

ATA takes Ruch School elementary students on the East ART

BY DIANA COOGLE

On Earth Day 2018, as though she knew she was being celebrated, Earth put on her brightest spring demeanor—her face all shining with blue sky, her hillside coats of grass embroidered with wildflowers. So appareled, she was a ready welcome to students from Ruch Outdoor Community School (ROCS), assembled for a hike on the East ART (East Applegate Ridge Trail). Applegate Trails Association (ATA) chair, David Calahan, and I, along with board member Mike Kohn, were there to tell the children something about the landscape they were hiking through, how the trail was built, and other tidbits of ecological interest.

I was there, in particular, to identify wildflowers for the kids and give them fun ways to recognize trees (e.g., to distinguish between Jeffrey pines and Ponderosa pines, squeeze the cone. If it pricks you, it's Prickly Ponderosa. If it doesn't, it's Gentle Jeffrey)—or to remember names of flowers (e.g., a mnemonic for Ceanothus is "See I know this"). However, I was with a group of about 25 second- and third-graders, who were too young to be interested in flower identification. (David, with a similar group of older students, was more successful in actually transmitting knowledge.) A child would point to a flower, ask its name, then keep on walking without noting the answer. My lessons evaporated into the spring air.

No matter. The trail itself was doing the teaching. As we traversed a steep hillside, with views of the snowy Siskiyou Crest beyond and of the Ruch valley below, one little girl marveled at the height: "Look how high we are," she said, and her friend answered, authoritatively, "That drops 300 feet." (She was close. It actually drops 1,800 feet from the trail to the valley floor.)

"How do they make it so beautiful?" one girl asked. The boy behind her said, off-handedly, "It's nature, you know."

The boy in front of me kept saying, "I'm afraid of heights" in a thin voice. I told him to look at the trail, not at the valley. His friend stuck close by and occasionally steadied him with a hand on his shoulder. In spite of his acrophobia, he wouldn't turn back and hiked through to the end.

I pointed out a patch of popcorn flowers as we passed them, naming them for whoever was interested. A boy turned around to say, "I don't know flowers, but I do know rocks," and he proceeded to give me a pretty good geology lesson, naming rocks on the trail. Overhearing our conversation, the girl in front of him said she had a rock shop and was selling rocks. She wanted to raise \$1,000, with which to buy dolls.

The children walked about a mile on the East ART. To some it seemed a long hike. "Can we go back?" "What if we miss the bus?" "How many more kilometers is



Students from ROCS hiking on the East ART on Earth Day. Photo: Mike Kohn.

it?" (What a cosmopolitan kid, I thought.) Children were given the opportunity to turn back, but no one wanted to. The trail held a kind of fascination for them, whether they knew it or not, the best kind of lesson for Earth Day.

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— Upcoming ATA hikes —

July 15: Enchanted Forest. Moderate. Three hours, not including an after-hike stop at Wooldridge Winery for wine and charcuterie. Bring lunch or eat at the winery. Meet at Applegate Store at 9 am. Led by Mike Kohn (utttohhh@gmail.com).

August 4: Mt. Elijah. Difficult but beautiful, with great views of the Siskiyou and one of the best wildflower displays in the Applegate. Five hours. Meet at Applegate Store at 9 am. Led by Diana Coogle (dicoog@gmail.com).

For all hikes: Be prepared for the weather, wear appropriate shoes, and bring water and lunch.

You can help keep trails open

■ APPLGATE TRAILS

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inviting when not crowded by encroaching brush or blocked by fallen trees. With trail-maintenance funding cuts, federal agencies are prioritizing the trails they maintain or close. You can help keep trails open by using them and registering at trailheads where that opportunity is provided.

You can also join any of several organizations that maintain trails in the Applegate. Even as new trails are being proposed and planned—some just beginning a lengthy environmental assessment process—nature is reclaiming others because of decreased use and funding cuts.

