

OTHER AREAS DESIGNATED FOR SPECIAL MANAGEMENT

The Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Management Area (formerly Murderers Creek Wildlife Management Area) was established along a portion of the South Fork John Day River in 1972 by the ODFW and the BLM to better manage mule deer winter range. The area is now used by mule deer, elk, and bighorn sheep year-round and pronghorn during all but the winter season. Several thousand mule deer use the area during severe winters. This area also provides habitat for turkey, chukar, mountain quail, California quail, and a host of neotropical migratory birds.

The State of Oregon established the John Day Wildlife Refuge in 1933 along the lower mainstem of the John Day River. The primary purpose of this refuge is to protect wintering and nesting waterfowl. It includes all land within 1/4 mile of the John Day river mean high water line from the Columbia River upstream to Thirtymile Creek. No waterfowl hunting is allowed in this area. The area is open to deer and upland game bird hunting during authorized seasons, but hunting of these species on private lands within the refuge requires land owner permission.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Prehistoric sites of archaeological interest are scattered throughout the planning area. They are most commonly found in certain environmental locations that are heavily influenced by the existing geology/terrain and for the most part tend to conform to the same locations where people live today. For example, there is a high potential to find prehistoric sites near any water course or body, like rivers, streams, springs and lakes. Similarly, ridges and breaks (abrupt changes in topography) are likely spots to find evidence of past use or occupation. Steep slopes and rocky ground are less likely to have cultural resources of relevance, though there are exceptions.

A cultural resource is “a definite location of human activity, occupation, or use identifiable through field inventory (survey), historical documentation, or oral evidence. Site types known for this area include but are not limited to Native American stone tool making scatters, rock shelters, isolated artifacts, remains of living structures, pictographs and petroglyphs, rock stacked features, burials, historic homesteads/living structures or their remains, roads/trails, irrigation ditches, stock raising and management features, cemeteries, ferry crossings, mining features and equipment, prohibition stills, wagon remains, and features related to logging activities.

On a regional basis, the John Day basin has been influenced through time by what is perceived as two distinct cultural areas – the Columbia Plateau to the north and the Great Basin to the south. The Columbia Plateau cultures are generally focused on river systems taking advantage of the elevation changes in that system to provide resource availability throughout the different seasons. Fish, berries and roots are important resources in this culture area. Resource storage and semi-permanent dwellings are key features for this area. Great Basin cultures focused on internally drained lake basins and other water features. Similarly, the Great Basin cultures take advantage of resource availability afforded in areas with relatively close elevation changes. Rabbits, waterfowl and roots are important resources. Storage and temporary shelters are key features.

Both groups developed relationships across and moved seasonally between these geographic areas as a hedge against food shortages and to increase the viability of their respective populations (Lebow et al 1990; Connolly et al 1993; Burtchard 1998; Hunn 1990; Zancanella 1997).

The location of historic sites is similarly influenced by the geology/terrain and water. Lands adjacent to rivers, streams and springs are good locations for homestead/ranches/farms and associated features. Mid-slope and upland settings may contain features or sites related to different parts of the ranching land use system. Mining site locations are random being dependant on the location and amount of minerals and their market value. Logging on any major scale was relatively late (after 1930) in the planning area due to limited access in the rough topography. Lumbering sites are typically found in forested area, though some processing sites may be located in an adjacent non-forested setting.

Resource Condition – Archaeological resources are fragile, non-renewable resources. Many natural processes and human activities have an adverse affect on the condition and integrity of archaeological resources. The degree to which these natural processes and human activities negatively affect a site will depend on the site type, the setting and the nature of the process/activity. Natural processes (such as intense thunder storms, catastrophic fires, or rodents) can be quite destructive to site condition and integrity. A fact to remember is that natural processes are dynamic not static, and, therefore, have a constant influence on sites. Human activity on a site can also be quite destructive. Artifact collecting, unauthorized digging, bulldozing, and concentrations of livestock or people are just a few of the actions that can have negative affects on cultural resources.

