

Spring 2022

News



Southern Oregon
LAND
CONSERVANCY



Two Land Trusts, Three Preserves and a New Stewardship Legacy

By Molly Morison

In January, equipped with rubber boots and nets, staff and volunteers from Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) waded together into vernal pools and into a new future for stewardship at Agate Desert Preserve. The sunny morning was filled with discoveries (we found vernal pool shrimp that are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act!), delights (the first spring wildflowers) and shared connections between people and nature.

The group exclaimed over a myriad of aquatic organisms swimming in the seasonal pools dotting the preserve, admired abundant native bunchgrasses and perennial forbs restored by TNC's application of prescribed fire and native seeding, and bemoaned their universal struggles with controlling invasive weeds.

This special place and two more nearby, Whetstone Savanna Preserve and Rogue Plains Preserve, were recently transferred from TNC ownership to SOLC after decades of protection and restoration work.

For TNC, this passing of boots, nets and land supports the longstanding conservation partnership between these two land trusts and frees up resources for new priority work. For SOLC, these preserves add conservation and engagement value to their Agate Desert-Middle Rogue Focus Area.

“Oregon’s land trusts play a critical role in our state’s future,” says Derek Johnson, director of protection and stewardship for The Nature Conservancy in Oregon. “After many years of partnership with
(continued on page 6)

From the Executive Director

Make No Small Conservation Plans

“**M**ake no small plans” is a frequent mantra of ambition in Chicago, where I grew up. The conservation version of that idea is what our newly transferred preserves in the Agate Desert mean for SOLC.

The Agate Desert-Middle Rogue Focus Area is one among six where we are proactively focusing on the big ecological picture; how each individual protected landscape builds toward lasting, regional impact. Our Focus Areas help us integrate the conservation we do, which addresses natural features and processes across a range of scales—from macroinvertebrates to migratory birds to global warming.

Each Focus Area encompasses a landscape that matters locally, with habitats that are under threat, and often harbor the homes of rare or sensitive local native species. Our other Focus Areas are the Applegate Valley; Cascade Foothills; Colestin

Valley-Siskiyou Summit; Little Butte Creek; and Upper Illinois River Valley.

The vernal pool-mounded prairie lands recently transferred to SOLC are an example of the increasingly rare but meaningful ecosystems typical of this focal area. Formulated through thousands of years of landscape change, they are living, enduring relicts of past geologic and climatic conditions. The ancestral range of the vernal pool fairy shrimp extends from central California to the Rogue, making Oregon’s Agate Desert the northernmost extent of this rare landscape, which is increasingly fragmented by development.

At least 40% of the remaining Oregon vernal pools have been degraded. Protecting the remnants takes on a sense of urgency and increased importance when considering the Agate Desert represents the northern range of a warming zone.



Corridor connectivity becomes critical, particularly in light of climate change. Protecting and connecting landscapes at larger scales is what will make long-term conservation work. For migratory animals, for the viability of animal and plant species that may be susceptible to changes in temperature and rainfall, for the resilience that these places that have adapted through epochs represent for a changing future. Focused areas. For people. For nature. Forever.

