

Fall 2023

News



Southern Oregon
LAND
CONSERVANCY



SOLC Joins an Ancient Fire Tradition

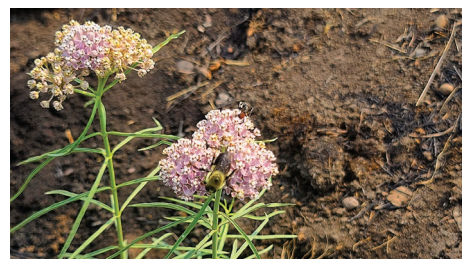
First Prescribed Burn at Agate Desert Preserve

We are the fire species, according to fire historian Stephen Pyne. Where photosynthesis created vegetation, the reaction that is fire, with a little help from people, can take it apart. With power over fire humans reshaped the landscape, and “...hungering for ever more firepower, we turned from burning living landscapes to burning lithic ones—once-living biomass converted over eons into oil, gas, lignite, and coal. Our firepower became unbounded.”

After decades studying fire, Pyne has arrived at the conclusion that the Holocene or Anthropocene age we are living in may be more aptly termed the Pyrocene: “... a coming Fire Age equivalent in stature to the Ice Ages of the Pleistocene.” He points out the intersection between burning lithic landscapes and living ones when power lines ignite raging fires during extreme weather events.

Pyne’s recounting of fire history seems to point us in the direction of a needed shift: away from burning fossil fuels, with their runaway effluent, and toward our millennial old relationship as fire bringers to the living landscape.

On June 22, 2023, SOLC did what humans have done for millennia: with expert assistance from Grayback Forestry Inc, we burned a living landscape, utilizing the reaction of fire to renew and restore the unique plant community of the Agate Desert. The Agate Desert Preserve burn was completed in less than two hours



during favorable weather conditions which quickly lifted smoke up above the height of roads and buildings where it was dispersed by light winds. In addition to removing invasive medusahead grass thatch, the fire consumed material that could otherwise have fueled an unplanned ignition later in the summer.

This was the seventh prescribed burn on the Agate Desert Preserve since 1989 as part of a comprehensive restoration plan initiated by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to benefit the native vernal pool and mounded prairie habitat. The preserve was transferred from TNC to SOLC in 2022. Periodic burns followed by seeding native species have successfully maintained and increased populations of the endangered Cook’s lomatium and large-flowered woolly meadowfoam plants on the preserve.



Lands committee members listening, in situ at a prospective preserve site, as Land Steward Rebekah Bergkoetter reads from a draft baseline report

From the Executive Director Becoming a Land Learning Organization

In so many ways, Southern Oregon Land Conservancy exemplifies what it means to be a learning organization. The idea is woven through our work, whether in evaluating where and why to conserve the next lands, monitoring sensitive plants and animals with partner groups, or bringing awareness to students of all ages in our field education programs.

A Harvard Business Review article described a learning organization as “made up of employees (and in our case partners and volunteers) skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge. These people could help their firms cultivate tolerance, foster open discussion, and think holistically and systemically.” Significantly, the article also suggests that learning

organizations are better equipped to adapt to the unpredictable better than other organizations.

SOLC and our land conservation actions embody these notions: We learn, share, and adapt knowledge to conserve lands we love. Our learning often begins with listening: to the needs of resident and migratory communities, whether those be plants, animals, or people. We soak in observations from our conserved lands, hearing from neighbors and partners where protection priorities should aim, tuning in on bird songs to document habitat use.

We apply our learning in caring for the land, adapting management plans to return natural processes like fire to the landscape. The learning pushes us to hone in on places that sustain ecological relationships, and to recognize the additive impact of

connectivity and climate resilience when we link protected places together. SOLC brings this idea to life in outdoor youth education, sharing the sensory feelings, intricate scientific understanding, enthusiasm, and the joy of nature discovery with future generations of stewards.

Best of all, the learning feeds further wonder. As birder, activist, author and National Geographic explorer Christian Cooper wrote, “Once you tune in to one aspect of nature, you eventually become aware of the whole connected network of life around us.” As we help more people come to that realization, conservation can’t help but follow.

