



## Blue Mountains Trail Newsletter - Summer 2025



### Oregon Recreational Immunity Bill Passes

[Oregon Senate Bill 179](#) has passed the Oregon House and has been signed by the Senate President, the Speaker of the House, and the Governor, making it law.

Also known as the Recreational Immunity Bill, 179 explicitly defines protections for local landowners, governments and nonprofit organizations that may contribute to access, construction, and maintenance of public trails. The bill encourages outdoor recreation by limiting the liability of landowners, organizations, and governments in cases of injury or damage occurring on public easements or unimproved rights of way. This includes protections for organizations and volunteers like ours who contribute to trail maintenance! This is a big sigh of relief for the recreation community! The alternative may have meant losing long standing access to public recreation for fear of lawsuits.

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Pip Redding presents to a crowd of trail enthusiasts at Quirk Brewing in Walla Walla.

## The BMT in Walla Walla

Trail Coordinator, Pip Redding, along with GHCC team members Nash Wadhams and Ian Wilson, recently visited Walla Walla for a Blue Mountains Trail Presentation at [Quirk Brewing](#). Pip's presentation was an introduction to the history, mission, and development of the trail, and its designation as an official Oregon Signature Trail. It included a section by section overview of the trail, including highlights and logistics. Most importantly, it outlined the intention for the BMT to be an impetus for stewardship, advocacy, and investment in alternatives to resource extraction as the primary use of USFS managed land.

The gathering was well attended by old friends and new acquaintances. If you're ever in the area, stop by [Quirk Brewing](#) for a wide selection of beverages and a relaxed sunset hangout in their backyard.

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## Trail Maintenance Reports

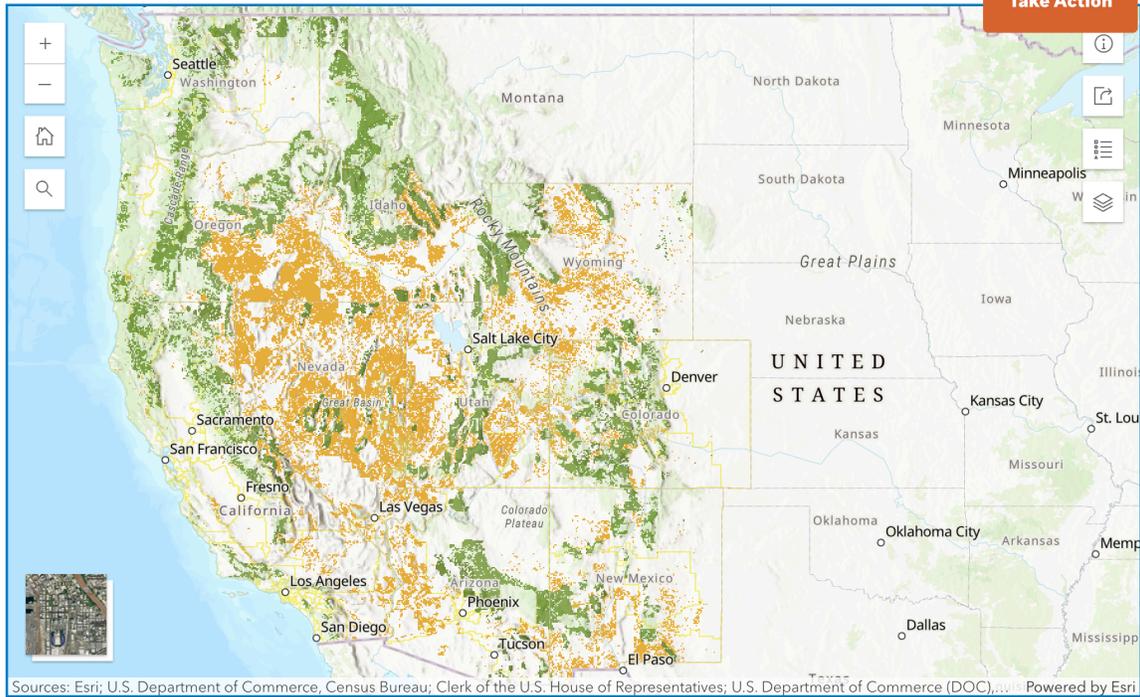
Volunteers have been hard at work improving sections of the Blue Mountains Trail in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Our local partners, the [Wallowa Mountains Hells Canyon Trails Association](#), recruit folks with the time and skills to cut logs, clear brush, improve signage, and kick rocks.

