

# Fire in the Applegate: Progress toward fire resilience

BY RICH FAIRBANKS AND ALEXI LOVECHIO

If you live in the Applegate Valley, you know we live in a fire-prone environment. Fortunately, engaged local residents are doing all they can to prepare for wildfire. Many have moved from making their own property fire resilient to working on wildfire issues at the community level. Three examples illustrate how we are moving forward on these issues.

## Prescription for Safety

Introduced in the fall *Applegater*, Prescription for Safety (P4S) is a community-led group in the Little Applegate, focused on implementing fuels treatments along critical evacuation routes in the area: Highway 238, Griffin Lane, and Sterling Creek Road. To make these evacuation routes safe, vegetation must be maintained to reduce fuel buildup. Having well-managed roadside vegetation makes wildfire suppression more efficient and controlled burning safer, reducing the potential for high-severity wildfire. This is strategic fuel treatment: providing egress, facilitating safer fire suppression, and encouraging more prescribed fire.

Through a wildfire planning strategy known as PODs (Potential Operational Delineations), Oregon State University scientists have identified roads in the Little Applegate that could be used to help contain wildfires. Working with fire practitioners, scientists have worked up a preliminary “Atlas of Potential Control Lines” for a portion of the Rogue Basin. Prescription for Safety has taken these lines, combined them with some local knowledge about possible evacuation routes, and come up with priority roads for treatment.

Prescription for Safety’s goal is to have most of this work funded through grants, so the landowner pays little. P4S has applied for a federal grant and has

tentative approval for \$80,000. After our first virtual community meeting in February 2020, 35 landowners who live on the main evacuation roads signed up for a free property assessment. Pairs of skilled fuels assessors conduct assessments on each property to determine what treatment is needed. To complete the assessments, P4S has teamed up with the OSU Extension’s My Southern Oregon Woodlands and their peer mentors. Peer mentors are already doing property assessments and are generally graduates of the Certified Master Woodland Manager.

To summarize, P4S is working to make certain roads play these roles: evacuation, fire lines and anchor points, strategic fuel treatment, and safer for an increase in controlled fire. P4S has received help, advice, and major staff time from Jackson County Extension, KS Wild, Oregon Department of Forestry, OSU School of Forestry, and the Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative.

To learn more about P4S or to get involved, contact Rich Fairbanks at richfairbanks3@gmail.com.

## Regional fire specialist

Oregon State University Extension’s new regional fire specialist for southwest Oregon, Chris Adlam, PhD, will work toward the following goals:

- Conduct outreach and education around prescribed fire and individual wildfire preparedness
- Tackle obstacles to prescribed fire and landscape-scale forest restoration by supporting agency partnerships, advancing policy change, and addressing smoke-related concerns
- Support the formation of community-based Prescribed Burn Associations such as the one recently launched in the Applegate Valley

- Build a more fire-adapted culture in southwest Oregon by supporting indigenous cultural burning and ecological fire management, with local input through forest management collaboratives.

## Forest and Fire Toolkit

Partners of Prescription for Safety recently released the *Forest & Fire Toolkit*, a “one stop shop” for all the resources residents need to acquaint themselves with the forests of the Siskiyou region. The toolkit provides information on how to prepare your family, home, and community for a wildfire emergency.

In section two of the Toolkit you will find:

- A how-to guide on preparing your property for wildfire: defensible space and home hardening

• Funding opportunities for home defense

- Post-fire checklist and financial assistance

- Steps to plan and be ready for a wildfire emergency and evacuation

- Resource directory of national forest districts, fire districts and more!

There is so much residents can do to prepare their property and community for wildfire season. To learn more about the *Forest & Fire Toolkit* and how to download a free copy, check out the KS Wild website at [kswild.org/forest-fire-toolkit](http://kswild.org/forest-fire-toolkit).