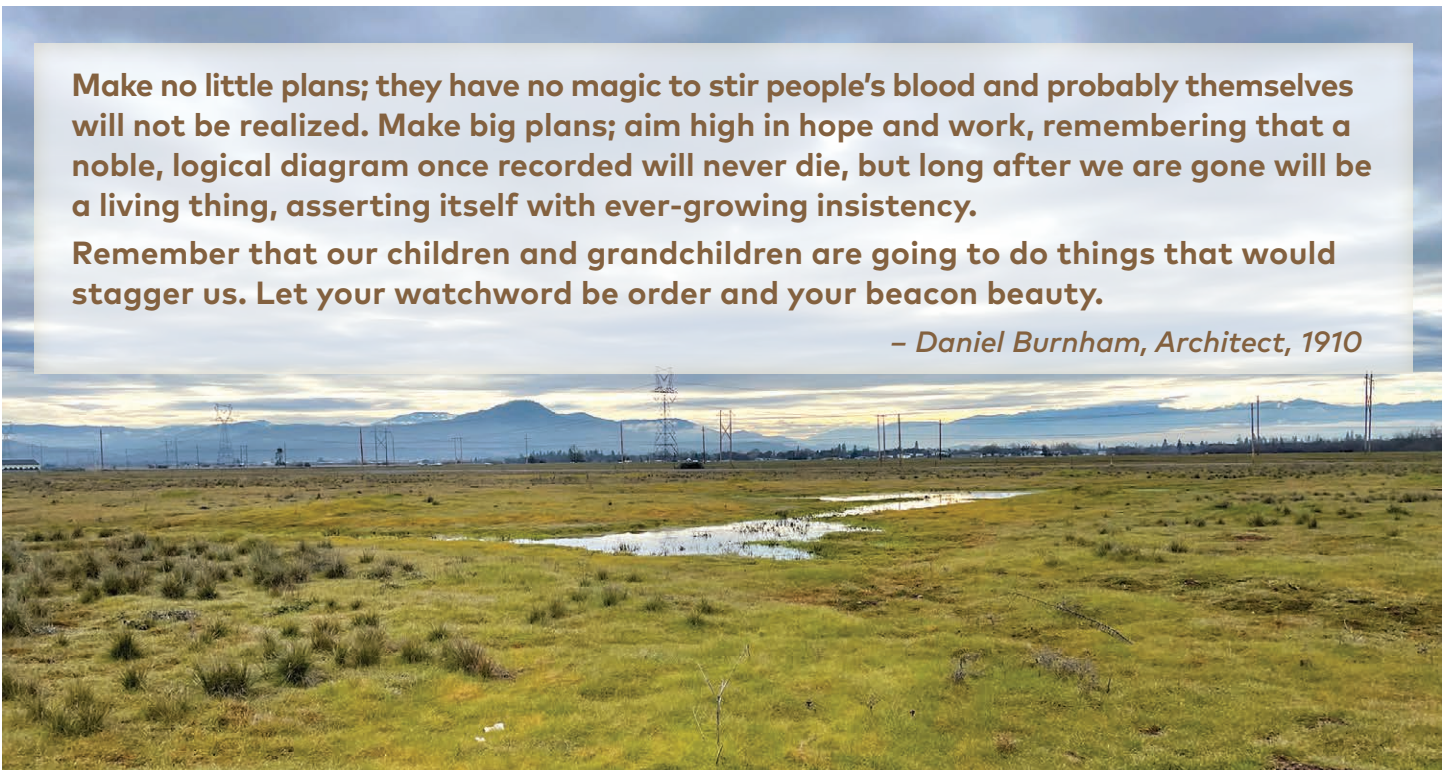
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Wise".

Steve Wise,
Executive Director

Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir people’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency.

Remember that our children and grandchildren are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.

– Daniel Burnham, Architect, 1910



Vernal Pool Fairies



Vernal pool-mounded prairie habitats are easy to miss at first glance. One may appear like a flat field when driving by one, but upon closer inspection, shallow depressions and diminutive mounds reveal themselves. Just below the soil surface is a cement-like hardpan, and in the wet winters of the Rogue Valley, the shallow depressions fill with water creating vernal pools full of surprises.

If you walk up to the edge of one of these pools and look past your own reflection, you will see a collection of skittering invertebrates and plants that have adapted to the parched summers as well as the waterlogged winters. If you're fortunate enough, you may even see fairy shrimp backswimming their way through their very brief lives. These translucent beauties rely on vernal pools to speed-run a life cycle, complete with hatching, growth, breeding and ultimately death, all within a few short months.

How do the shrimp survive through the dry summers? The female shrimp carry a sack of eggs and, in the process of dying, the sack opens up. The eggs fall to the bottom of the pool and settle into the pool sediments where they "over-summer." The eggs are highly resistant to desiccation and high temperatures, and can survive

unhatched for years until conditions are right for growth, sort of like a seed.

There are several known locations of two fairy shrimp species (Oregon fairy shrimp and the threatened vernal pool fairy shrimp) on SOLC conserved lands. SOLC currently protects more than 845 acres of vernal pool-mounded prairie habitat at six unique properties in our Agate Desert-Middle Rogue Focus Area: The Wood House Conservation Easement along Highway 62; the Rogue River Preserve; and the Agate Desert Preserve and Whetstone Savanna, recently transferred to SOLC from The Nature Conservancy.



Vernal pool fairy shrimp



Top: Staff and volunteers survey for vernal pool fairy shrimp.

Middle right: Spring wildflower bloom at the Agate Desert Preserve.

Bottom right: Map and tools are gathered for surveying pools.

Coming Soon:

Safe Access to Pompadour Bluff



Photo: Richard Jacquot

A new concrete span over the Talent Irrigation District (TID) ditch will soon replace the aging bridge at The Harry and Marilyn Fisher Preserve at Pompadour Bluff, providing safe access for vehicles and visitors. Thanks to grants from the Gardner Grout Foundation, Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund and a major anonymous donor, we plan to install the new bridge this spring before irrigation water is scheduled to flow in the TID ditch.

