

# THE WILD HIGH LAKES

YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO PRESERVE THE RICHES  
OF THE GREATER HART-SHELDON REGION



*Thanks to you, the BLM recently recognized the wilderness character of the remarkable High Lakes region. Photo: Jim Davis, with support from LightHawk*

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Deep in the arid high desert of the northern Great Basin, just south of the world-renowned Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge, there is a place that exemplifies the wilds of southeast Oregon. Dotted with ephemeral lakes, the High Lakes plateau sits within a vast desert landscape. It is home to massive geologic formations, unobstructed views that can stretch for 50-plus miles without the imprint of man, and the kind of wildness that once defined the North American continent.

The High Lakes plateau is the heart of a pronghorn migration corridor that runs from Oregon's Hart Mountain to the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in northern Nevada. This wildlife corridor encompasses healthy native plant communities so threatened today that they have gained national attention for their importance to sagebrush-dependent wildlife species; in 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified the High Lakes and surrounding sagebrush steppe as one of six areas across North America critical to the long term survival of the Greater Sage-grouse. Situated in the center of the Greater

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Hart-Sheldon Region, one of the largest expanses of intact habitat in the Great Basin, these public lands shelter over 300 species of wildlife, including Greater Sage-grouse, bighorn sheep and pygmy rabbit.

Scattered across the plateau, along rim rock and dry lake beds, dense concentrations of rock art remind us that humans have been present in this rich landscape for millennia. Some of these petroglyphs are among the oldest dated rock art on the continent, estimated to be more than 7,000 years old. Evidence of more recent history can be found here as well, with wood-shingled homesteads serving as sentinels of late nineteenth century European settlement. At these places young and old alike can peer through a window into the past and see how others have lived, moved and survived in the harsh climates of the northern Great Basin.

The High Lakes plateau is the kind of place that all of us want to explore, understand and ensure we protect. Sound management to preserve wilderness values on the High Lakes plateau can also safeguard the region's

cultural artifacts, ensuring they remain for desert-lovers of all kinds to appreciate. It also happens to be a place that is critically important, for wildlife and humans alike, in the face of climate change, and how we manage this landscape now will determine whether it can withstand the impacts of a warming planet.

As unique and awe-inspiring as the High Lakes plateau is, it's just one stretch of the 1.6 million acres of public lands that have recently been recognized by the Lakeview District of the Bureau of Land Management as holding wilderness values – one of the largest concentrations of such areas in the country. The completion of this wilderness inventory is a major milestone, a key step toward making well-informed decisions about how these areas will be managed.

As the BLM updates their management plan for public lands in the Greater Hart-Sheldon Region, they are obligated to solicit public input. This will be your chance to let the BLM know that there is widespread support for strong conservation-focused management of lands with wilderness characteristics. 1.6 million wild acres need your voice.