

Spring 2023

News



Southern Oregon
LAND
CONSERVANCY



New: Buck Prairie Conservation Easement

We just conserved an extraordinary place, rich in species and habitat diversity, with a conservation easement (CE). The land is highly scenic with views along Indian Memorial Road of a beautiful stream valley—a vibrant meadow flanked by dark green mountain forests. The 389 acres include aspen stands, headwater streams, montane forests with grand old Pacific yews, and rocky meadows supporting biscuitroots and western juniper. Enchanted swampy patches host elephanthead flowers and spirea shrublands.

The diversity of landscapes across this easement area, along with its strategic location, makes for great wildlife habitat. Oregon Vesper Sparrows, currently being petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act, forage in the grasslands. During bird breeding season, the bugling call of Sandhill Cranes

and the winnowing sound of diving Wilson’s Snipe resound in the meadows. The scat of American black bear and Roosevelt elk are sprinkled through the landscape. Pacific fishers and Great Gray Owls are likely present as well as bobcat, cougar, and coyote. The headwaters of a wetland and stream system flows from the property into the recently-renamed Latgawa Creek, within the Little Butte Creek Watershed. This watershed is a high priority for fish conservation in the Rogue Basin, and protecting lands in the upper reaches should help with water quality further downstream.

The now preserved area, within the traditional lands of the Takelma and Latgawa Tribes, had been a historic homestead; a small cabin and some old fenceposts remain. Located within the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, it

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“The 389 acres include aspen stands, headwater streams, montane forests with grand old Pacific yews, and rocky meadows supporting biscuitroots and western juniper.”



Photo: Frank Lospalluto

From the Executive Director

Answering Conservation's Questions, even with cold feet

As in any worthy endeavor, land conservation often raises more questions than answers. Like, “Why am I and several staff and volunteers standing ankle deep in an iced-over vernal pool” whose water measured 0.7 degrees C on a frosty January morning at Whetstone Savanna? Or, “How can this licorice fern patch (pictured below) take hold amid the otherwise arid, eroded cliff face of a potential conservation site” in the Cascade foothills?



The answers—reflecting the enduring lifestyles of flora and fauna that are adapted over the eons to their specific, if widely varying environments—help determine the values and scales that matter for land conservation to be effective. To explore and document these intricate, place-based phenomena is both fascinating and daunting, but necessary to set priorities that deliver the greatest potential in our work. Which scales matter, in which places, in what relation to each other and the broader landscape? How do we protect pieces of the Southern

Oregon mosaic that will last into the far future as a resilient, ecologically meaningful whole?

The rest of this newsletter opens windows into ways that SOLC is digging deep into

these questions. We’re monitoring use of current preserves by sensitive species, each an indicator in its own way of broader ecosystem



health. We’re integrating data with community-based wisdom to update our Conservation Plan, helping to focus our next decade of conservation actions. And we are expanding opportunities for a broader cohort of community members to share in and steward the quiet wonder of living nature that we feel in these places.

Through the commitment of our dedicated staff and board, collaboration with volunteers and schools, and unending generosity of community members supporting this effort, SOLC is on a solid, if sometimes soggy, footing as we keep expanding our questioning in the years to come. We thank you for being a part of our work, for people, for nature, forever.

Steve Wise,
Executive Director



Time is On Your Side: Planned Giving Update

Updates in the federal tax code this year may have expanded the allowable amount and timing for donations known as planned gifts. The age requirements and amounts for retirement funds and certain other charitable gifts present new opportunities to support future conservation right away. With scheduled donations, you get to see the results of your generosity—with potential tax savings—now rather than after your lifetime.

For additional information on dedicating a part of your financial legacy to SOLC, please see our web information on Charitable Giving: plannedgiving.landconserve.org/



Photo: Linda Thomas

Shall We Shrimp?

Last year, we shared the exciting news of several new SOLC-managed properties in the Agate Desert, just north of Medford. These properties (Whetstone Savanna Preserve, Agate Desert Preserve, and Rogue Plains) are mainly comprised of vernal pool-mounded prairie, a unique landform featuring pools that fill with water in the winter and slowly dry in the spring. These marvelous pools also host the federally threatened Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*). As stewards of these preserves, we wanted to see how many pools currently support these incredible invertebrates.

Equipped with nets, data sheets, and the appropriate approvals from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, SOLC staff and volunteers surveyed over 150 unique vernal pools at the Agate Desert Preserve. This project took several days of meticulous monitoring in which the surveyors swished their nets around each pool and investigated the contents. Most pools contained water fleas, flat worms, and seed shrimp, while some also had our target species, the rare Fairy Shrimp. In our preliminary data crunch for the Preserve, we found that approximately 20% of the pools surveyed had the Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp. These ethereal backswimmers continue to inhabit portions of the Agate Desert and we think they are Shrimptastic!