The new bridge is designed to safely support the weight of school buses, emergency vehicles and equipment that may be necessary to create trails and visitor infrastructure. When the land was donated to SOLC, an inspection revealed erosion in the bridge footings, indicating the need for repair or replacement to allow safe access. Installing the new bridge is the first major step to making the Preserve available for outreach and education programs.

For more information about The Harry and Marilyn Fisher Preserve at Pompadour Bluff, visit our website's homepage at landconserve.org.

Behind the Lens at The Harry and Marilyn Fisher Preserve at Pompadour Bluff

By Photographer Dan Elster

Like most Southern Oregonians, I've wondered about Pompadour Bluff since moving to the Rogue Valley 16 years ago. I came here to pursue wildlife photography as a full-time career. Pompadour Bluff looked very intriguing to a wildlife guy from afar, but a few locals told me it was private property, so I just gave up on the idea...until a few months ago. That's when the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC) reached out to see if I'd be interested in trying to photograph some of the Bluff's wildlife. I had to think about it for half a second.

My first visit was in dense fog. I couldn't take in the magnificent view of Ashland I had envisioned. I couldn't view much of anything! Thankfully, I did catch up to a large flock of Western Bluebirds, a few of which were kind enough to pose for photos. A good start!

This new opportunity comes at a time when I am experimenting with new photography techniques as well. For lack of a better term, let's call it "camera trapping." I'm deploying

two different types of "traps" on the Bluff. Game cameras (often used by hunters and researchers) are easy to set up and informative, and the short videos can be quite entertaining. I caught people trespassing, for example.

The second type of camera I'm using is a DSLR camera trap. Much more sophisticated, it involves tree mounted flashes, wireless sensors, weather-proof camera housing, lots of batteries and a whole lot of frustration. The resulting images can be stunning. Super high resolution, artistic photographs, worthy of a gallery.

I'm thrilled that SOLC reached out and I look forward to sharing what I learn about the Bluff's inhabitants with SOLC—and you!

Originally from Chicago, Photographer Dan Elster now calls Ashland home as he pursues his dream career in wildlife photography. Dan participates in fine art festivals up and down the west coast and is represented by a handful of galleries. To see more of his stunning work, visit elsterphotography.com.



Top: Blacktail Buck at night on the bluff. (DSLR camera trap).

Middle: Western Bluebird in fog.

Bottom: Two coyotes hopping the fence. (trail camera)

All photos: Dan Elster

New Loop Trail at the Rogue River Preserve



Lewis's Woodpecker and bull elk photos: Frank Lospalluto

In the fall of 2021, volunteers and contractors built the 5000' Gnatcatcher Loop trail segment at the Rogue River Preserve, completing a 1.5-mile loop trail that offers a fairly complete overview of many of the Preserve's conservation values.

The trail meanders through several distinct habitats, skirting the dense floodplain forest and offering a waterfront view of the Rogue River before zigzagging up into meadows, oak woodlands and chaparral. Seasonal streams, oak woodlands, vernal pools and scabland features, all visible alongside the trail, contribute to the rich mosaic of habitats that support the Preserve's exceptional biodiversity.

Signs of animals—and sometimes the animals themselves—

are abundant along the trail. Lewis's Woodpeckers, rare elsewhere in the Valley, are perhaps the most common bird on the loop trail in winter months, and the local herd of Roosevelt elk leaves prints by the hundreds in muddy spots. In the spring, flowers bloom in the meadows and mounded prairie, including carpets of popcorn flower, hedges of fragrant buckbrush and patches of narrow-leaf milkweed, a critical host plant for monarch butterflies.

The trail also offers glimpses into SOLC's stewardship activities. In one clearing, a stand of young ponderosa pines shows where a dense patch of invasive Scotch broom was removed several years ago. From the trail, sharp-eyed hikers can

spot an array of bird boxes, built to serve different species' needs and installed in their preferred habitats. And the trail passes by the Motus station installed and monitored by the Klamath Bird Observatory. The station, the second one to be installed in Oregon and pictured above, is part of an international network of next-generation wildlife tracking systems to research the ecology and conservation of migratory birds, bats and large insects.

To experience the trail for yourself, visit during an Open Lands Day, register for a guided hike in our upcoming hike series or join our site steward volunteer team. For more information about upcoming events, visit the Events section of our website at landconserve.org/events.



Encouraging Mindfulness

This 5th grader picked a perfect spot for his "silent sit" activity, in which we invite students to spend 15 minutes observing the natural world—and their own bodies and minds—in silence. We consistently hear that the "silent sit" is a highlight of students' visits to the Rogue River Preserve, and students have shared these observations about the experience:

"I heard so many birds all around me."