Our trails coordinator leads trips that focus on the Blue Mountains Trail. So far this spring, we've cut heavy regrowth of hawthorn, wild rose, and ninebark in the upper reaches of Dug Creek and Tulley Creek in Hells Canyon. We've also installed new signs, cleared logs and brush around the Freezeout Saddle and Squirrel Prairie. All of this work in Section 2 of the Blue Mountains Trail incrementally improves the navigability and experience for hikers in the most challenging portion of the trail, but there's tons more to do!

Projects with the WMHCTA are suggested and prioritized by forest service personnel, association members, and recreationists that may have intel on trail conditions across the region. GHCC's own trips range across the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla, and Malheur National Forests along the BMT route. So if you have a favorite trail that needs some love, get in touch and we'll add it to the list. Even better, join one of GHCC's outings or sign-up to be a volunteer trip leader.

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Public lands eligible for sale in the Senate Reconciliation BMT Bill (based on 6/14 bill text)



This map from The Wilderness Society shows all public lands proposed for sale in the "Big Beautiful Bill".

## Action Alert for Public Land Sales, Reduction in Funding for Trails

The threat to sell off our public lands to the highest bidder has reared its ugly head once again. It's back in play as part of the GOP's massive budget bill - the "Big Beautiful Bill."

The original provision in the House of Representatives bill focusing on Nevada and Utah was removed. Shockingly, an even worse version has appeared in the Senate. [The latest proposal](#) would not just allow, but require, the sale of up to 3.2 million acres of public lands managed by BLM and Forest Service across 11 western states in the next 5 years.

Unsurprisingly, selling public lands is massively unpopular. Montana's Congressmen heard resounding resistance from their constituents and the State has already been exempted from this proposal. We need other Senators in the West to stand up right now and say "no" to the selling of public lands here or anywhere!

Along with the possibility to lose our public lands completely, the bill also includes a massive 60 percent cut to the labor and operations budgets of the US Forest Service for maintaining trails, and redirects revenue from fee collection at recreation sites to support rapacious executive orders that will further degrade our public land.

Quote from From the USDA FY2026 Budget Justification, "...Fees collected are used to repair or reconstruct roads, bridges, and trails on NFS lands. Previously funds were utilized to correct road and trail deficiencies that adversely affect ecosystems. Since FY2008, appropriations acts have directed collections to be transferred to Treasury. In FY2026, the program will retain collections and will prioritize their use for the maintenance and

*reconstruction of roads critical to the implementation of Executive Order 14225, Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production.”*

Many existing trails in our area are barely usable for lack of maintenance. The USFS has been scraping the bottom of the barrel for years to hire recreation staff. Further cuts may mean closed campgrounds, restricted access, and impassable trails.

The time for action is now! Please tell your Senators our lands and trails deserve better than neglect and privatization. [Follow this link to GHCC's easy submission form](#), and feel free to use your own colorful language to tell how important our public lands and trails are to you.

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## A word to 2025 BMT hikers

With July fast approaching, BMT thru hikers and long section hikers are eyeing their packs and planning their trips.

Please keep in mind that with warming temperatures comes the risk of fire, and this spring has been especially dry. Anyone hitting the trail should take care to stay informed on fire conditions, new starts, seasonal restrictions and incidental Forest closures throughout the planning and execution of their journey.

Thankfully, there are simple tools to keep you apprised of the situation. Folks already using Caltopo for the BMT maps can simply toggle the “Fire Activity” checkbox overlay found in

the right column. A new and popular option is the [Watch Duty app](#), which has up-to-date information available.

As always, be cautious with stoves and other ignition sources in the backcountry. For many, a campfire feels like a requisite part of the outdoor experience. Unfortunately, they are often illegal, unsafe, or unnecessarily impactful.

## A BIG Thank You to BMT Sponsors!



GHCC works to protect, connect, and restore the lands, waters, native species, and climate resiliency of the ecologically magnificent Greater Hells Canyon Region.

*[Join us](#) in protecting the Greater Hells Canyon Region and making the Blue Mountains Trail a path to resilience for Northeast Oregon.  
Pip Redding, Blue Mountains Trail Coordinator*

***By joining GHCC's River Runner program for \$10/month or more, we'll throw in a special gift.***

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