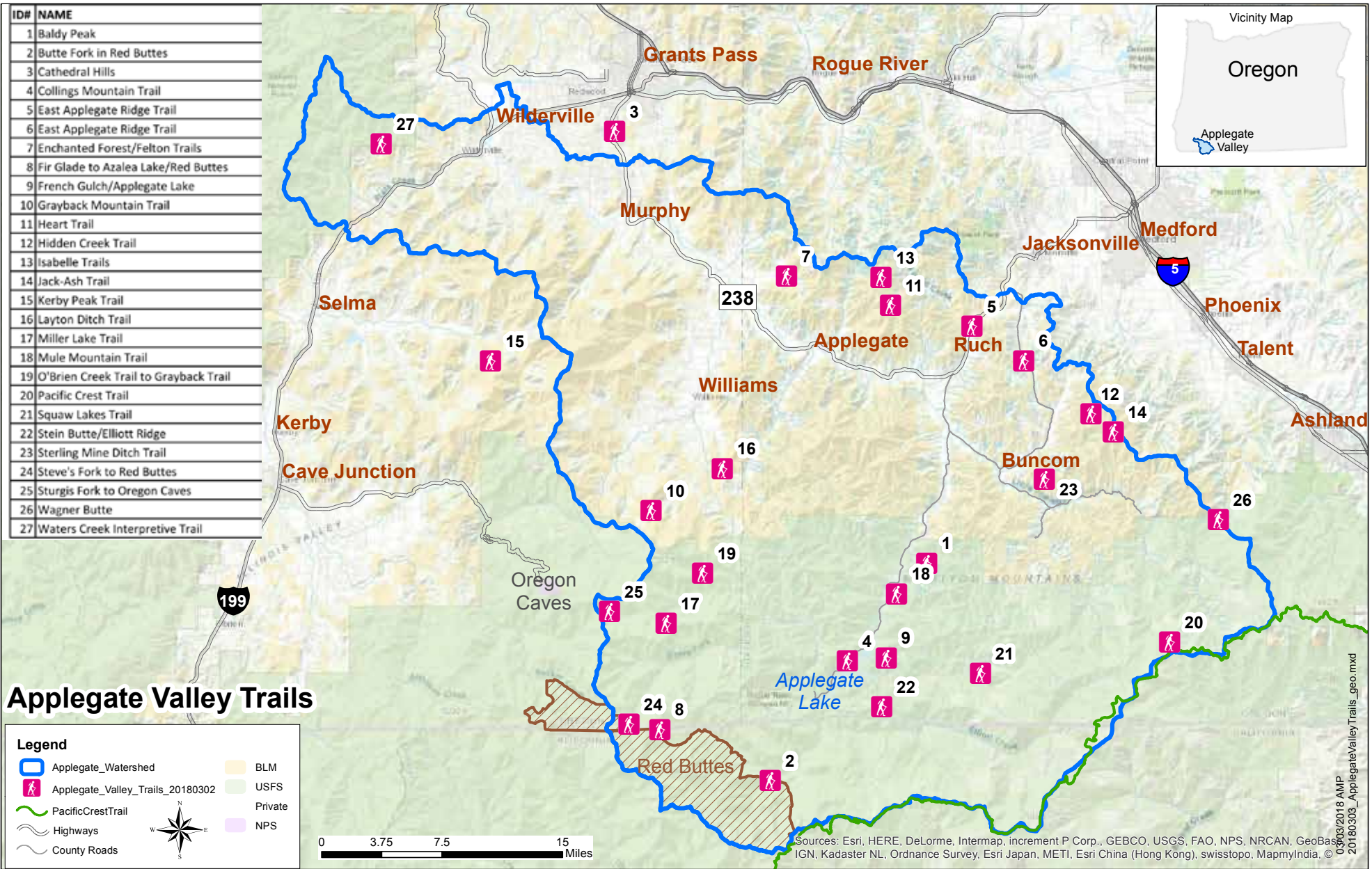
Applegate Valley Connect website

Visit the Projects section of the Applegate Valley Connect website at applegateconnect.org/projects to learn more about trails in the Applegate Watershed and the volunteer organizations that help to maintain them. The accompanying overview map (see below) shows many trail locations in our watershed—you might plan your next adventure on a trail you didn't know was there!

While you're on the Projects page, check out the other projects described there and consider posting a community project that you're passionate about.

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The Applegate Valley Trails map below was created by Annette Parsons.





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