

- Palouse Prairie habitats around Horn Butte provide some of the only habitat for Washington ground squirrel in Oregon.
- Lewis' Woodpecker habitat on the North Fork of the John Day
- Wintering bald eagle habitats on the North Fork of the John Day

WILD HORSES

The only wild horses in the planning area are located in the Murderer's Creek Herd Management Area. The herd management area spans 108,568 acres and is managed under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 that mandates that these horses be managed in a thriving ecological balance with the land and as part of the natural landscape. The Bear Valley Ranger District of the Malheur National forest has primary responsibility for managing this herd and annually inventories the Murders Creek wild horse population with a ground census. The Appropriate Management Level (AML) for this herd management area ranges between 50-140 wild horses. The wild horse herd averages about 100 head.

The lineage of the Murderer's Creek horses is diverse. Part of the lineage of horses found in the area by early explorers can be linked to animals that escaped from Indian herds assembled from horses escaped from or released by Spanish Conquistadors. It is also likely that many of the Murderer's Creek horses are descendants of animals lost or turned loose by settlers and ranchers.

HERD MANAGEMENT

Wild horse herds increase at a rate of 18% per year, so their populations, without controls, double about every 4 to 5 years. Wild horses have few natural predators, except for humans and mountain lions. Prior to the enactment of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, wild horses were not federally protected species. Herd numbers were controlled by ranchers and by mustangers who hunted the horses or gathered them for sale. After the Act, the population control has been by mountain lions and the managing agencies, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

Mountain lions do an adequate job of controlling wild horse numbers in only a few locations. The size of most herds must be controlled by the managing agencies in order to protect the land from overgrazing and to protect the horses from eventual starvation due to overgrazing. It is for the health of the land and the health of the animals that "excess" wild horses are removed from their territories.

VISUAL RESOURCES

The variety of landscapes across the John Day basin provides a visual smorgasbord for residents and visitors. The 13 subcoregions within the planning area provide scenery that ranges from broad vistas of rolling grassland to rugged canyons to mountain peaks flanked by forests. While much of the area appears to be relatively undisturbed, logging, grazing, fire suppression, road building, mineral extraction, and the creation of infrastructure such as roads and utilities have left an imprint on the land and on the overall scenic quality within

the planning area. For the most part the sparse population and relatively small population centers have left much of the region relatively natural appearing.

The John Day River Basin contains an abundance of high quality scenery. Scenery was also identified as an outstandingly remarkable value for federally designated WSR segments by both Congress and the BLM.

The John Day River Canyon is a key visual element, with few public access points, within the planning area. This canyon is generally primitive and undeveloped. The John Day River slices through a high basalt plateau; winding alternately through gentle farm valleys, 1,000-foot deep canyons cutting through a layer cake of basalt cliffs, and steep rugged hills. Lush green riparian vegetation at the river edge contrasts with green-golden hills of grass, sagebrush, and juniper in the summer and fall.

Exposed volcanic ash deposits and the erosion and oxidation of basalt columns have created unusual colors and interesting formations that have become scenic landmarks for river visitors floating the river. Tumultuous in the headwaters, the river is mostly calm in the lower reaches though punctuated by the occasional rapid. In the summer as runoff dwindles rapids become riffles and runs become long twisting ponds with little current.

The North, Middle and South Forks of the John Day River are also striking river canyons with varying basalt outcrops, vegetation and erosive features with high scenic beauty. Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) identified scenery as a “Special Attribute” for State Scenic Waterways along the mainstem of the John Day and its tributaries; North Fork, Middle Fork, and South Fork John Day Rivers. Canyons along these river segments include vertical cliffs more than 500 feet high, composed of dramatic basalt rock outcrops. Sandy beaches and gravel bars appear at low water flows.

Vegetation ranges from fir and pine trees in the uplands to high desert communities of sagebrush and juniper in the lowlands. Small outposts of different vegetation communities dot the landscape along the South, North, and Middle Forks of the John Day River and provide variety and contrast for the eye. Ranches, intermingled with public lands, add an interesting contrast. No major hydroelectric dams or developments affect the visual resource values in the basin.

Sutton, Rudio and Stephenson Mountains are also prominent landscape features in the planning area. These landscapes are towering landforms, weathered over time. The remaining public lands contain important visual elements and contribute to providing open space views on plateaus and rolling hills.

The Status of the Interior Columbia Basin; Summary of Scientific Findings Report (USDA-Forest Service, 1996) contained several points of interest regarding scenic quality within the Columbia Basin consistent with the John Day Basin:

1. By the year 2045, the most value to the increasing and older human population will be provided by (in decreasing order) motor viewing, day use, trail use, fishing, and hunting. (pg. 52). This statement emphasizes by 2045, the most popular recreation activity by the older human population will be motor viewing, or driving for pleasure.
2. Scenic integrity is reflected by the “visual intactness” or wholeness of the landscape. Scenic integrity is not the same concept as scenic beauty, but research shows people frequently perceive scenic integrity and scenic beauty to be the same thing. Scenic integrity of USFS and BLM public lands were rated as: a) 42%

of USFS and BLM lands rated very high, b) 33% high, c) 17 % moderate, d) 7% moderately low and e) 1% very low. (p. 54). The essence of these ranking show that the majority of USFS and BLM public lands have a natural-appearing landscape, with a lower percent of public lands having a disturbed appearance.

3. In the Effects on Ecological Integrity and Socioeconomic Resiliency section of this report stated "...Local publics will be expected to continue to express preferences for stability in scenery and lobby to have projects put in someone else's back yard...." (p.140).

Except for newly acquired public lands on the North Fork of the John Day River all public lands within the planning area have been inventoried according to BLM Visual Inventory guidelines. Previously inventoried public lands were assigned VRM management classes with established guidelines, through the Two Rivers, John Day and Baker RMP/EIS process and the plan amendments instituted via the John Day River Management Plan.

BLM public lands not accessible by the public have generally retained a higher level of natural appearance, although unauthorized motorized use on some BLM public lands has created routes used by off highway vehicles (OHV), degrading scenic quality. Some public lands accessible by motorized use have had new routes and trails created around Canyon City, Dixie Creek, South Fork of the John Day, and Rudio Mountain. The scenic quality of these public lands has been affected in these locations.

Wilderness Study Area Interim Management Guidelines that restrict all motorized use to existing or designated routes continue to be violated by some public land users and some adjacent private landowners. These activities also reduce the natural character of the landscape by creating new OHV routes.

Unique or Key Features: The John Day River, North and South Forks of the John Day River and their river canyons, Sutton Mountain, Pat's Cabin, Little Canyon Mountain and the Rudio Mountain/Johnson Heights area are all key visual features within the planning area. The rivers listed above are also unique features that significantly contribute to high scenic quality in these locations.

SPECIAL MANAGEMENT DESIGNATIONS

AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

BLM has two Areas of Environmental Concern (ACECs) in the John Day Basin planning area: Horn Butte Curlew and Spanish Gulch. Both were designated through the Two Rivers RMP/EIS in 1986. These ACECs are shown on Map 9, Special Management Areas and Recreation Sites.

Horn Butte Curlew ACEC is approximately 6,000 acres and is located five miles east of Arlington, in the extreme northeast corner of the planning area. Designated for its long-billed curlew) nesting habitat, a management plan was prepared in 1989 proposing land acquisition, livestock management, noxious weed control and seasonal closure of the area to OHVs. Implementation of all planned actions except OHV management is ongoing.

Since 1989 approximately 80% of the ACEC has been burned by wildfire. Long-billed curlew nesting habitat, consisting mostly of sites dominated by perennial grasses, has