private inholdings. Appraisals on some of these lands are nearing completion.

The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes initiated the Three Sovereigns Consultation/Coordination process to facilitate legislation implementation.

With the FY09 funds, BLM began hiring staff to implement the requirements of the Omnibus Act. Positions filled thus far include an Implementation Project Lead, Outdoor Recreation Planner, and Park Ranger. Additionally, BLM contracted for expertise to complement BLM staff, and also purchased vehicles, equipment, and other field supplies needed for project implementation.

The Owyhee legislation directed the creation of an official map and legal description for each area designated as wilderness. The BLM Idaho Cadastral

Survey Unit is developing the legal descriptions, a process that will continue for several years due to the need for extensive surveying and monumentation. The OI Inc. has worked closely with BLM to assure that the intended and legislated wilderness boundaries are accurately represented by the legal descriptions. Wilderness boundaries relative to primary recreational access sites and road side wilderness boundaries have largely been confirmed. The work will continue when weather conditions allow. Where issues cannot be resolved locally, the Board of Directors is also developing some minor wilderness boundary adjustment recommendations for Congress.

The Omnibus legislation directed the Secretary of the Interior to complete inventories of livestock grazing management facilities and improvements in the newly created wilderness, within one year. Most of the affected ranchers have already provided such information to BLM and BLM is compiling this information with agency data to assure a complete record of wilderness range improvements. Field inspections of the range improvements during spring and summer will include condition assessments before the inventory is complete.

BLM staff have installed wilderness boundary signs along existing roads, and have closed and signed some routes that are not authorized in the legislation. Further, some routes that provide access to livestock management facilities have been gated to allow access to authorized users only. Route closures, gating and signing will continue until completed.

BLM staff have designed and developed interpretive wilderness signs to be installed on kiosks, and wild and scenic river interpretive signs will be designed this year. Additionally, BLM has posted maps and other pertinent wilderness and wild and scenic river information on the Idaho BLM website.

The Owyhee Initiative Board of Directors and Senator Crapo are working on the next Congressional appropriations, requesting:

- **\$1 million for the science review program.**
- **\$1 million for the Shoshone-Paiute Cultural Resource Protection Plan.**
- **\$300,000 for recreation and travel planning**
- **\$500,000 to develop wilderness and wild and scenic river management plans.**
- **\$500,000 for law enforcement coordinated efforts between Owyhee County and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes.**
- **\$300,000 for environmental reviews, resource clearances, appraisals, etc. to facilitate land exchanges.**

The Owyhee Initiative Board of Directors has also approved an action plan with the University of Idaho for conducting the science reviews.

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