

## OPINIONS

## River Right: It's for the birds!

BY TOM CARSTENS

When I'm on the river, I love to watch the American dipper, also known as the water ouzel (*Cinclus mexicanus*). It's better than a video game! This little guy finds all his food beneath the surface of fast-moving water. Dippers can swim, so they produce a lot of protective oil for their feathers, have special eyelids that let them see under water, nostrils that close, and a dense bone structure—all good adaptations for a critter that can stay submerged for up to 30 seconds. Out on the rocks, he's a real clown—bobbing and weaving like a drunken sailor and flashing white when he blinks.

I've got birds on my mind. I just returned from a three-week camping trip to the Arizona desert to watch birds. Well, to be more accurate, to watch my wife watch birds. "What's wrong with the birds here?" an Applegate Valley friend asked me. I don't have the answer to that question; it's not within my purview. I just carry the bins.

Although dippers tend to stick around all year, most birds migrate. So my wife likes to watch them as they transit through Mexico to points north. Literally hundreds of species make the journey. They like to take a break in the mountain clusters that rise precipitously from the desert floor. This trip my wife added about seven new species to her life list. We've done this before.

One of her favorite places is the Ramsey Canyon Preserve owned by The Nature Conservancy high in the Huachuca Mountains near the border southeast of Tucson. Migrating birds seek respite in this cool, lush riparian zone.

I like The Nature Conservancy (TNC). We've been members for decades. When we first moved to the Applegate Valley 12 years ago, I volunteered with the local chapter and was assigned to pull thousands of non-native plants from the floor of the Agate Desert. It was pretty boring, but they bribed me with great cookies, so I kept at it.

What I like about this group is that they're environmentalists who don't scold you. As far as I can tell, they don't sue you either. They just try and work things out. What a concept. They actually sit down with landowners, government, industry, and others to figure out best outcomes. They've come up with some innovative, science-based conservation approaches that have actually kept a lot of precious land from being commercialized, industrialized, or compartmentalized. They negotiate in good faith and show stakeholders how they can profit while preserving nature's bounty. A local group, the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy, works deals in much the same way. Google them

American dipper feeding its youngster.  
Photo: Bob Armstrong.



up—they're a nice bunch and have great programs.

We've been hearing a lot about political deals in the news lately. In my mind, a good deal is fair to all parties and moves the ball forward. It's good for us and good for wildlife, including the birds.

TNC recently featured an interesting article in their journal about new ornithological research at the University of Washington. Dr. John Marzluff and his graduate students have determined that, although wild reserves provide shelter for lots of unique birds, the suburbs are literally bustling with them. This was a surprise to me. Marzluff published a book, *Welcome to Subirdia: Sharing Our Neighborhoods with Wrens, Robins, Woodpeckers, and Other Wildlife*. It turns out that wherever we live, we tend to create lots of different kinds of habitat. Residential zones can actually foster diversity of bird species. Think about all the different landscapes in the Applegate Valley.

Marzluff came up with something he calls "Nature's Ten Commandments." I know we technically don't live in the burbs, but I thought that his ideas might be adaptable by us here in the Applegate.

I've summarized them in the sidebar.

The presence or absence of birds tells a lot. I know that when a dipper is working at my lunch spot, it means the water is clean and the river is healthy. And what a show!

See you on the river.

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## Marzluff's Ten Commandments

Adapted slightly for Applegaters

- 1. Keep your lawn small.** Devote more of the land around your house to native species, gardens, ponds, etc. This kind of landscape is easier to care for, requires less fertilizer, and saves a lot of water. The birds will love it.
- 2. Keep your cat indoors.** Our feline pets kill wild birds by the billions.
- 3. Make your windows visible to birdies.** Go ahead and wash your windows, but try applying decals or striping. Just five percent coverage will do the job.
- 4. Don't light up the night sky.** Use outdoor lighting only when necessary and face lights downward. Think of the owls.
- 5. Provide food, water, and nest sites.** Leave some dead snags for nesting cavities and food. Hummingbirds love sage blossoms.
- 6. Don't kill the predators.** The toxins we use to control insects and rodents are deadly to hawks and eagles.
- 7. Foster a diversity of habitats.** Let the birds landscape for you. "Birdscaping" is chaotic, but beautiful and natural. And a lot less work.
- 8. Make wildlife-safe zones.** Leave corridors of natural grass and shrubs on your property. The birds will dine in style.
- 9. Work with local authorities.** Protect our parks and riparian zones. Cantrall Buckley and Fish Hatchery parks are bonanzas for ducks, herons, eagles, and other wildlife.
- 10. Cherish what we have.** Did you know that ecologists consider southern Oregon one of the most biologically diverse spots in the country?  
Conserve what you can and enjoy!

