

The valley of the Grande Ronde spills out of the Blue Mountains, meanders along the toe slopes and foothills below the Wallowa Mountains, and washes back upon itself before the canyons of the Elkhorns. It is vibrant green in the spring and golden brown by the dead of summer when the unrelenting heat turn the fields of wheat. Mint grows and timber processed by the acre. Their scents mingle and hang in the valley bowl, heady and symbolic of a place fated to the continuing prosperity and productivity of the land, much of it publicly held.

I arrived in La Grande in mid-May to serve as the legal intern of the Hells Canyon Preservation Council entirely unfamiliar with the locale and associated legal issues. Thankfully, the foundation of first-year eased the transition. I spent the bulk of my time early on coming up to speed on the organization's work. This process involved focused legal research, preparation of legal memoranda for staff and co-plaintiff attorneys, and, eventually, collaboration with a staff attorney on an administrative appeal of an environmental impact statement for small-scale mining operations in the Wallowa-Whitman N.F. Throughout, I accompanied one or both of the staff attorneys on site visits, attended an appeal disposition meeting, and participated in several meetings with federal and local officials relating to the management of public lands.

My experience as the summer progressed encompassed the breadth of the administrative process. I developed comments for federal land management projects proposed at the local and national level and, as a capstone, drafted a complaint against the U.S. Forest Service concerning management of native wildlife in Hells Canyon. The latter effort involved Freedom of Information Act requests, dialogue with Oregon and Idaho wildlife management agencies, coordination with an expert witness, and an exhaustive review of the administrative record.

From the cattleman pointedly asking what it is, exactly, that environmentalists want during a forum on wolf recovery in Oregon, to the county commissioner lobbying a U.S. Senator for federal money and less federal control over the public lands in a single breath, and, finally, to the staff of the Hells Canyon Preservation Council who tirelessly address these issues with equanimity, realism, and reason, I will surely revisit the lessons and examples of the summer in the valley as my education and career evolve.

