

# Metolius Mule Deer Winter Range Homesteading on the Grassland



## Home on the range

For centuries, the area now known as Jefferson County was inhabited and cared for by Native American groups, many of which are now represented by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. European-American settlement began in the mid-1880s, spurred by the Homestead Act of 1862. Families were lured west by the sale of cheap land and many received their 160-acres of federal property at no cost. By 1888, the first homestead was established in the Madras area.

Between 1900 and 1925, homesteading in the region flourished. The promise of fertile soil and ample water attracted new settlers, enabling agriculture in addition to the ranching and mineral exploration already taking place. Several small towns were founded during this time, including Geneva and Grandview, and nearly 700 families put down roots in the area. Settlers told of abundant snow and water — enough to grow watermelons, wheat, barley, rye, oats and other crops.



*The Glover Homestead, an early 20th-century building within PGE property, provided insight into homesteading life on the Winter Range. Unfortunately, weathering and vandalism took a toll on the structure.*

*To preserve its historic value and protect it from additional damage, PGE deconstructed the building in 2018. We are working with the High Desert Museum in Bend to incorporate the original timbers into an exhibit to educate the public on the history of the region.*

## A changing landscape

Climate conditions took a turn for the worse in the late 1910s. With the onset of persistent drought, crop failure and the Great Depression, many homesteaders were forced into bankruptcy. By 1934, fewer than 50 families remained of the nearly 700 that had lived in the area three decades earlier.

The federal government stepped in to provide relief, purchasing thousands of failing farms and helping families find new opportunities. Not all of the homesteaders sold their land to the government, hence the patchwork ownership you see on the grassland today. The purchased lands were managed by the Soil Conservation Service, which removed buildings, installed fences, developed water sources for livestock and reseeded eroded farm fields.

The land was transferred from the Soil Conservation Service to the U.S. Forest Service in 1954, and the Crooked River National Grassland was officially designated in 1960. It is the only national grassland in Oregon. Today, PGE and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs work closely with the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Jefferson County and other agencies and nonprofits to preserve and enhance the area for wildlife.