

Creswell conservation easement protects WV habitat

A 1,610-acre working lands conservation easement in the South Willamette Valley now protects the highly imperiled Oregon vesper sparrow along with large swaths of grasslands and oak woodlands.

A grassland-dependent bird, the Oregon vesper sparrow is petitioned to be federally listed as endangered.

In October, property owners Darrick and Shannon Salyers and their family granted the easement through ODFW's Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program (WWMP). The easement is held by the Center for Natural Lands Management, a non-profit that protects sensitive biological resources in Oregon, Washington, and California.

Laura Tesler, Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Pro-

gram coordinator, praises the Salyers family for joining the program to permanently protect the property for its wildlife values, many of which are vanishing in the valley.

The owner retains rights to conduct certain land management activities with the signing of this easement, Tesler said.

"This is the largest long-term conservation commitment we have for the South Willamette Valley, giving us a very rare opportunity to help the largest known population of Oregon vesper sparrow in the valley," Tesler said. "The sheer size of this property and the amount of oak woodlands and grasslands it contains will help many of our wildlife species that depend on these two diminishing habitat types."

The property, Creswell

Oaks, also includes Douglas-fir forest and riparian habitats and is home to many Oregon Conservation Strategy Species including western gray squirrel, acorn woodpecker, and common nighthawk which are becoming uncommon. In total, the area protects habitat for 10 Strategy bird species along with western rattlesnakes and western gray squirrels which are also Strategy Species.

As a working cattle and timber operation, Creswell Oaks is a special type of working lands conservation easement. The property is managed to maintain healthy grasslands by grazing cattle through rotating paddocks to prevent overgrazing.

This practice created habitat for the Oregon vesper sparrow and for threatened plants including Bradshaw's

lomatium.

"Creswell Oaks is a great example of how a working landscape can blend activities, such as grazing, to benefit wildlife habitat," Tesler said. "The WWMP is an excellent program for valley landowners interested in permanent protection for wildlife habitat on their lands through acquisition of fee title or conservation easement. Landowners whose property has Oregon Conservation Strategy species and habitats and who would like to protect those values from development might consider the WWMP."

Cooperators in the Creswell Oaks conservation easement include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

The program contributes technical assistance as well

as in-kind and contracted work for oak woodland thinning. Oak thinning and conifer removal reduces competition, allowing oaks to grow larger, produce more acorns, and provide more cavities for Oregon Conservation Strategy focal species such as the white-breasted nuthatch, acorn woodpecker, and western bluebird.

Another partner, the Coast Fork Willamette Watershed Council is currently conducting riparian reforestation, stabilization, and fencing on a tributary of Camas Swale Creek.

The council also conducts the Waters Program (Watershed Action Teams in Education, Restoration, and Stewardship) with Creswell Middle School. Students admitted to the program meet monthly at Creswell Oaks to learn about natural

resources and participate in a stewardship activity such as clearing invasive species and planting native trees.

Creswell Oaks represents nearly 10 percent of the WWMP's protected acreage goal of acquiring 16,880 acres of wildlife mitigation property and adds substantially to the total protected acreage of both grassland and oak woodland habitat.

The Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program is funded by the Bonneville Power Administration to mitigate fish, wildlife, and habitat impacts from construction and operation of Willamette River Basin Flood Control Projects.

Landowners interested in conserving their property through a conservation easement or purchase can contact Tesler at 503-947-6086 or email laura.tesler@state.or.us

Public invited to free screening of 'Ice on Fire'

This Friday, Dec. 13, beginning at 7 p.m., the public is invited to a free screening of the documentary film "Ice on Fire" at the Rural Organizing Project Building, 632 E Main St., in Cottage Grove.

The screening is the third installment in a series of climate-related events and is hosted by Climate Action Cottage Grove, Forest Web

and Sustainable Cottage Grove.

The film features visionaries and scientists working to mitigate climate change and minimize climate-related events despite a rapidly warming planet.

With sweeping, "Ice on Fire" was filmed across the globe, from Norway to Alaska, Iceland to Colorado, Switzerland to Costa

Rica to Connecticut.

The film highlights firsthand accounts of people at the forefront of the climate crisis, with insights from scientists, farmers, innovators and others.

"Ice on Fire" emphasizes the importance of an immediate, two-pronged approach to reversing the crisis: reducing carbon emissions through traditional renewable energy

sources and new ones, like tidal energy, and implementing "drawdown" measures, focusing on methods for drawing down and sequestering carbon, including direct air capture, sea farms, urban farms, biochar, marine snow, bionic leaves and others.

A discussion about the film will be held after the screening.



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