

Local

Owyhee Monument

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Bentz also introduced the panel who were from left to right: Cecil Dick, Paiute Nation; Scott Meyers, Grant County Judge; Ken Kestner, Lake County Commissioner; Chris Perry, Wheeler County Judge; Mike McCabe, Crook County Judge; Steve Grasty, Harney County Judge; Ted Fiorelli, State Senator; Cliff Bentz, State Representative; Greg Barreto, State Representative; Dan Joyce, Malheur County Judge; Larry Wilson, Malheur County Commissioner; Don Hodge, Malheur County Commissioner; Don Gonzalez, Vale District BLM Manager; Bill Harvey, Baker County Commissioner; Brian Wolfe, Malheur County Sheriff; and Mark Bennett, Baker County Commissioner.

Congressman Greg Walden was unable to attend, but sent a statement saying in essence that more regulations are unneeded and the people should be heard and their wishes heeded.

U.S. Senators from Oregon, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, were also unable to attend but sent a joint statement concluding with, “We are confident there is a solution that ensures the long-term protection of this unique landscape and local needs and values, but the only way to make sure local needs and values are well represented is through your engagement and input.”

Bentz then introduced Fenty to give all present an overview the proposal being made to present to President Obama.

He said that the Owyhee Canyonlands Coalition is a group of Oregon citizens and other organizations that want to see that the Owyhee Canyonlands are preserved for future generations and enjoyed by all Americans for not just one lifetime but in perpetuity.

He spelled out the important points of the proposal that state grazing would continue and that the legislation would actually “grandfather in” grazing and could add facility maintenance and forms of access not currently available.

Current mining claims within the 2.5 million acre proposed monument area would also be “grandfathered” while “protecting” the area from any detrimental future mining, oil and gas development.

He stated that the existing legal roads and routes to both popular and remote areas in the Owyhee will remain open, at which point there was a loud groan of disbelief from the crowd.

Fenty said that he believes that this proposal will bring an economic boom to the area through increased tourism for hunting, fishing, camping and water recreation. It would also preserve critical wildlife and conserve existing water developments and bring an increase in restoration projects.

Afterward, Bentz asked for audience input alternating between pro and con opinions, each person being allowed two minutes to speak their view.

Of the approximately

30 people who voiced their opinions, the “pro” category reasons included protection of the land, increased recreational opportunities, protection of fish and wildlife, and belief it will create jobs and bring economic stimulus.

The con side reasons are citizens don’t feel they need government help to protect the land and have been doing themselves for generations, other monuments have been in constant litigation since being formed, and belief that it will result in job loss as well as no trust in the government to keep its promises.

Bob Skinner of the Public Lands Council spoke against the proposal saying, “It is not in the best interest of locals. I believe the people behind it are anti-grazing. Read the fine print.”

Larry Price, a resident of Adrian said, “We don’t want the changes it will bring to this town.”

Greg Jones, a fourth-generation Owyhee County resident, said, “We don’t want to be like Jackson Hole or Vail. We can take care of our own.”

Labron Hardy of Bend, Oregon was for the proposal saying, “We need to preserve this area for the future. This will keep out the destruction from oil drilling and large mines.”

Bob Reese of Tillamook has been a hunting and fishing guide for 20 years and believes, “We need to protect the fish and wildlife habitat for the future.”

Kirk Richardson of Portland was also for the proposal saying, “Outdoor recreation of all kinds brings an economic boost to the entire area.”

Some questions arose from the many locals in the crowd as to who was footing the bill for the travel expenses of those in favor of the monument, who were primarily from the western side of the state.

After the public statement portion of the meeting, the panel members were each given two minutes to speak their opinions.

Commissioner Mark Bennett commented, “We must look out for the people and their way of life. Actions must be decided by the people of the land.”

Commissioner Bill Harvey remarked, “If they want to preserve the land they should find a way to help us do it not take it over from us.”

Judge Mike McCabe added some humor to the situation by saying, “Tell them to take the Deschutes instead and leave us alone”

Cecil Dick of the Paiute Nation was eloquent when he gave his opinion saying, “Be cautious! It is the Indians’ experience that treaty from Washington D.C. never tell truth. Leadership changes means truth changes.”

Senator Ferrioli agreed with Cecil Dick saying, “Listen to the Indians—they know. Trust is a big issue. People who care should work together to care for the land they love.”

Ted Ferrioli’s main question was: “We need to be concerned about why they (The Owyhee Coalition) aren’t engaging the local people through a Congressional vote rather than

going to the President.”

Bentz closed the meeting by thanking all those who helped put it together and those who came to learn and give their opinions. He also promised there would be more meetings and discussions to come.