"I could actually hear myself think!"

"My body was really calm."

"I've never sat still for that long in my whole life!"

We love encouraging mindfulness alongside stewardship and scientific literacy during field trips at the Preserve. For more information on SOLC's growing education program, visit the Education section or our website at landconserve.org/education.



Two Land Trusts, Three Preserves and a New Stewardship Legacy

(continued from front page)

Southern Oregon Land Conservancy throughout southwest Oregon, we are proud to place the long-term care of Agate Desert, Whetstone Savanna and Rogue River Plains Preserves in their capable hands.”

All three preserves are located on a gravelly outwash plain on the Rogue Valley floor, not far from the Rogue River, and protect the most northern extent of high quality, unusual, mounded prairie-vernal pool habitat. Among the preserves, in addition to the threatened vernal pool fairy shrimp, live two federally

endangered plants: lemon yellow Cook’s desert parsley and showy white large-flowered meadowfoam. Other rare and common wildflowers create waves of bright colors throughout the spring and summer.

The 144-acre Whetstone Savanna Preserve is unique in its protection of groves of ancient Oregon white oaks. More than 80 species of birds use this site for nesting and foraging, making it a local birding hotspot. Researchers studying oak-fungi relationships have discovered brand new species of truffles here.

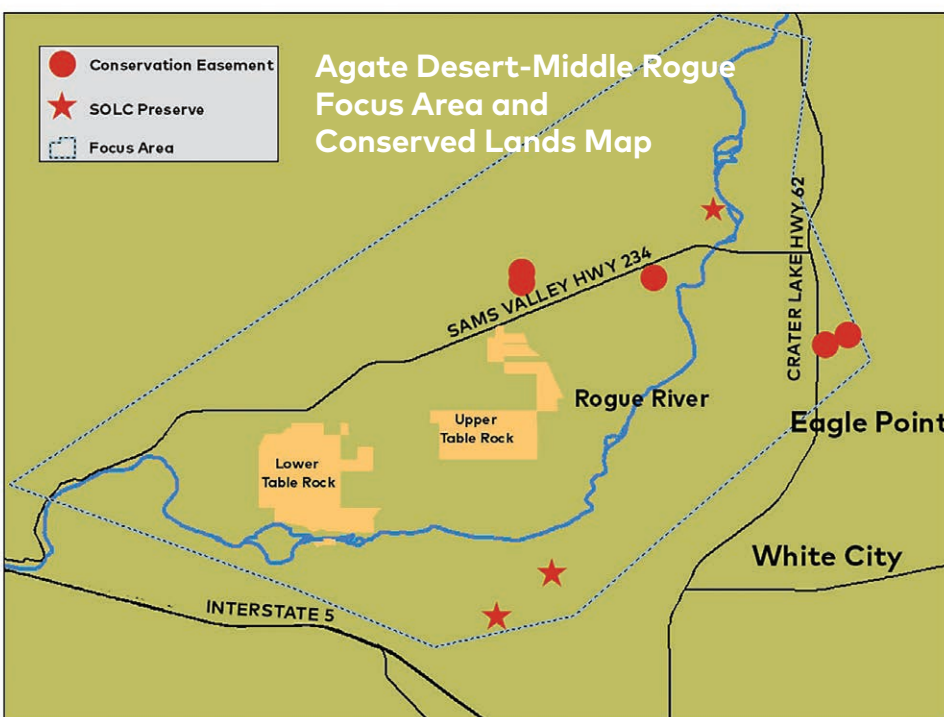
A mile downstream from SOLC’s Rogue River Preserve, the Rogue Plains Preserve is a

conservation easement property that secures an intact 125-acre expanse of vernal pools and prairie with eye-catching views of the Table Rocks and Mt. McLoughlin.

“We welcome the opportunity to work with TNC to ensure the continued conservation and stewardship of these notable properties,” says Steve Wise, SOLC executive director. “The TNC preserves complement our current properties and they fortify our commitment to protect vernal pools, oak woodlands, native grasslands and special species.”

SOLC’s conservation plan focuses on six areas including the Agate Desert-Middle Rogue where we have already conserved more than 700 acres. Adding these preserves to SOLC’s growing portfolio of owned lands gives us new opportunities to expand access for the entire community and to build new education and volunteer stewardship opportunities that connect people with these special places.

For more information on this and all of SOLC’s conservation Focus Areas, visit the Where We Work section of our website at landconserve.org.



