

## 8 Snow Cover Zone

8,000 to 9,700 Foot Elevation

Snow accumulates in this zone, forming giant drifts that remain until late summer. These sites have shallow soils, rocky outcrops, limited vegetation, and some ephemeral ponds, springs, and streams. On the Steens Loop Road, these rocky areas are most noticeable for about 1-1/2 miles when driving west on the southern portion of the Loop Road from the East Rim Viewpoint, and near the turnoff to Kiger Gorge Viewpoint on the North Loop Road.

## WILDFLOWER ETIQUETTE

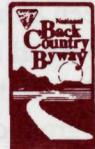
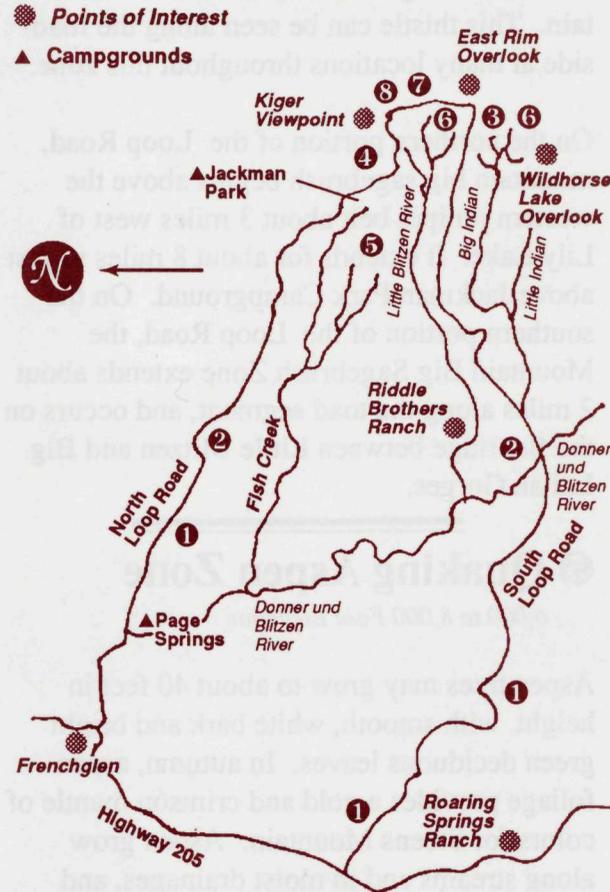
Please take only photographs, and travel with light steps. Wildflowers picked or trampled cannot reproduce, and those transplanted from their original home do not usually survive. Please help us care for this fragile and finite resource.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
BURNS DISTRICT  
HC 74, 12533 Highway 20 West  
Hines, Oregon 97738

BLM/OR/WA/GI-94/4-4800

# BLM Oregon/Washington

## STEENS MOUNTAIN VEGETATION



**STEENS MOUNTAIN** is located in southeastern Oregon's Harney County and is managed jointly by the Bureau of Land Management, Burns District, and state and private landowners. The Mountain can be accessed by traveling about 60 miles south of Burns on Highway 205 to Frenchglen. The Steens Mountain Back Country Byway leaves Highway 205 at Frenchglen and leads to the top of Steens Mountain, returning to Highway 205 about 10 miles south of Frenchglen. The approximately 66-mile long Back-Country-Byway is also known as Steens Loop Road.

**STEENS MOUNTAIN** contains a wide variety of habitats for plants. The location, number, and distribution of plants are most influenced by elevation, temperature, precipitation, soils, and wind patterns. These factors combine on Steens Mountain to create striking vegetation zones as elevation increases from the arid shrub steppe lands at the eastern and western bases to the subalpine grasslands at the summit, nearly 10,000 feet above sea level. U-shaped valleys and small lakes are evidence of extensive glaciation, which has also influenced the type and distribution of vegetation. This brochure is designed to help the Steens Mountain visitor recognize the major vegetation communities occurring on the Mountain.

## 1 Arid Sagebrush Zone

4,200 to 5,500 Foot Elevation



The Arid Sagebrush Zone contains a mixture of big and low sagebrush, with scattered areas of western juniper. Big sagebrush

ranges from 2-4 feet

in height and grows on moderately deep, well-drained soils. Low sagebrush is less than 3 feet in height and is most common on shallow, rocky soils. Beginning at Page Springs Campground, the northern portion of the Loop Road travels through an Arid Sagebrush Zone for 4-5 miles. From Highway 205 to the Blitzen River Crossing, the southern portion of the Loop Road travels through this zone for 14-15 miles.

