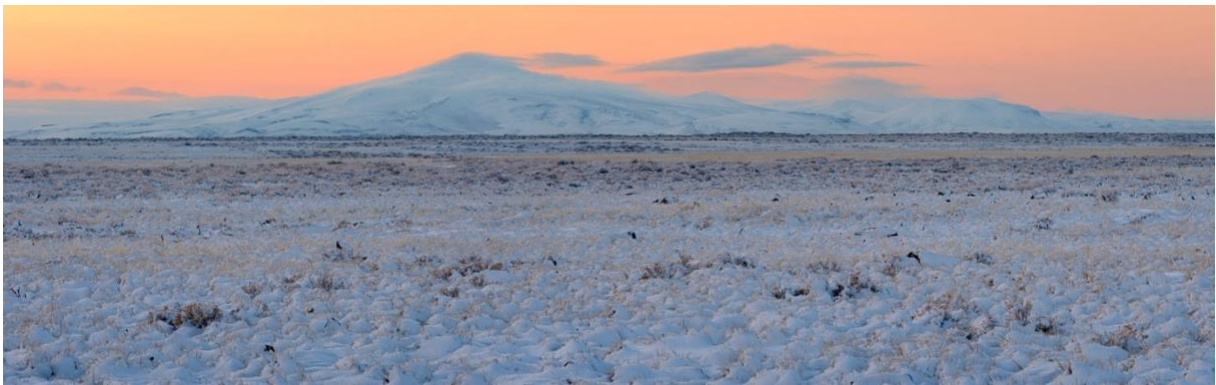




FRIENDS OF HART MOUNTAIN NATIONAL ANTELOPE REFUGE



Beatys Butte is at the heart of the TCC focus—the 'land between' Hart and Sheldon/Jim Davis

The Tri-Corner Collaborative and FOHM

By Julie Weikel

State lines don't observe natural distinctions. That's why, back in March this year, Friends of Hart Mountain joined a regional collaborative comprising residents of Oregon, Nevada and California whose goal is to engage the local community in the future of the working lands and broader landscape within and between Hart Mountain and Sheldon National Wildlife Refuges.

The new group is the Tri-Corner Community Collaborative (TCC). Its focus area is currently attracting national attention due to its rare and unique scale and relatively intact healthy ecosystem features that support popular and iconic species such as pronghorn, greater sage grouse, pygmy rabbit and bighorn sheep. The purpose of the TCC is to provide a strong local voice with respect to how the area might be managed going forward, and it pursues this with regular meetings at which members get together and talk about common goals and how best to achieve them.

The Collaborative is not a RAC (Resource Advisory Committee) providing advice to

government agencies. Rather it is technically a subgroup of the Lakeview Local Sage Grouse Implementation Team (LIT). Many government agencies have members attending the meetings, including BLM, USFWS, Lake and Harney County Commissioners, SWCDs, OSU Extension, ODFW and others. Oregon's two US Senators and Congressman Cliff Bentz send staffers to observe. Wildlife and environmental groups include Oregon Hunters Association, Oregon Natural Desert Association, Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and Wild Sheep Foundation—as well as us, the Friends of Hart Mountain. Local ranchers are in heavy attendance. Meetings are held in person, in Lakeview. There is a Coordinating Committee which provides structure to the process. Meetings are open to anyone interested in the long term management of the lands between the two Refuges and they are facilitated by The Nature Conservancy.

To date there have been five monthly meetings and Friends of Hart Mountain has been represented at all five meetings by one or more members of the Board of Directors. Attendance has dropped off by about 50% since the initial meeting where much concern was expressed opposing the idea of merging the two refuges. The focus of the meetings has shifted towards a “stewardship” approach, and a few areas of common concern have emerged that all the members continuing to attend would be able to support. These include invasive annual grass management, maintaining or improving habitat integrity for wildlife, wildfire management, maintaining open space, and intentional efforts to maintain and improve grazing management.

This group has the attention of numerous agencies and individuals at the national level. At the September meeting, Shannon Ludwig, project leader for the Hart Mountain NAR and Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge, announced that a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) process will begin in about a year that will combine future management plans for both Hart Mountain and Sheldon in a single plan. That planning process will be conducted within the framework of Landscape Conservation Design (LCD), a new approach wherein USFWS management can complement the efforts and values of neighboring landowners, agencies and communities. The TCC will no doubt be part of that effort, and FOHM plans to continue to take part.

The more we work together, the more likely we'll conceive something we can achieve.

Lifelong High Desert advocate Julie Weikel is a member of the Friends of Hart Mountain Board of Directors.



Volunteers Karl Findling and Libby Mae Findling plant willows at Hot Springs Campground last summer during riparian restoration work/image: Maris June Findling

Season's Greetings from Friends of Hart Mountain

By Bob Lebens

The mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service is unique among federal land management agencies in eastern Oregon. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management manage the lands under their jurisdiction for ‘multiple use’. In contrast, the Fish and Wildlife Service manages Hart Mountain for the benefit of wild animals and the habitat on which they depend. This distinction is apparent in that there has been no grazing on Hart Mountain for three decades.

Dispersed camping is allowed at most places in southeastern Oregon managed by the BLM, while at Hart Mountain, with the emphasis on habitat preservation, it is not. Likewise, off-road vehicle use is not allowed and is enforced on Hart Mountain unlike in most of the surrounding federally managed lands. These conservation management practices are particularly important as recreational use has increased dramatically over the last several years, threatening the habitat needed to support wildlife and plant communities across the northern Great Basin.

So at Hart Mountain—in addition to the scenic beauty of the mountain and the stunning views of the surrounding landscape—the emphasis on providing quality habitat for wildlife species in turn enhances the visitor’s experience viewing wildlife and intact natural plant communities.

The Friends of Hart Mountain board is dedicated to educating the public about the value and wonders of Hart Mountain and advocating for the Refuge. In 2023, we helped build a fence around Post Meadows Campground to protect the adjacent wetland and planted

willows to protect the streams in the Hot Springs Campground. We staffed the visitors center and re-opened the Friends Pronghorn Store next to the visitor center. We also lobbied for refuge funding and the creation of a dark sky sanctuary for the area.

Be a part of this effort by donating to or volunteering with (*or both, see below*) the Friends of Hart Mountain this holiday season. The Friends could also use your help expanding our educational efforts over social media and staffing the visitors center. Share your enthusiasm by talking to the many interesting people that travel to Hart Mountain and stop at the visitors center.

I hope that 2024 brings you the joy of visiting Hart Mountain, but even more importantly knowing that places like Hart Mountain are there to serve as a refuge for humans, as well as the plant and animal inhabitants, and the knowledge that Hart Mountain will be there not only for your next visit, but for future generations.

Bob Lebens is president of Friends of Hart Mountain.

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