There are 439 archaeological sites records in the Oregon Heritage Information Management System (OHIMS) for the John Day basin. They extend from the mouth of the John Day River to its upper reaches and represent a wide variety of site types related to history and prehistory. The OHIMS db site record includes a condition attribute with several qualified selections. Of the 439 sites, 144 have Unknown condition which probably reflects legacy data where site condition was not noted. The remaining 295 sites have been assigned a condition attribute. Of the 295 sites 46 are Excellent, 119 are Good, 39 are Fair, 79 are Poor, 11 are destroyed, and 1 is in the Other category.

The Dalles-Canyon City road, homesteads in the Sutton Mountain area and lower John Day River segment, and the Dixie Mining District have been identified as possibly suitable for nomination to the National Register (Lebow et al. 1990). One other area was mentioned as possibly needing evaluation for nomination to the National Register. That area involved two separate clusters of prehistoric sites within the lower John Day River segment that were proposed as Historic Districts. One of these districts has an historic component.

The following interpretive sites have been developed by the BLM and its cooperators: ramadas with interpretive signs were constructed at Fourmile Canyon and John Day Crossing (west side, McDonald's Crossing). The BLM John Day Crossing (west side) interpretive site (panels with ramada) was placed on land owned by the Sherman County Historical Society through a Cooperative Management Agreement.

TRENDS

Cultural resources are non-renewable resources that are affected constantly by natural factors and sometimes by human actions. As such, most sites tend to deteriorate over time and some are subjected to vandalism and/or pilfering.

PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Paleontological resources within the planning area are world renowned. Fossil localities in the Blue Mountain portion of the basin occur as steep, highly eroded 'badlands' dotting the canyon walls from river to rim. The rocks of the John Day basin have a high potential to produce important fossil localities. One hundred million years of ancient life are represented within the John Day basin. Specimens include 25 foot long marine reptiles from 90-95 million years ago to mammoths from the end of the Pleistocene Period (about 20,000 years ago). The most prominent time period represented in the basin is the Cenozoic Era or the Age of Mammals (65 million years ago [mya] to present). The John Day basin has one of the most complete rock sequences in the world for the period between 54 mya to 5 mya. Fossil preservation is excellent in the basin. Less known but equally important are geologic processes frozen in time within the basin. Examples include, stream and river channels, volcanic mud flows, lava infilling (of existing landscapes), and large volcanic ashfall events. This sequence is punctuated by volcanic tuffs sandwiched between old soils (paleosols) that can be reliably dated. The combination of long sequence, datable rocks, and good fossil preservation has made the John Day basin one area (known as a reference area) paleontologist/geologists use for understanding the ecologic changes seen in other areas of the US or the world with no or little control for time.

Understanding the importance of the fossil record in the John Day Basin, Congress authorized the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument in 1974. The monument consists of three separate units, Sheep Rock, Painted Hill and Clarno. These three units were established in the John Day basin specifically to highlight the critically important fossil and geologic resources of the time period between 45-5 million years ago.

Fossils on public lands are considered "a fragile and nonrenewable scientific record of the history of life on earth, and so represent an important and critical component of America's natural heritage". There are three main types of fossil resources, vertebrate (representing animals with backbones), invertebrate (animals without backbones) and botanical (leaves and wood). Trace fossils represent a rare fourth type consisting of skin impressions or trackways. Locations on the ground where fossils occur are known as localities, not sites. Geologic settings may also constitute a paleontological resource when associated with fossils or significant processes that created contexts for fossil preservation.

Fossils are associated with areas of land that have no or very little vegetation and expose the underlying rock layers. Sometime this is in small areas measured in square feet or larger areas encompassing many acres. Each exposure may or may not produce fossils. This is a characteristic of the preservation of large landscapes and what portion of that landscape is exposed to view. Not all parts of the ancient landscape had features that are necessary for animals or plants to become preserved. Exposures with fossils are known as localities. Some exposures are steep in nature like in the upper John Day river canyon, while others may be more in a horizontal position as exhibited in the plains adjacent to the Columbia River.

Fossil localities are scattered differentially throughout the John Day basin. What type and age of fossil one finds depends on your position in the canyon. Most fossil resources from the Tertiary Period (54 to 5 mya within the planning area) are found between Thirtymile Creek in the lower John Day River canyon and Monument on the North Fork and around Dayville along the South Fork of the John Day River. Many of the better known localities are associated with and surround the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument and contribute significantly to filling in gaps in the rock sequence not exhibited on the park.