

USFS taking action: Trash mars headwater streams of Applegate River

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

Mattresses, beer bottles, car parts, broken camping gear, plastic wrappers, carpets, diapers, bags of household garbage—these are some of the many items dumped by campers and recreationalists on headwater streams of the Applegate River, namely the Middle Fork of the Applegate, Carberry Creek and Elliott Creek. Nestled at the base of the Siskiyou Crest and the Red Buttes Wilderness, this area is one of the Applegate Valley's premier recreation areas, including the Middle Fork National Recreation Trail. It is not uncommon that large bags of left-behind trash are torn apart and strewn about by wildlife on the banks of these beautiful mountain streams.

From the gold rush era up until the 1980s, there were cabins on federal mining claims on these streams; however, fast forward to 2015 and these old cabin sites have become de facto camping and recreation spots—what the US Forest Service (USFS) calls “dispersed recreation.” Because this area is not an official campground, there is no trash service, campsite maintenance, or fees.

“Trash is an ongoing problem primarily during the hot summer months when visitor use is higher and people want to camp,” said Brian Long, recreation program manager for the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

Brian couldn't say for sure why this problem is occurring, but he attributed it in part to the growth of the Rogue Valley. “With more and more people moving there, visitation has increased and oftentimes more visitation means more trash,” he pointed out. He thought another reason could be a lack of education on proper camping techniques. “Many of the

people who camp there are inexperienced and infrequent campers and aren't fully aware of the ‘pack it in, pack it out’ procedures,” he said. “In some instances I suspect that dumping trash there is a cheaper alternative than taking it to a legal dump. In fact, last year on a district clean-up day I found a discarded lawn mower.”

USFS has tried to address this issue for years through patrols of the area by fire prevention staff, recreation personnel and law enforcement, sometimes handing out trash bags to visitors and campers. They have also installed educational and informational signs to encourage trash removal and organized clean-up days with local partners, residents, and volunteers.

The efforts of USFS are often stymied because a large portion of the area affected by this trash dumping is just over the border in California. “Some of our partners who help with our recreation projects are restricted to specific counties or states, so we can't use their services in the Middle Fork area, since it is in California and not Oregon, or in Siskiyou County and not Jackson County. Also, at times the number of visitors is overwhelming for our current workforce and we are not able to spend the amount of time there that may be necessary to adequately address the problem,” Brian said.

Because of these challenges, the USFS is looking to take further action. “The Middle Fork is a nice area—great swimming, nice scenery, good hiking—and it is free. We don't want to block all access, but ideally we would like to either charge the visitors or change their thinking so they take better care of

the area. Last year we visited all the campsites to determine future management of each, and we are working toward blocking off or installing barriers to discourage use in some locations. We have also talked about developing a closure order that would restrict alcohol consumption, which might help with the party atmosphere that has developed there,” Brian said.

In Curry County, on the southern Oregon coast, a group of local citizens formed a nonprofit group called the Trash Dogs (www.trashdogs.org) to tackle a similar problem in their area. Its mission statement: “The Trash Dogs is a volunteer organization dedicated to maintaining trash-free national forestlands and all roads in Curry County, Oregon.” Its motto: “Cleaning up the forest, one big pile at a time.” Some expenses are funded through USFS via Title II grant funds.

According to Donna Mickley, Siskiyou Mountains district ranger, the Trash Dogs have been an incredible asset for the national forest. “If there were volunteers willing to assist us in a similar way with cleanup in these dispersed recreation sites during the summer months, it would help us immensely,” said Donna. Having participated in camp cleanups



Carpets are clearly visible in this trashed dispersed campsite on the Middle Fork of the Applegate River. Photo by Suzie Savoie.



Another trashed dispersed campsite, this one on Elliott Creek. Photo by Suzie Savoie.

in the Middle Fork area, Donna knows firsthand what kind of trash is dumped or left behind by campers.

Applegaters take pride in the quality of the public land that surrounds the valley, and many want to see the Middle Fork area treated with the respect it deserves. “It would be nice to see visitors take care of it as if it were their own backyard. Since it is public land, in many ways it is every US citizen's backyard,” said Brian.

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Boy Scouts clean gravestones in Logtown Cemetery

Logtown Cemetery welcomed another visit from Boy Scout Troop 7. Connor McKeehan, who is working towards his Eagle Scout badge, proposed a community service project that would facilitate the cleaning of headstone markers in the cemetery. Connor and members of his troop, friends, and family, spent hours cleaning 400 gravestones in the oldest part of the cemetery.

Although many volunteers come together to clean the property twice a year, very little time is available to maintain gravestones—many markers were unreadable because of years of neglect. The people who are buried in the cemetery were pioneers, veterans, and people who helped shape southern Oregon. Because of Connor and his team, their names and the



dates of their lives are visible once more. One individual was born in 1796; another had a fishing pole, line, lure, and a trout engraved into the marker—all previously unknown to us and now visible to all.

Thank you Boy Scout Troop 7.
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