Oregon State University scientists have worked up a preliminary Atlas of Potential Control Lines for a portion of the Rogue Basin showing the best places to stop a fire (blue) with somewhat less effective places (green). These control lines are almost always roads. This zoomed-in detail of the Sterling Creek Road area shows a blue area at the upper right, which is the relatively nonflammable streets and landscaped yards of Jacksonville. Running from the upper right towards the lower left is Griffin Lane and Sterling Creek Road (highlighted in green).



A treated stand with piles ready for a controlled burn. There’s a low load of surface fuels and a high canopy base height. Photo: Rich Fairbanks.

Applegate community members are coming together to better prepare the area for a wildfire emergency and to restore fire resilience to our forests. As we come into what looks like another severe fire season, we hope that more people will get involved in making our communities safer.

Rich Fairbanks  
richfairbanks3@gmail.com  
Alexi Lovechio  
alexik@kswild.org

## AVFD FLEET

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from Medford or just to Jacksonville for a few groceries. No thanks! Same thing for our fire district’s older apparatus—heavy, long, and not quite as responsive as the firefighters might need. Especially if someone’s home or life is threatened!

This type-six engine also has more water capacity, better pump capacity, and a hose size that allows firefighters to “pump and roll” (yes, just as it sounds—apply water to a spreading fire as you roll along the edge of the fire). It also has a unique feature that is invaluable: there is a Cascade system in the vehicle, which allows firefighters to refill their breathing apparatus on the scene of a structure fire, so that they can get back to the fire more quickly. The new #8563 is also easier to operate, maneuver, and drive. (Not to mention to train new firefighters as drivers!)

Our fire district was established in the 1980s. The goal was to provide timely responses to both structural and forest fires in the Applegate. Today our fire district has seven stations across the Applegate Valley. Staff and volunteers respond to fires, accidents, injuries, illness, and other emergencies. With #8563 now in service out of headquarters, the plan is to have an identical new type-six engine stationed on the west side of our district in the coming months. (But don’t jump out of your seats!



The new engine has plenty of room for medical supplies. Photo: Sandy Shaffer.



Blankets, hoses, and other supplies in their new engine niches. Photo: Sandy Shaffer.

By purchasing a second type-six engine at the same time, the cost was 50 percent of the full price. And best of all, some of the cost was covered by a grant, and the remainder was matched by generous donations!) Way to go, team!

Sandy Shaffer  
sassyoneor@gmail.com

# Wildflowers, gifts of the road

BY CHRISTINA AMMON

The native wildflowers in my valley mark time like a calendar. The first purple larkspurs and shooting stars indicate the start-line of spring, and then the blooms progress toward summer like a slow-motion fireworks display: red *Fritillaria*, white trillium, purple lupine, and then blazing red Indian paintbrush.

I get to know these flowers on my daily hikes on the Jacksonville woodlands and even feel bonded to particular ones, like the singular mission bell that grows each May in an old gold-mining ditch. I feel as protective over the blooms as a parent and fume when I pass a hiker carrying a bouquet of the rare and endemic *Fritillaria*—or worse, see the flowers plucked and then dropped on the ground. Nothing gives me a more pessimistic view of humanity than a rare flower smashed into the dirt—a small transgression perhaps, but one that feels deeply symbolic of something larger.

That said, there is one flower I allow myself to freely harvest: the magenta sweet



“Gifts of the Road”  
by Christina Ammon.

peas that grow along our country highway in June. When I see them, I carefully slow my car, find a pull-off, and pick to my heart’s content. This particular *L. latifolius* is somewhat invasive, crowding out native plants, so in picking it you might even feel you are doing nature a favor.

The sweet pea is originally from Sicily.

The annual variety was brought here from England, intentionally cultivated, and even sold in the Burpee catalogs.

As pretty as sweet peas are, they are considered simple and unspecial. According to a poet named Junkin, sweet peas are “built of common earth” and grow “in lowly place beside village lanes.”

But for me, these roadside flowers are as magnificent as any store-bought bouquet, and when every tableside in my house is adorned with a splash of magenta, I know for sure it is June.

Christina Ammon  
christinaammonwriter@gmail.com



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