Steve Wise
Steve Wise,
Executive Director

Sharing SOLC's Work on a National Stage

In September, SOLC staff and board members headed north for the Land Trust Alliance’s national conference, which was held in Portland this year.

Executive Director Steve Wise moderated a panel discussion called *Cows and Conservation: Reconciling Ranching and Resilience in the*

Klamath-Siskiyou Region, which brought three practitioners from our region into conversation about conservation-minded grazing practices. And our Education Program Manager Tara Laidlaw co-presented a workshop focused on our recent pilot project, *Youth Climate Protectors: Designing*

Collaborative Engagement Programs. SOLC attendees also enjoyed the opportunity to connect with other land conservation professionals, learn about other organizations’ innovations and successes, and of course, browse the shelves at Powell’s Books during some down time.

Post-Prescribed Burn: A Photo Essay

A single pocket gopher can move one ton of earth each year. These busy rodents maintain the shape of mounds—they are vernal pool-mounded prairie architects. Their **burrowing activity** is especially evident since the burn.



Andre’s harvester ants are also busy, collecting seeds, and leaving visible piles of chaff and old flower parts around their nest holes. They are primarily collecting and consuming unburned, nonnative annual grass seeds, making them invaluable allies in our goal to reduce invasive grass cover, and to increase native plant population.

Soon after the prescribed burn, narrowleaf milkweed bloomed from underground rhizomes, and **California poppy flowers** popped up from seeds at the Agate Desert Preserve.



Youth Climate Protectors

This year, SOLC teamed up with Unete Center for Farmworker Advocacy, and Southern Oregon Climate Action Now, to develop and pilot the “Youth Climate Protectors” program. This program, fully-funded by the Oregon Health Authority, introduced local Latino/a/x high school students to the science of climate change. Their education included exciting field trips to a number of public and private protected lands—including Rogue River Preserve, Whetstone Savanna Preserve, Agate Desert Preserve, and Vesper Meadow—where they learned about the human/land relationship,



explored land-based career pathways, and collaborated on climate change-related presentations for their families and friends.



Open Lands Fae *Event Photo Gallery*

This year we decided to celebrate the Rogue River Preserve in tandem with Halloween! Guests who visited the Preserve for Open Lands Fae on October 28 were encouraged to dress up and enjoy a fall hike. More photos of the event may be found by scanning the QR code.



CONSERVATION AWARD

Donna Rhee

At the 2023 Member's Picnic, on a gorgeous fall day at Rogue River Preserve, we honored longtime SOLC and community leader Donna Rhee with the 2023 Conservation Award. She joins a distinguished list of 21 past recipients.

Donna served on the SOLC board from 1999-2016, including volunteering as President and Vice-President, after moving to Oregon with her husband Ken Rhee. Donna was also a Lands Committee member for over 20 years, where she brought grace and intelligence to our work as SOLC's conserved lands grew.

Donna has a Masters in Agricultural and Environmental Chemistry from the University of California, Davis, and over 30 years' experience working in environmental management, hazardous waste remediation, and environmental analysis.

Before moving to Oregon, she fought to end a significant pollution crisis in Nebraska. Community members were becoming sick due to hazardous chemicals created by a meat packing plant. Donna worked with agencies and partners to halt



the pollution discharge. For her efforts, the Governor and Nebraska State Legislature made Donna an Admiral in the Nebraska Navy, a prestigious honor bestowed on those contributing through service to the state. Donna retired and moved to Ashland with her husband, Ken Rhee. She is an active Ashland Garden Club Member, and past president, and serves on the Ashland Parks Foundation board. She has been appointed and served on many other committees and organizations, such as the Ashland Water Advisory Committee, ad hoc committees supporting North Mountain Park, and continues to volunteer at the Heirloom Garden. We are grateful for her service to the land and people.



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Our Mission

To protect and enhance precious land in the Rogue River region to benefit our human and natural communities.

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- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
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- Lasting Stewardship