

Applegate stonecrop worth protecting

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

Sedum oblancheolatum, otherwise known by its common name, Applegate stonecrop, is a succulent perennial plant. As its name implies, Applegate stonecrop grows almost exclusively in the Applegate River watershed, making it an Applegate endemic. An endemic plant is one that is native to a well-defined geographical area and grows only in that area. This pretty, rock-loving plant is found primarily in the Jackson County portion of the watershed, but some plants can be found in the Josephine County portion, as well as the Siskiyou County, California, portion. The only population found outside the watershed is in the headwaters of Seiad Creek on the south side of the Siskiyou Crest above the Klamath River, but very few plants exist there.

The conservation status of Applegate stonecrop gets confusing because the Applegate River watershed is located across two states (Oregon and California), and two federal agencies (the forest service and the Bureau of Land Management) each have their own classification. In Oregon, the forest service used to list Applegate stonecrop as a “sensitive” species; this gave it extra protection during federal project planning (e.g., timber sales, mining, road construction, etc.). The Oregon Biodiversity Information

Center now includes Applegate stonecrop on List 4, which means, federally, it has conservation concerns and requires continued monitoring, but is not currently threatened or endangered. This listing can include plants that are very rare but have a secure population, like Applegate stonecrop. The Oregon Department of Agriculture (Plant Division) lists Applegate stonecrop as a candidate for the state’s threatened or endangered list. In California, where Applegate stonecrop is even more geographically limited, the species is given the status of “rare and endangered” by the California Native Plant Society.

The Applegate Valley has many special, rare and endangered plant species (including nine other sedum species), but no other can claim the Applegate as its namesake. Applegate stonecrop can be found growing on dry, exposed rocky slopes and rock outcrops up to 5,700 feet in elevation. It blooms from June to July and has cream or pale yellow flowers. A chance sighting of this rare plant in flower is a treat—it puts on quite a showy display considering the harsh conditions in which it happily grows. The fleshy succulent leaves form dense, attractive rosettes that can be easily distinguished from other native sedums found in the Applegate.



Applegate stonecrop is a succulent perennial plant that grows almost exclusively in the Applegate River watershed.

Unlike the other sedums you’ll see around, the leaves of Applegate stonecrop are very glaucous, meaning that they are covered with a white waxy powder. The fleshy leaves of stonecrops are an adaptation for enduring drought in their usually dry habitats. Sedum, from the Latin *sedeo* (“to sit”), is an appropriate name for a plant that apparently “sits” steadfastly in a rocky stronghold.

Ethnobotanical documentation shows Native Americans used the fleshy leaves of many kinds of sedums. Northwest tribes are known to have eaten the leaves raw and cooked, and to have used the plant as a female tonic and many other medicinal uses. I have not found specific

documentation regarding the use of Applegate stonecrop by the Dakubetede, who originally inhabited the Applegate Valley before the European invasion, but I would guess that they also used it.

It is my desire in highlighting this local beauty to inspire Applegaters to seek out the rare, endemic and special plants right here in our own low-elevation foothills. The amazingly diverse botanical wealth of the Applegate is something we should all be proud of and work hard to protect.

Get out for a hike this spring and relish the wildlands of the Applegate!

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