What is the Southeastern Oregon RMP?

The Bureau of Land Management creates Resource Management Plans for planning areas to guide their decision-making about the lands they manage.

Following two decades of successful advocacy and precedent-setting legal action led by ONDA, in 2018 the BLM is working on the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan Amendment (SEORMP).

The process will create the blueprint for how nearly 5 million acres in southeastern Oregon — including beloved places in the Owyhee Canyonlands like Leslie Gulch, Three Forks and Birch Creek — are managed.

For public lands advocates, getting involved in the Resource Management Planning process is one of the most important opportunities to shape how lands are managed for decades to come. This process provides the chance to help protect sage-grouse habitat, determine where off-road vehicles can and cannot travel, and protect wild desert places to camp, hike and bird.

Three main issues – Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Off-Road Vehicle and Travel Management, and Livestock Grazing – will be addressed in the SEORMP process.

Understand these and you’ll have the background to provide substantive input that the BLM needs to consider.
What does the Resource Management Planning process look like?

This timeline highlights the required steps in the Resource Management Planning process, the opportunities for public involvement, and ONDA’s engagement in the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Planning process.

Public participation is at the foundation of the RMP process. Whether you’re an organization or an individual, your voice matters in how our public lands are managed.

Explore this graphic to better understand when and how the public can engage in resource management planning and why it is so important to do so.
Livestock Grazing

The Scope:

The SEORMP will establish where livestock grazing occurs and what tools are available to the Bureau of Land Management for managing grazing.

What lands are authorized for grazing?

Under the BLM's multiple-use mandate, grazing is one of many land uses the agency manages for. Currently, 98% of the SEORMP planning area is available for grazing.

How is livestock grazing structured on the landscape?

Lands authorized for grazing are broken up into discrete regions called allotments, which are typically further divided into pastures. Resource Management Plans authorize whether allotments are open to grazing and determine the tools available to land managers in managing grazing on the landscape. For allotments authorized for grazing, the BLM can then issue grazing permits and other management decisions such as how much grazing is allowed, when grazing can occur, and for how long.

What is an AUM?

An AUM stands for “Animal Unit Month” and is the amount of vegetation that one cow-calf pair, one horse, or five sheep eat in one month. AUMs are the unit of measure for how much grazing is allowed on a particular allotment. The number of permitted AUMs is also known as the stocking rate.

What grazing management options will the BLM consider during the planning process?

The BLM will consider management alternatives that analyze whether, where, how and in what manner grazing will take place on the landscape.

The BLM will analyze various management actions, including alternatives for: voluntary grazing permit relinquishment processes; the identification of areas that will no longer be available for grazing use; and closure of allotments or pastures where land health standards (used to achieve desired ecological conditions) are not being met due to livestock grazing.

ONDA’s take:

The BLM should have a process under its revised plan that will allow ranchers to voluntarily relinquish their grazing permits and a process that identifies areas no longer available for grazing. The BLM does not currently have the authority to permanently retire grazing permits in the planning area, limiting the agency’s ability to protect sensitive ecological resources and maintain the important balance of the agencies multiple-use mandate.
Off-Road Vehicle and Travel Management

Sage Brown

The Scope:

The SEORMP will establish where, when and how off-highway vehicles (OHVs) are allowed to operate.

What does the management of OHV use on BLM lands look like?

The BLM is required to classify all lands within a planning district into one of three OHV designations: open, closed, or limited.

The official definition for each designation:

1. **Open**: An open area is where all types of vehicle use are permitted at all times in the area, subject to operating regulation and vehicle standards.

2. **Limited**: A limited area is where there are restrictions at certain times, in certain areas and/or to certain vehicular use. Generally, these restrictions fall into one of the following categories: number of vehicles, types of vehicles, time or season of use, permitted or licensed use only, use only on existing roads and trails, use only on designated roads and trails.

3. **Closed**: A closed area is where off-road vehicle use is prohibited.

Where can OHVs currently operate?

Currently less than 0.5% of the lands in the planning area are closed to OHV travel. The majority of the lands either fall into the “limited” or “open” categories described above. Changes were implemented in 2015 to protect sage-grouse habitat per the Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment, also known as the sage-grouse plan. The sage-grouse plan limits OHV travel to existing routes in areas identified as critical sage-grouse habitat and resulted in 2 million additional acres being classified as limited instead of open. However, large areas outside of sage-grouse habitat are still open to cross-country OHV travel, and, under the current administration, the fate of the changes made as part of the sage-grouse plans remains unclear.

What are some of the concerns regarding OHV use on public lands?

When not properly managed, OHVs can fragment wildlife habitat, impact soils and plant species, increase erosion and spread invasive species. The Council on Environmental Quality stated in a 1979 report that ORVs (Off-Road Vehicles) have “damaged every kind of ecosystem found in the United States.” The number of OHV users on public lands has dramatically increased in recent years. At the same time, advancements in technology have allowed motorized recreationists to reach increasingly remote areas. Both factors are leading OHV use to have a greater impact on the ground.

ONDA’s take:

The BLM should restrict OHV use to designated routes, eliminating cross-country travel and protecting intact wildlife habitat. By restricting OHVs to designated routes, the BLM can limit impacts to healthy ecosystems while still allowing for a rich experience for motorized recreationists. As noted in BLM’s guidance to field offices in 2007, “continued designation of large areas that remain open to unregulated “cross-country travel” is not a practical management strategy.” The BLM should implement this guidance in the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan.
Citations:
1. As described by the federal government's Code of Federal Regulations (43 CFR 8340.0-5)
2. Per GIS analysis completed by ONDA
The Scope:

The SEORMP will establish how the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will manage wilderness values in a set of areas known as Lands with Wilderness Characteristics.

What are LWCs?

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) are areas that have been inventoried and found to meet Congress’s definition of “a wilderness” from the 1964 Wilderness Act. However, LWC areas are not designated protected areas like Wilderness areas or Wilderness Study Areas. Instead, the management of these areas will be determined by this Resource Management Plan.

What characteristics define wilderness?

According to the Wilderness Act, wilderness quality lands must possess:

1. **Sufficient size** – generally 5,000 acres or larger (but this can be smaller if the area is adjacent to an existing Wilderness Study Area or Wilderness area).
2. **Naturalness** – affected primarily by the forces of nature.
3. **Solitude and/or primitive recreation** – outstanding opportunities for either solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation exist.

What protection do wilderness values in LWC units have?

Unlike Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas, the BLM is not necessarily required by the Wilderness Act or other laws to preserve wilderness values in LWC units. However, the BLM can choose to manage LWC units to retain their wilderness values through a Resource Management Plan.

ONDA’s take:

The BLM should preserve and protect wilderness values in LWC units. Selecting a resource management plan alternative that protects wilderness values in LWC units also provides protection for important wildlife habitats, limits fragmentation of the sagebrush steppe ecosystem, and increases opportunities for quiet recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking and wildlife watching.