



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist

by Jim Anderson

Healing and loving the land

Several years ago, while conducting some fence lizard business at the Deschutes Land Trust's Metolius Preserve, I ran into Amanda Egertson, the Land Trust's stewardship director. She was conducting a restoration project on the preserve with a vigor I found remarkable, planting grass over and over and over, day after day.

The Metoilus Preserve was once a picnic ground for the old Brooks-Scanlon Lumber firm in Bend. In that capacity the land was trampled and most of the native ground cover was no longer there, and what was had been eaten down to nubbins by deer and elk. In spite of this degradation, there are three species of native lizards living there: sagebrush, fence and horned.

Amanda loves the land and decided to make things right again by planting native grasses in the preserve. As a result, the mule deer thought they'd died and gone to heaven; here were these beautiful, luscious grass plugs suddenly appearing on their land and all they had to do was be patient and the ones they ate would soon be replaced.

And that's the way it went until Amanda hit on the right deer repellent (rotten eggs and garlic) to coat the soil around the grass. But that took quite a while and lots and lots of grass, dedication and patience to work out.

The preserve is healing, and you should see the thriving grasses now!

Well, it just so happens that Brent Fenty of the newly organized Oregon Desert Land Trust (ODLT) is about to do something similar. He has his eye on some small chunks of private land located in a BLM Wilderness Study Area southeast of Bend.

The Diablo Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) is one of the largest in the United States, spanning 118,794 acres and is located about an hour southeast of Bend. The topography of this area varies from salt flats in the west to steep escarpments in the east and is home to mule deer, pronghorn antelope and golden eagles. One of the oldest studied prehistoric sites in North America, Paisley Cave, is also nearby.

Here's the way Brent's trying to make it work: For \$46 an acre, anyone can contribute to the permanent conservation of this area that is home to wildlife gems such as migratory birds and desert big-horn sheep, within the BLM's Diablo Mountain Wilderness Study Area in northern Lake County.

If you want to take a look at what properties are available, you can view each acre by going to www.conserve.org, select the acre you like, then buy it at a bargain-basement price. You'll receive additional information regarding the natural values of the property, plus the latitude and longitude of the acre if you want to visit it.

Each donation is matched four-fold: At \$46 per acre, the donor is paying ? of the acre's cost, which triggers matching funds from ODLT and Global Wildlife Conservation, for a total purchase price of \$182 per acre. ODLT is covering all legal, management and administration costs, and www.conserve.org is paying for credit

card fees.

All donations made through www.conserve.org go directly to purchasing the land.

Oregon's high desert, although composed of significant areas of public land, also contains tracts of private land that are critical to wildlife habitat, unique ecosystems and scenic values. Securing these inholdings furthers restoration and conservation efforts in the region and provides access to the parcels and surrounding public lands.

Unfortunately, like millions of acres of land throughout Oregon, the Diablo Mountain Wilderness was pounded hard by early sheep and cattle grazing. Ecosystems have been destroyed by continued cattle grazing, which has never given the land the opportunity to heal from the abuse of the mid-1800s.

The BLM, in its eagerness to create cow pastures that have replaced native vegetation, hasn't helped matters much. However, management of the Diablo Wilderness Study Area is going to change things.

If ODLT can get all those tiny parcels of private ground into their conservation plan, the ecosystems within those areas will be restored, wildlife habitat first and foremost; then cattle will be welcomed onto the land, but with strict guidelines. There will be no more of that old saying, "eat everything in sight, boys, and we'll get more tomorrow."

The largest private acreage within the wilderness study area is known as Lost Cabin, which is near the 750-mile-long Oregon Desert Trail. There are natural artesian springs very near the old cabin. Some fascinating geological interactions with sand and springs have created unique land forms around the cabin, making the area especially important

for water-birds and spring dwellers. It is also a very important source of water for thru-hikers over a pretty dry stretch of trail.

Diablo Mountain has a series of active golden eagle nests on it which are being watched over carefully by the Oregon Eagle Foundation.

The parcels of land under ODLT's protection are a significant part of the high desert ecosystem and contain key elements for sage grouse and golden eagle populations of the area. The combination of ODLT and [conserve.org](http://www.conserve.org) making it possible for these historical private lands to be returned to productive ecosystems will be a treasure for the nature of the area for years to come.

I'm in, how about you...?

(Jess – Breakout following in V-Day "Card")

I agree with Aldo Leopold when he wrote, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

"If the land mechanism as a whole is good then every part is good, whether we understand it or not...To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering."



Amanda planting grass. Vital part of a healthy ecosystem: sagebrush orb weaver spider (photos by Jim Anderson (3) Jim hugging a baby golden eagle who was about to hurt itself. (4) Lost Cabin (Photo provided) Please mask all photos with a Valentine Day's "Heart."



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