

Happy Birthday, ATA!

BY DAVID CALAHAN

Happy Birthday! The Applegate Trails Association is eight years old!

Like some people, rather than receive gifts we prefer to give a gift in celebration. Our gift is to the community. What is it? It is a new trailhead at the west end of the East Applegate Ridge Trail (the ART).

Located on Highway 238 between Longanecker Road and Forest Creek Road, 400 feet uphill from the highway, the trailhead has a gravel parking area for 12 vehicles, a picnic table, and an informational kiosk. Thanks to a Travel Oregon grant, trail users will no longer need to park their cars on the opposite side of the highway and then run a gauntlet of speeding vehicles to access the trail.

The 5.5-mile East ART, completed in 2017, quickly became extremely popular and may exceed 5,000 visitors per year. That estimate would not include all the canine visitors, since they rarely register at the kiosk.

The gently rolling trail leading out from the existing trailhead at the Sterling Creek end runs through open mountain meadows and chaparral, offering spectacular views of Ruch and the Applegate shortly after you leave the parking area.

ART Phase II

Phase II of the ART is still in the planning stages. Check out the proposed route on our website at applegatetrails.org. This part of the trail will link the East ART to both the Jacksonville Forest Park and Humbug Creek via the Wellington Wildlands (see savewildlands.org). Since the ART is almost entirely on public lands managed by BLM, everything we do requires a paperwork process—and patience!

Applegaters—on one of your trips into town, we invite you to stop and check out the new trailhead. Better yet, bring sturdy shoes, layered clothing, water, and a hat and go for a hike.



Trailhead construction was completed in mid-May, except for the asphalt approach off Highway 238. Pictured, left to right, Duane Mallams, ATA volunteer, and Roarke Ball on his backhoe with celebratory balloons. Photo: David Calahan.

National Trails Day

The same attire will also suffice for helping us maintain the trails at Cantrall Buckley Park on June 1, which is National Trails Day.

Hope to see you at 9 am that Saturday morning or on the trail sometime.

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Prescribed burning for a safer community

BY AARON KRIKAVA

Wildfire, and how to protect ourselves from its destructive effects, is one of the hottest topics in our communities right now. The intense fires and resulting smoke we've all witnessed over the last few years are problems that need to be addressed with meaningful solutions. It may seem counterintuitive, but one of the most important ways to mitigate the impact of wildfire in our communities is the use of *more* fire, specifically controlled or prescribed burning on both private and public lands. The Applegate Partnership is working to put this vital tool back in our toolbox.

Controlled burning is the careful application of fire to the landscape during ideal environmental conditions of temperature, humidity, fuel moisture, and wind speed and direction in order to safely consume the fine fuels (less than three inches in diameter) that primarily carry wildfire. This use of fire goes far back into human history and continues today with modern fire-management practices. It was a primary tool used by native cultures for thousands of years to reduce fuel loads, improve forage for game animals, and provide many other ecological benefits.

Currently, wildland firefighters rely heavily on controlled burning in the form of "backfiring" operations to remove unburned fuel between control lines and the advancing flame front. In this way it is often fire, not water, that stops



2018 prescribed fire training exchange (Trex) in the Applegate.
Photo: Jon Bailey, The Nature Conservancy.

the spread of a fire. Federal agencies also use prescribed burning on public lands as the preferred tool to maintain safe fuel levels after mechanical fuel reduction has been performed.

Planning documents at the federal, regional, and local levels recognize the importance of increased prescribed burning to manage wildfire risk. Unfortunately, the use of controlled burning on private lands in the western United States has been relatively limited due to the complexity of planning, permits, and liability. At the Applegate Partnership, we're working to overcome those hurdles and get useful fire back on the ground.

Our region is often described as a "fire-adapted" ecosystem, meaning the flora and fauna of our area have evolved to withstand the effects of our historic fire regime and quickly bounce back to a healthy state. Research shows that southwest Oregon has had a high frequency/low-to-mixed-

severity fire regime, with an average of eight years between fires, according to tree-ring studies. This means our landscape experienced frequent fires that primarily burned at a low intensity mixed with some medium-to-high severity burning. The Miller Complex in 2017 was a good example of this, burning with 66 percent low, 27 percent medium, and only 7 percent high severity.

This frequent return of fire to our landscape allowed only a small amount of new growth to accumulate, so when fire did come through, it burned at a lower intensity. If fire is excluded from landscapes like ours (as has happened since the advent of modern fire-suppression practices approximately 50 - 70 years ago), the accumulation of fuel leads to devastatingly severe wildfires when fire finally does reenter the landscape. Prescribed burning is a vital tool to keep fuel loads at a safe level, so when fire does return, its effects are moderate and manageable.

Recognizing the importance of prescribed burning, the Applegate Partnership is working with local partners

to facilitate the use of this important tool on private land in our community. Our group is helping interested landowners develop burn plans, find grant funding for prescribed burning and the initial mechanical fuel reduction, develop work cooperatives among neighbors, and provide the crucial insurance coverage for this vitally important work. We are also interested in training a local workforce of qualified individuals to carry out this work in our community on an ongoing basis.

If you are interested in the use of prescribed fire on your property or would like to get involved on the ground to learn how to use this important tool, contact me at aaron@apwc.info. If you would like to learn more about prescribed fire and how it is used, go to applegatepartnershipwc.org/programs for links to articles, research papers, and videos.

Together we can use prescribed burning to protect our community and reduce the impact of wildfires.

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Grant received for Williams multimodal path

BY BRYAN HUNTER

We got a grant! In collaboration with Josephine County Planning and Williams Elementary School, we're receiving a \$65,000 grant from a state program called Safe Routes to Schools, as well as matching funds from Josephine County. That's a total of around \$130,000 to construct a multimodal path, about four-tenths of a mile long, from Williams Elementary School to Williams General Store and the post office.

Now comes the fun part: meeting with Josephine County Public Works officials and engineers and Three Rivers School District staff to implement the project. Ideally, our working committee would like a path on the northwest side of Williams Highway, on the far side of the ditch, to accommodate two-way traffic of walkers, bikers, wheelchairs, and horses.

The county may see it differently, though, due to "challenges" of getting children across the street at the crosswalk and path maintenance issues. To address those concerns, our volunteer group has offered to maintain the path if the county builds it. And with effective signage and road striping, we feel the crosswalk can be made safe.

Josephine County Public Works, county engineers, and representatives from Three Rivers School District have already met, and we've heard about the challenge of the project and the potential reworking of this grant toward widening the road and restriping, but without a path. Our committee will join those groups at a second meeting being scheduled, so we're patiently waiting to weigh in on the project.

This four-tenth-mile-long path, phase one of our path throughout Williams, appears to be near construction. We plan additional portions to make local car-free travel safe and pleasant. If you have ideas and comments, please contact me.

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