## BLM releases proposed changes to Resource Management Plan: Applegate Valley residents weigh in

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently released its proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) for western Oregon. This huge, 2000-plus page document proposes some major changes in how the BLM manages 2.6 million acres of federal land in western Oregon, an area currently managed under the Northwest Forest Plan. The changes relate to how the BLM makes decisions on a range of issues including water quality, recreation, wildlife habitat, and logging.

If implemented, the BLM's new RMP will drop both the Dakubetede and Wellington Wildlands from their currently inventoried status as "Lands with Wilderness Characteristics." Dakubetede is in the Little Applegate Valley—you hike straight through it on the Sterling Ditch Mine Trail. Wellington Wildlands is in the Middle Applegate Valley between Ruch and Applegate on the ridges above Forest Creek, Humbug Creek, and Highway 238.

By dropping the status of these areas as Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, the BLM will remove important environmental protections from some of the Applegate Valley's most intact

habitats and cherished recreational areas. This will enable the BLM to log the small amounts of timber from these mostly oak woodland, chaparral, and grassland areas, degrading the wilderness character, the wildlife habitat, and the recreational experience.

The Proposed RMP will also drop the status of the Applegate watershed as an Adaptive Management Area (AMA). Designated in 1994, the Applegate AMA helped engage local residents in the BLM planning process, and it mandated that innovative and adaptive forest management techniques would be implemented in the Applegate.

Applegate Valley residents and nonprofit groups are currently reading through the hefty document to figure out how the new plans for our public BLM lands will further affect the Applegate Valley. Below are some of their initial reactions to the proposed changes:

"Recent revelations regarding widespread overcutting of spotted owl habitat in the Medford District, compounded by significant blowdown of trees in recently thinned forest stands, mean that BLM thought it had much more spotted owl habitat than actually

exists. Therefore, calculations underlying the RMP that quantify harvest levels, land allocations, and wildlife habitat are based on inaccurate information." —Chant Thomas, Threatened and Endangered Little Applegate Valley

"The BLM is mandated to protect watershed and streamflow and, with our hotter, drier summers and decreasing water flow, they are failing by cutting the riparian reserves in half. The trees they cut are essential to protect the streams for salmon habitat and water conservation." —Cheryl Bruner, Williams Community Forest Project

"BLM's Proposed RMP threatens to compound watershed issues already threatened by lax and under-enforced ODF [Oregon Department of Forestry] logging regulations on private lands. It is unwise to increase logging on public lands while rural and urban communities are already feeling the negative effects of the last 50-plus years of intense logging, which has led to water quality degradation and an increase in fuel loads and fire intensity. What we need is ecologically appropriate management based on community safety and fire resiliency, and not on the false pretext that the timber industry is going to create jobs." —Lydia Doleman, Speak for the Trees

"BLM continues to kick the OHV [Off Highway Vehicles] issue down the road. If I were grading this RMP, they'd get an 'incomplete.'" —Jack Duggan

"I will mourn the loss of the Applegate Adaptive Management Area and the Lands with Wilderness Characteristics." —Luke Ruediger, Klamath Forest Alliance

"It's unfortunate that the BLM is still operating from an outdated mindset. The new plan lacks recognition of the importance of carbon storage in our forests. It weakens stream buffers, which affect wildlife and fish. The BLM should be embracing the expanding recreation economy and emphasizing forest health rather than increasing the number of board feet produced by our forests." —Marion Hadden, Applegate Neighborhood Network

"If enacted, BLM's RMP would be devastating to businesses like ours, and to wineries, organic family farms, recreation, and other businesses that depend on the beautiful ambiance and natural services provided by these BLM lands in our neighborhoods, including the official Oregon State Scenic Trail, the 30-plus mile historic Sterling Mine Ditch Trail." —Susanna Bahaar, Director, Birch Creek Arts and Ecology Center

The 30-day protest period for the proposed changes to the RMP is now over, and the BLM will soon release their final record of decision. To read the BLM's proposed RMP, visit [www.blm.gov/or/plans/rmpswesternoregon](http://www.blm.gov/or/plans/rmpswesternoregon).

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