Grasses of this zone are called bunchgrasses because of their growth habit, and include Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and Sandberg's bluegrass.

## ② Western Juniper Zone

5,000 to 6,000 Foot Elevation



Western juniper on Steens Mountain is easily seen when driving south on Highway 205 toward Frenchglen because it stands out as a dark green belt

against the Mountain. On the northern portion of the Loop Road, the Western Juniper Zone is well-defined and begins about 3 miles east of Page Springs. On the southern portion of the Loop Road, the zone is not as well-defined. The principal Western Juniper Zone begins just before the southern portion of the Loop Road crosses the Blitzen River at Blitzen Crossing, and continues to the lower base of Rooster Comb.

Mature juniper trees produce large amounts of blue-black fruits, which make trees laden with fruits look distinctly bluish. Juniper can be an important shelter for deer during the winter. This long-lived species often reaches an age of several hundred years, though the majority of trees on Steen Mountain are less than 100 years old. The oldest trees are concentrated

in rimrocks and rock outcrops where they are sheltered from wildfires. Many of the plants associated with the Arid Sagebrush and Mountain Big Sagebrush Zones also occur in the Western Juniper Zone.

---

## ③ Mountain Mahogany Zone

6,000 to 8,000 Foot Elevation



Curleaf mountain mahogany prefers steep rocky locations with shallow soils.

Although it does not form an easily defined zone on Steens Mountain, it can be seen on Rooster Comb off the southern portion of the Loop Road. It also occurs on the east face of the Mountain, on the slopes of the gorges, and scattered throughout mid-elevations.

Mountain mahogany grows to about 20 feet in height. Its inconspicuous white flowers appear in May or June and produce a seed with a spiraling, feathery plume. Mahogany is an important source of winter forage for deer.

## ④ Mountain Big Sagebrush Zone

6,500 to 8,500 Foot Elevation

Mountain big sagebrush is found on flat to gently sloping areas with deep, well-drained soils, and may reach 2-3 feet in height. The Mountain Big Sagebrush Zone contains many wildflowers, such as the Steens Mountain thistle, which grows only on Steens Mountain. This thistle can be seen along the roadside at many locations throughout this zone.

On the northern portion of the Loop Road, mountain big sagebrush begins above the western juniper belt about 3 miles west of Lily Lake. It extends for about 8 miles to just above Jackman Park Campground. On the southern portion of the Loop Road, the Mountain Big Sagebrush Zone extends about 2 miles along the toad segment, and occurs on the flat ridge between Little Blitzen and Big Indian Gorges.

---

## ⑤ Quaking Aspen Zone

6,000 to 8,000 Foot Elevation

Aspen trees may grow to about 40 feet in height, with smooth, white bark and bright green deciduous leaves. In autumn, aspen foliage provides a gold and crimson mantle of colors for Steens Mountain. Aspen grow along streams and in moist drainages, and provide an important source of forage for deer. They can be seen along the northern portion of the Loop Road in the Fish Creek drainage, at Lily Lake, Fish Lake, and Jackman Park Campground.

## ⑥ Subalpine Meadow Zone

7,000 to 8,400 Foot Elevation

Subalpine meadows occur below large snowdrifts and along streams, and are characterized by moist soil of varying depths and diverse vegetation. Wildflowers common to subalpine meadows include mountain meadow knotweed, which may fill entire meadows with white flowers, and false hellebore, a tall corn-like plant with large green leaves and white flowers. Subalpine meadows are found in small areas around Fish Lake, larger areas near Jackman Park Campground, and in Little Blitzen and Big Indian Gorges.

---

## ⑦ Subalpine Grassland Zone

9,000 to 9,700 Foot Elevation

Subalpine grasslands occur at high elevations on the Steens where small rocks and gravel cover the surface of the ground and snow does not usually accumulate. Shrubs do not normally exist in this harsh environment, and other vegetation seldom exceeds 6 inches in height.

These grasslands can be seen along the Steens Loop Road, from near the Kiger Gorge Viewpoint turnoff to the East Rim Viewpoint turnoff, and along the road to Wildhorse Lake Viewpoint