Molly Morison is the Preserve Manager for The Nature Conservancy’s SW Oregon field office. When not busy caring for TNC’s conserved lands and coordinating volunteers, she produces vibrant wines from her 4-acre certified biodynamic vineyard in Talent, Upper Five Vineyard and Winery.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Linda Thomas, Lending a Hand and Her Eye



Linda Thomas volunteers as a photographer for many of SOLC's events, education programs and site steward days. Our newsletters, website and social media posts wouldn't be as attractive or robust without her. She knows how to get into the action and capture a smile, even with masks on. In addition to photography, Linda shines as a volunteer site steward and docent.

Linda shared her thoughts about volunteering with SOLC, "When I moved to the Rogue Valley six years ago, I researched volunteer opportunities with conservation groups and was delighted to connect with Vesper Meadow and SOLC. I love to hike, work on preservation projects and photograph people and plants in natural environments, so it was a good fit. I'm especially happy that my photography can be used to further their conservation efforts."

Having someone like Linda on the team is an invaluable resource that elevates our work. If you would like to learn more about volunteering with SOLC, please contact Teresa Fernandez at 541-482-3069, ext. 107 or at teresa@landconserve.org.



Photo: Linda Thomas

At Southern Oregon Land Conservancy, we rely on donations from friends like you to help us protect and enhance land in the Rogue River region to benefit our human and natural communities.

But what about the future? Though we've accomplished a lot, there's still much left for us to do. Planned gifts help us get there.

When you make a planned gift to SOLC you:

- Provide us with solid financial footing.
- Help us plan for the future with confidence.
- Ensure we can adjust our offerings to meet the changing needs of those we serve.

Here are several ways you can make a planned gift to SOLC, many of which offer you benefits in return. Some popular gifts include:

- Giving a gift in your will or living trust. This gift costs you nothing today and is easy to change as needed.
- Naming SOLC as a beneficiary of your retirement plan assets. A simple form is all that's needed to make this gift.
- Donating appreciated stock. When you give stock that is worth more now than when you bought it, you can avoid capital gains tax.
- Establishing a life income gift. Give a gift and receive steady income in return. You may even qualify for a tax deduction in the year you make your gift.



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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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Explore Your Options Online

You can find more information about all the gift types available to you, their benefits and how to make your gift on the Planned Gifts section of our website, plannedgiving.landconserve.org.

A planned gift is more than just another way to give. It's a way to help create the future you want to see by ensuring your support for our work continues even after your lifetime. Contact Kelly Gonzales at (541) 482-3069, Ext. 104, or kelly@landconserve.org to learn more.



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UPCOMING EVENTS



Photo: Linda Thomas



Photo: Linda Thomas

2022 Spring Hike Series *Explore, Discover, Enjoy!*

Vernal Pools of Whetstone Savanna
Sunday, April 10 | 9 a.m.–12 p.m.

RRP Open Lands Day – Two Wildflower & Plant Options*
Saturday, April 16 | 10 a.m. & 1 p.m.

Vernal Pool Flower Power at Whetstone Savanna
Saturday, April 30 | 9 a.m.–12 p.m.

Explore the Bluff – Three afternoon options at Pompadour Bluff
Wednesdays, May 4, May 11, May 18 | 3 p.m.–5 p.m.

Jacksonville Woodlands History Tour with Chelsea Rose
Saturday, May 7 | 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

Petals & Feathers of Pompadour Bluff
Sunday, May 8 | 9 a.m.–12 p.m.

Geologic Discoveries at Pompadour Bluff
Saturday, May 28 | 9 a.m.–12 p.m.

RRP Open Lands Family Fun Day with two hike options – Reptiles and Butterflies*
Saturday, June 18 | 10 a.m. & 1 p.m.

**RRP is Rogue River Preserve*

This spring join our expert hike leaders and staff on a hike (or two)! All outings are on conserved lands and are free and open to the public, but require pre-registration. Visit our website at landconserve.org/hikes-and-tours to see the full details of each outing then register well in advance because these hikes fill up quickly. See you on the trail!

Registration opens one month before the hike date.



Outdoor 2022 Conservation Celebration

We're going outdoors at a new location! That sounds fitting for a celebration of land conservation, right? Join us at Hillcrest Orchard for an evening of fun, food and fundraising in a magical setting with views of the surrounding vineyard, orchards and Roxy Ann Peak. We are excited to gather with you at this historic landmark nestled in the magnificent foothills at the base of the Roxy Ann hills.

**Saturday, May 21 at 5:30 p.m.
Hillcrest Orchard in Medford**

For more information, visit the Events section of our website at landconserve.org/events.



Photos: Steve Addington