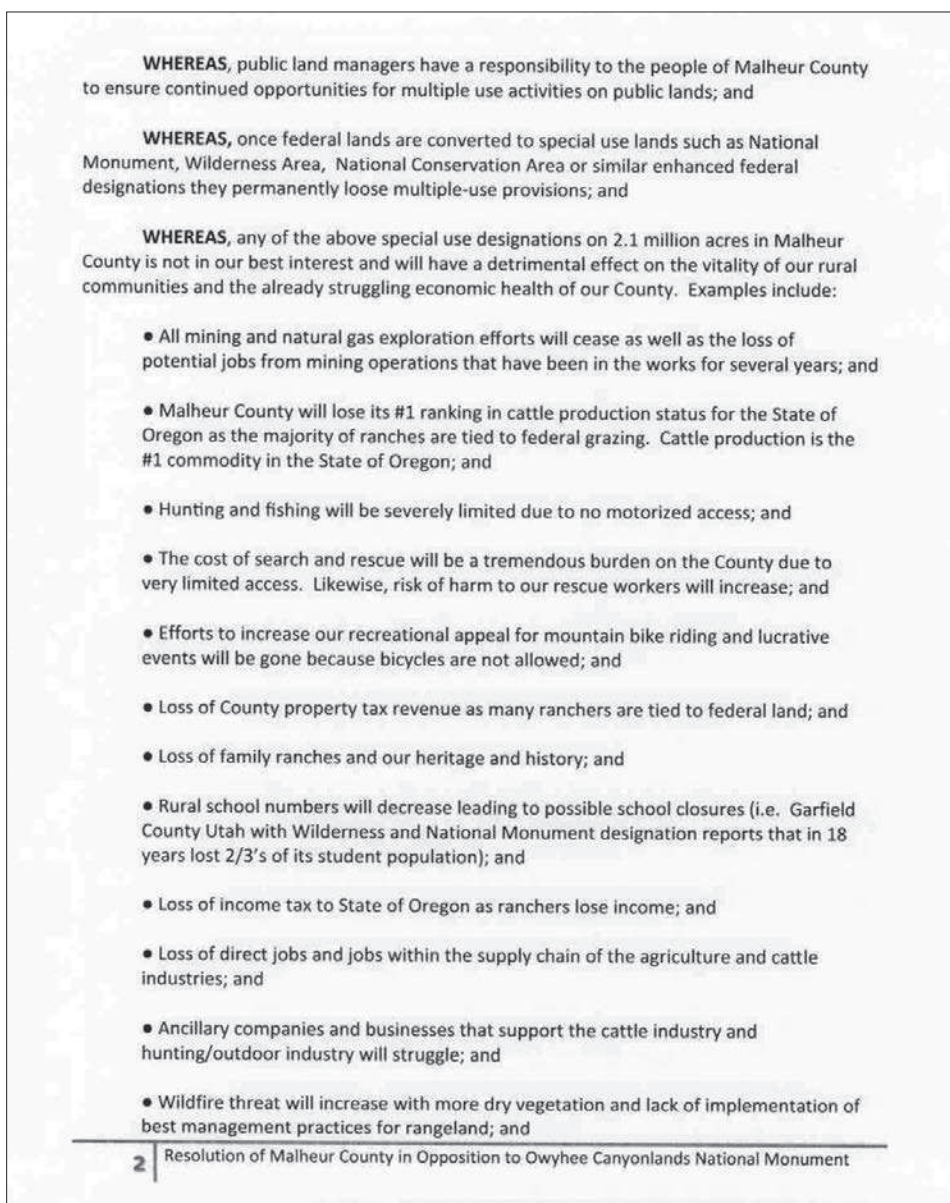
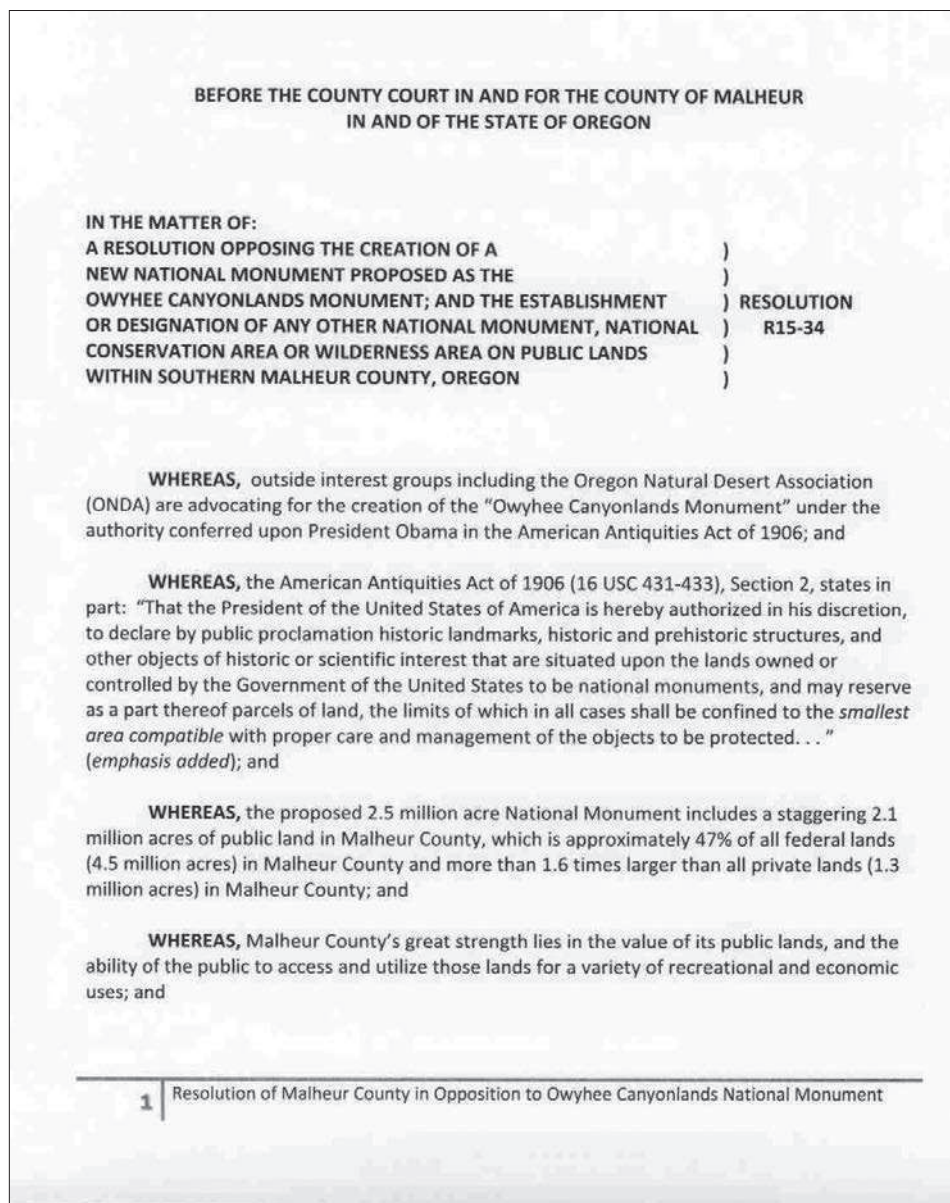
The Malheur County Court is standing firm behind its resolution (pictured in full to the right) to oppose the monument.

