



GHOSTLY TREES ARE THE REMNANTS OF A FOREST COVERED BY THE DUNES

PHOTO COURTESY DINA PAVLIS

lost major processes such as sand collection and dispersal via wind and water.” The natural shifting of the dunes has been interrupted, as has the function of the ecosystem.

Ironically, one apparent aspect of the changing dunes has been to increase the numbers of not only common opportunists like crows and coyotes, but also possibly of a subspecies of Humboldt marten. Kertis says the marten “lives in huge swaths of shrub fields that have developed on the dunes thanks to dunes stabilization.”

In June, environmental groups including Cascadia Wildlands, where Peters sits on the board, and Oregon Wild, petitioned to have the Humboldt marten put on Oregon’s endangered species list. There are an estimated 200 of them in Oregon, according to the Center for Biological Diversity, 100 in the dunes.

LeGue says one conundrum is that when you open up the dunes to benefit the snowy plover, you might be risking the habitat also benefitting the Humboldt marten.

Currently, Kertis says, the Forest Service is working on an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project to

address many of the environmental issues that arise as the group seeks to protect and restore the dunes as well as the means by which they are restored and preserved.

Because the dunes are public land, projects go through a public process, with opportunity for people to weigh in on how those goals will be achieved. For example, work parties have been hand-pulling the invasive plants, but the overall project will take years and must operate on a large scale.

“We are talking about everything from hand-pulling and big machines to herbicides and burning,” Kertis says.

Phillips is kind of a fan of big machines. More precisely, he’s a fan of OHVs and using them to keep invasives at bay. Phillips founded Save the Riders Dunes as part of his efforts to both preserve the dunes and preserve the rights of OHV riders to recreate on them.

“I go back to just being a kid,” he says of riding on the dunes. “Who do you know as a kid doesn’t like to play in a sandbox?”

Phillips remembers his first trip to the dunes when he was five or six years old, back in 1957, and he laments

the changes he’s seen over the years. He says he wants to preserve “the thrill of being able to go wherever you want to go, the freedom and the thrill of riding climbing big dunes.”

He adds of the broad expanses of sand: “It’s like a clean sheet of paper, and you can do what you want to with it.”

Phillips says one kind of event that benefits both the dunes and the OHV riders is “trash the grass,” in which people go out in their vehicles and use the tires to tear up the Scotch broom and European beachgrass.

It’s a family sport, Phillips says of dunes riding, and one that’s a recreational draw and moneymaker for coastal communities like Florence, Winchester and Coos Bay, all located near OHV riding areas.

Bill Blackwell, a retired deputy district ranger for Oregon Dunes Recreation Area, has a different technique for removing the invasive plants. Blackwell has been coordinating work parties to pull gorse, Scotch broom and European beachgrass from the dunes.

He says people come from as far away as Eugene and Roseburg to help restore the dunes, in groups from 10 people to as many as 23. Spring, he says, is the best time to go after bright yellow Scotch broom as it flowers and before it goes to seed, but work parties continue through the summer and the fall.

“Little plants you can pull,” Blackwell says. “For larger plants, each person has their favorite tool.”

Weed pullers are the most effective, he says, with a wrench you put on the base of the plant with a lever to pull the roots out. “Some of us use a shovel to dig down a little bit down to the root and loppers or a handsaw to cut them down.”

LOOKING FORWARD FROM A LONG HISTORY

Collaborative member Ashley Russell understands Phillips’ affection for ATVs as one way people enjoy recreating on the dunes, but as a Miluk-Coos tribal member she also brings in a long-term perspective on the land, its history and its uses.

Russell is an enrolled member of and water specialist for the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians. The tribes are part of the collaborative, and Russell says the dunes are a historical village and camping site. “We still gather there,” she says.

The unique ecosystem of the dunes is home to a number of culturally significant species, Russell says, including bearberry, mussels, bog cranberries and American dune grass, which are still utilized by the tribes today.

In addition to restoration — and acknowledging the European beachgrass will never be fully removed — Russell is working on education and outreach to “inform local landowners of why this is important and why dunal processes are important.”

The tribes “lived and hunted and camped” in the dunes, she says.

Russell was brought into the collaborative by Jesse Beers, *Shayuusht’axan hiich* (a Siuslaw person) and cultural stewardship manager with the confederated tribes. Cultural stewardship and natural resources are often interrelated, Beers says.

The tribes have stories associated with the dunes, Beers says, as well as traditional camp sites and cultural sites. A great example of this, he says, is Tahkenitch — the same place where Peters saw her first glimpse of the dunes.

Tahkenitch was a traditional village site, Beers says. What is now a lake system was once a river to the bay. Dunes cut off the outlet, “and now we know it as an inland lake,” he says. Possibly due to the encroaching dunes, the village was abandoned as a permanent site.

“There are lots of different village sites we don’t know about, probably under the dunes, and campsites we do know about,” Beers says.

“The most important things is just having the dunes. They are in danger of going away.” ■

Dina Pavlis will present on the Oregon Dunes at an Oregon Wild Wednesday event 6 pm Oct. 10, at Claim 52 Brewing and Taproom, 1030 Tyinn Street in Eugene.

To find out more about the Oregon Dunes Restoration Collaborative and upcoming work parties, go to saveoregondunes.org. To keep tabs on the Forest Service’s EA, go to fs.usda.gov/project/?project=52946.