A shrimp in the hand is worth two in the pool

What's New: The Harry & Marilyn Fisher Preserve at Pompadour Bluff

After reviewing a range of options for the future Harry and Marilyn Fisher Preserve, SOLC decided to remove the house at Pompadour Bluff. It would have required extensive repairs and, in this case, residential use was not compatible with a nature preserve. Fortunately, Fire District 5 was conducting a training program. Using the newly replaced bridge to bring heavy fire equipment and water to the site, about 20 fire fighter trainees took down the house in a carefully staged “Burn to Learn” live exercise that eliminated the building but protected



surrounding white oak groves.

Since then, the home site debris was removed, and volunteers cleared interior fencing and pulled noxious weeds. SOLC also held five community hikes and hosted partner visits with groups like the Ashland Youth Advisory Council, Indigenous Gardens Network, and Rogue Valley Audubon Society.

Many baby birds fledged in Pompadour’s rocks and oaks last year, including Common Raven, Red-tailed Hawk, Turkey Vulture, and Violet-green Swallow. Surprisingly, Purple Martins, a large swallow very uncommon in the Rogue Valley, moved into a power pole at the preserve and also raised

young. Students from Southern Oregon University studied reptiles for their capstone project. Bird point counts were also conducted. Staff wrote a management plan which will guide restoration, monitoring, and thoughtful public access that minimizes wildlife disturbance. Near-future plans include building a trail to the summit, where we’ll look forward to sharing the view with more of you. SOLC is grateful to the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund, Gardner Grout Foundation, and, generous partners and individual donors who supported our first year of Pompadour Preserve access, conservation, and monitoring.



SOLC is Updating its Conservation Plan

Our Conservation Plan is a strategic analysis that guides our work. It helps determine where—and why—to prioritize our conservation efforts for the most benefit. SOLC is updating our existing plan (2012-2020) with current ecological information, habitat and species data, and incorporating new strategic elements such as climate resilience and connectivity. Looking ahead, Equity and Indigenous land access will be important priorities.

We are working with the good folks at CoreGIS to integrate the best data available into a prioritization framework. Exciting new trends in conservation make this update timely and relevant. Recent studies have evaluated landscape-level approaches towards conservation. We now have better information about which lands are important corridors for species movement and which lands are important for mitigating the effects of climate change. Planning that considers a changing climate and secures wildlife migration corridors adds resilience to the notion of conserving land in perpetuity.

A fun challenge of conservation, is deciding where and what to conserve: southern Oregon abounds with precious land, distinctive

biodiversity and habitats, and critical water resources. We recently gathered with partners in the community for feedback and thoughts about conservation priorities in our region. SOLC hosted three stakeholder sessions over two days to share the process for updating our plan and to discuss important conservation needs in the region. Thank you to all who participated; there were so many great contributions!

A bit of what we heard from the stakeholder sessions:

Protect cold water resources; riparian areas are great wildlife corridors; protect the mid-elevation zones; be mindful of capacity; look at adjacent lands; be careful of adverse impacts from public access; save the last great places.



Top: CoreGIS consultants leading a discussion of the preliminary plan analysis.

Bottom: Illinois Valley residents reviewing priority area maps with Matt Stevenson of CoreGIS.

We still have more work to do to update our Conservation Plan. Stay tuned for more updates.

Buck Prairie Conservation Easement

(continued from front page)

is adjacent to largely federal lands, most which are designated old growth forests. Protecting lands near other conserved lands is a strategy we employ to maximize the benefit of conservation. In this case, the stream on the property flows across federal land and onto the 354-acre Vesper Meadow, also owned by the same

landowner and protected with a CE.

We are grateful to Cory Ross who purchased both Vesper Meadow and Buck Prairie with conservation as her primary goal. In her own words:

“This land is especially appealing and beautiful, being somewhat healthier than Vesper Meadow. Being within sight of Indian Memorial Road, the property called to us for years until we were able to acquire it. I believe

in conservation since we need to have regenerative spaces to heal the negative impact we, as humans, are having on this planet. It benefits both the planet from our little corner, and also builds community, mutual support and healing within us which feeds my soul. I appreciate working with SOLC because the staff bring great expertise, joy and enthusiasm for conservation and education.”



Bald Eagles at Rogue River Preserve

Photo: Jim Harper

For the past 13 years, retired wildlife biologist Jim Harper rented a helicopter on his own dime to check on nesting raptors across southwest Oregon, particularly Peregrine Falcons. He explains: “I’ve always had an interest in raptors, and with my skill set and time available, I can make a difference by monitoring the birds across southwest Oregon. Raptors are cool.”

From the air last June, Jim spotted nesting Bald Eagles at the Rogue River Preserve. The year before, their large stick nest in a pine had fallen apart and it was unclear where the pair went. On a drizzly day last winter, Jim and an SOLC staff member clambered through

the floodplain forest in search of the new nest tree. They found it in a magnificent black cottonwood along with two adult eagles peering down from a high perch. Jim will discreetly monitor the nest from the ground



Photo: Thomas Craig

until the young fledge. In our region, eagle chicks usually fledge from the nest around July 4th.