In addition, on September 18, the Oregon Natural Desert Association in Bend responded to that resolution with a number of documents, stating in part, “Our proposal seeks to protect 2.5 million acres of public land in Malheur County via a combination of National Conservation Area (NCA), Wilderness, and Wild & Scenic River designations which would need to be enacted through federal legislation ... The Malheur County resolution mischaracterizes the Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal as a National Monument proposal, misstates acreages associated with the proposal and is factually incorrect and/or highly speculative in many of its assertions.”

Following the meeting, Baker County Commissioners Mark Bennett and Bill Harvey responded with their take on the monument and meeting. Harvey said, “We went in solidarity and support with Malheur County, which in my point of view is being attacked by the conservation movement. They’re trying to take so much land in that county that it devastates their economy. And that’s not all they’re taking. BLM just followed through and took 1.9 million acres from Malheur, Harney and Lake Counties across the bottom of the state. Combined, two-thirds of Malheur county is being locked up. This is the largest land grab I’ve seen in a single county.”

Harvey also cautioned against assurances that grazing and pasture will be protected. “Current means only what’s allowed now and nothing more in the future. So you want to be careful and listen to every word,” he said. Harvey pointed out that most of the environmental visitors came from west side of the state, charged up their cars in Bend, bought gas in bend, brought their camping supplies with them and stayed nowhere near hotels or restaurants. “They spend two weeks on vacation and go home. They’ve done nothing for the economy here.” Harvey added, “It’s pristine because families who live there have protected it for 150 years. There’s no need for more protection.” “If they can do it there, they can do it here in Baker County. There’s nothing to stop them from trying,” Harvey said.

Bennett said, “We must protect the working landscape—which is the people. They kept using the term ‘landscape’ and no decision should be made without engaging the people who preserve that landscape. There’s no threat documented against that landscape. This, to me, is just a sham for a big land grab.”



Submitted Photos.

Above is the full resolution drafted by Malheur County in opposition to the proposed monument.