

Hiking the Applegate

BY JANEEN SATHRE

This year has been a challenge for me to do one of my favorite things here in the Applegate: Hike. In the early spring, when I like to shake out the kinks from my winter nap, it was still cold and rainy. Every time I thought about heading out to some of the lower elevation trails, rain clouds would settle in and, if that wasn't enough, many times it wasn't rain, but snow. Some people were happy about this snow and I would have to say I was not unhappy, but I did stick around the warm fireplace much more than getting outside and hiking.

When I finally did hit the trails, I was pleasantly surprised to find them better than ever. Thanks to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the wonderful volunteers of SUTA (Siskiyou Upland Trails Association) the Sterling Mine Ditch is in fabulous shape for hiking or horseback riding. There are five portals for accessing this trail system. Three points of entry are on Little Applegate Road after the pavement ends—Bear Gulch, Tunnel Ridge, and the Little Applegate Trailhead. Off Sterling Creek Road, you can access the BLM road, Armstrong Gulch, where you will find two more trailheads—Armstrong Gulch and Demming Gulch. Maps are available at the BLM offices in Medford.

This trail system provides some

sensational views of the Little Applegate Valley with snowcapped mountains as a backdrop. In the spring, the south-facing hillsides are filled with all colors of wildflowers, and in the shady draws, there are some of the biggest trees I have seen. The best part of this trail system is you can do the parts that fit your physical ability. Armstrong Gulch is easy, the ditch/

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trail crosses the road and the ditch has no noticeable grade whether you go left or right. The Bear Gulch or Tunnel Ridge trails will give you a bit of a climb for about half a mile and then you walk the flat ditch line. Then, if you want something with a little more of a workout, start at the Little Applegate Trailhead.

The next surprise for me was hiking the BLM roads and trails on the headwalls of Forest Creek. In all my years (not quite as old as the hills) here in the Applegate, I never ventured into the Forest Creek area—shame on me. There are views up there of the Little Applegate



Valley to the Lower Applegate, down into Humbug Creek and all the way to the top of Thompson Creek. Grayback Mountain, Preston Peak, the Red Buttes, Dutchman Peak, Roxy Ann, Mount McLoughlin, Crater Lake Rim, and Mount Isabelle. Yes, I just did a 360-degree view standing in one spot. We won't even talk about flowers in the spring; I gave up counting the varieties, too much of an overload.

Thanks go to David Calahan and the new ATA (Applegate Trails Association) for giving me a tour and articulating the wonderful vision of a trail system for hikers and horseback riders from Forest Creek to Grants Pass. Beginning with a proposal for 5,800 acres to become Wellington Wildlands and ridgeline trails to run for many miles, they have their work cut out for them. In the meantime, the BLM road to Mount Isabelle will give you opportunities to hike right here in the middle of the Applegate Valley.

Someday, the trails systems I have mentioned may tie into the BLM's Enchanted Forest and Felton Trails. This trail system begins at the end of Slagle Creek and is a great spring trail with giant trillium flowers in the creek area and a great autumn trail with the big leaf maples in all their golden glory. I really enjoy hiking the Enchanted Forest, with a stop afterward at one of the beautiful wineries where I kick back and savor the taste of our spectacular Applegate Valley.

The beauty of these trails is their easier access and more year-round availability than the higher-elevation trails of the Red Buttes or Dutchman Peak areas, which even now, on the first of July, are covered with snow. And no, Maggie, I am not going to borrow your snowshoes.

Happy trails!
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Growing agripreneurs: A farmer incubator program and partnership

BY MELISSA MATTHEWSON

The Southern Oregon Farmer Incubator program is a collaborative of organizations working to train new and beginning farmers. The collaboration between Thrive, Rogue Farm Corps, Oregon State University Extension and the Friends of Family Farmers has created a three-year training program with various components. One of these components is a new project launched at the Southern Oregon Research & Extension Center (SOREC) this spring called Growing Agripreneurs. This project is funded by the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crop Program and run by the OSU Small Farms Program. In essence, Growing Agripreneurs consists of a one-acre teaching farm located at SOREC with a cohort of nine beginning farmers who are working and learning how to design and manage a new farm business. The focus is on the production of horticultural crops, but other topics related to all agricultural enterprises like record-keeping, crop planning and organic certification have also been included.

A part-time farm manager, Shaina Bronstein (also owner of Walker Creek Farm), manages the one-acre plot and has split the one-acre into various quadrants

for demonstration, teaching and ease of management. The plot has mostly been fallow for several years, so cover crops and grains have been planted to build soil fertility. Wheat and barley are growing on a ¼ acre each and will be nearing harvest by mid-summer. Two types of cover crops are growing as well—an oat and pea mix and a straight clover mix. Perennials that have been planted include hops, strawberries and raspberries and there are plans to include herbs and other perennials. Annual vegetables and flowers are growing on two quadrants and mostly consist of summer crops like

tomatoes, eggplants, melons and squash. At this time, the produce generated from the one-acre plot will be donated to local food banks and pantries. The plot is currently being managed organically with the intent of certifying the plot organic in the coming year. Because the plot is located on the Southern Oregon Experiment Station, the farm manager has access to equipment and other farming resources through the research and extension branch. As this is the pilot year of the program, we are learning what it takes to run a teaching farm. We have identified a number of things to improve on next year, including building a proper greenhouse, securing irrigation lines as well as timing irrigation.

The cohort is a diverse set of participants ranging in age and experience and most of

them come from the Ashland and Medford area. One participant currently grows vegetables for a retreat center outside of Ashland and another has inherited land that he is interested in developing into a vegetable farm. One participant installs gardens for urban residents and another is farming an urban plot in Medford. Another participant runs a successful creamery, but has acreage he is interested in developing into a farm. All are mostly new to farming

within the last few years and have hopes of developing sustainable and profitable farms. Shaina Bronstein says, "Students

are observing the components that go into building a small farming enterprise, from planning to implementation. They are getting hands on time working in the field and the small setting allows for in depth discussions about each participant's farming goals. Participants can focus on identifying and building those particular skills required for their individual situations."

The nine participants must volunteer two hours a week on the teaching farm and work alongside the farm manager, which allows ample opportunity for questions and interaction. Volunteering on the farm allows participants to take pride in the work and the farm as well as learn how to grow on a scale that could lead to a commercial enterprise. The participants also receive one-on-one attention from Extension faculty and the farm manager. In addition to the volunteer hours, there are monthly skill-building sessions that focus in-depth on various topics including cultivation, irrigation, and greenhouse

seeding. Each participant is responsible for keeping a notebook and making notes and observations during farm walks.

There are also an additional five classes throughout the growing season, including the basics of horticulture, irrigation, pest management, equipment and soil fertility. For these classes, OSU Extension faculty provides resources and education as well as call on other Extension and agricultural professionals to provide education. Participants are also able to attend farm tours and classes held by Rogue Farm Corps in addition to the educational offerings through OSU. Many of them will have access to a produce subsidy program and an online farmers' market as outlets for their produce. Both of those programs are administered by THRIVE. These are the many ways that we are working with other organizations to build a comprehensive beginning farmer program for southern Oregon.

We hope to continue expanding the farm over time by taking on some additional acreage and adding livestock in the future. Currently, the project is limited by having access to capital and grant funds to run and expand the farm. We hope to put up a greenhouse this winter and add more classes during the 2012 growing season. If you are interested in being a part of the program or have questions, please contact Maud Powell or Melissa Matthewson at the Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center.

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