In the 1960s, Bald Eagles were down to only 417 nesting pairs, due to habitat loss, hunting, and the toxic effects of DDT. The pesticide was banned in the US in 1973, thanks to Rachel Carson, and Bald Eagles were listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1978. Since delisting in 2007, Bald Eagles continue to recover, doubling in population about every ten years according to US Fish & Wildlife. Recovery of threatened plants and animals takes perseverance, great vision, and a village of people, including inspired folks like Jim Harper.



Youth Education Spreads its Wings

Building on the success of our nature-journalizing field trips at the Rogue River Preserve, we're expanding our education program's reach in Jackson County and beyond. Last summer, we piloted similar programs for youth at three additional conserved properties: Jacksonville Woodlands in Jackson County, and in Josephine County Alder Creek Community Forest and Sourdough Gulch Ranch. Since then we have also adapted the program for younger students at the Twin Creeks riparian easement in Central Point, and for older students at Oredson-Todd Woods in Ashland. No matter where we go, students enjoy exploring the trails, peering through hand lenses, and basking in the quiet magic of nature as they develop scientific and social-emotional skills.



In 2022, we facilitated 1,676 education student days.



2023 Spring Hike Series

Explore, Discover, Enjoy!

Agate Desert Preserve Wildflowers

Wednesday, April 12 | 3–5 p.m.

Pompadour Bluff, Oaks, and Wildlife

Friday, April 14 | 3–5 p.m.

Wonder and Wander at Whetstone

Sunday, April 16 | 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

Open Lands Day – with two hike options – Tour & Flowers*

Saturday, April 22 |
10 a.m. & 1 p.m.

Explore the Bluff – Three afternoon options at Pompadour Bluff

Wednesdays, April 26, May 3,
May 17 | 3–5 p.m.

Birding at Pompadour Bluff with Pepper Trail

Saturday, May 27 | 8–11 a.m.

Open Lands Day with two hike options – Native Bees & Beetles*

Saturday, June 3 |
10 a.m. & 1 p.m.

Jacksonville Woodlands History Tour with Chelsea Rose

Sunday, June 18 |
9 a.m.–12 p.m.

Walk 'n Work for Wildlife at Vesper Meadows

Friday, June 23 |
11 a.m.–3 p.m.

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 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.

**At Rogue River Preserve*



Southern Oregon
LAND
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Our Mission

Conserving and enhancing land in Southern Oregon to sustain our human and natural communities forever

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- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
- Responsible Governance
- Lasting Stewardship

Wild Woad Workshop

On May 18 and 21, SOLC will offer a unique two-day event that combines invasive species eradication, crafting, and just a bit of chemistry. Participants will learn how to identify and remove the invasive Dyer's Woad (*Isatis tinctoria*), extract the blue pigment, and dye a skein of wool yarn or cotton linen. For more info visit landconserve.org/events.



Photo: Luke Wimmer



Dyer's Woad plant and hat dyed with Dyer's Woad



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Coalition Raises Prospects for I-5 Wildlife Crossing

By Amy Amhrein, SOLC Board Member & SOWCC Co-coordinator

In Spring 2021, a coalition of 17 conservation-minded organizations formed the Southern Oregon Wildlife Crossing Coalition (SOWCC) to plan a series of safe wildlife crossings across Interstate 5 between Ashland and California. Project goals support protecting biodiversity in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument region and reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions. SOLC plays a key role in the coalition by helping to connect private lands to this effort.

Studies show that wildlife

crossings consistently cut the number of large animal-vehicle collisions by more than 80%, helping migratory wildlife access habitats and maintain their genetic diversity, while reducing injuries and the high cost of collisions.

SOWCC recently completed a Conceptual Design Report evaluating wildlife crossing opportunities at eight sites. Two wildlife overpasses rose to top priority: Barron Creek north of Siskiyou Summit, and Mariposa Preserve just north of the California border. Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) will conduct



engineering designs for the project in 2023 using funds allocated by the Oregon Legislature. This project has been identified as a priority in the amended State Transportation Improvement Plan.

As soon as the new federal Wildlife Crossing Pilot Grant Program is announced, ODOT and SOWCC will apply for federal funds for construction dollars, aiming to begin construction in 2024 or 2025.

Conservation Celebration

We look forward to gathering with you on Saturday, May 13 in the evening to celebrate 45 years of SOLC's conservation leadership and accomplishment at this year's Conservation Celebration. Join us for a night of poetry, reflection, games, and anticipation of more



SAVE
the DATE
May 13



Photos: Steve Addington

land protection to come. We'll have a silent auction filled with experiences, original art (some by staff craftspeople), and more. Tickets will be available beginning March 31. Look for an update on our website or call our office for more details.

If you represent a business or other organization which would like to become a sponsor of this year's event, contact our new Philanthropy Director Jade Chavis (jade@landconserve.org).