

KS WILD NEWS

The Journal of the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center

FALL/WINTER 2020



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NOTES FROM THE TRAILHEAD

On the morning of the Almeda fire, I evacuated with my five year old son, stuck in traffic with flames burning next to us on the road. It took a lot for me to remain calm, to reassure him that we were going to be okay. But the look of fear on his face was one that I didn't recognize. Since that day, fire has shown up in his play—lego towns are burned and tall flames arc across his drawings. This is the first up-close fire of his lifetime, but not his last. I would do well to teach him reverence and respect for this element; his natural fear has already been fostered. My son is growing up in the Pyrocene era.

Coined by environmental historian Stephen Pyne in 2015, the Pyrocene is marked by humans' increasing use of fire, and our transformation of how and what we burn. Our dependence on burning fossil fuels paired with the lack of intentional burning to manage biodiversity and ecosystems leaves humanity vulnerable to fire that runs out-of-control through our wildlands and communities.

Much like the Ice Age, Pyne's Fire Age shapes our landscapes; it grows to shape how and where we live. "We can manipulate fire, directly and indirectly. We can't ice. We survive ice by leaving. We survive fire by living with it. If at times it seems our worst enemy, it is also our best friend. We can't thrive without it."

KS Wild's mission is to protect and restore wild nature in the Klamath-Siskiyou region of southwest Oregon and northwest California.

We promote science-based land and water conservation through policy and community action.

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As a community, we have experienced an enormous amount of change in a very short period of time. Yet, that is what we are to expect in this climate crisis. The change is happening now, not in some distant future.

The impacts of wildfires in the Klamath-Siskiyou region and throughout the West have changed communities forever—destroying thousands of homes and businesses, claiming several lives, and displacing residents as well as the unhoused. Up and down the west coast, communities are being impacted and shaped by fire.

In this issue of *KS Wild News* we're focusing on the impacts of fire in our region with personal perspectives, political implications, and necessary policy change, along with the importance of collaborative efforts. Together we can prepare and protect our communities. Together we can reimagine and rebuild. ¡Unidos y fuertes!

Jessica Klinke is KS Wild's Communications Manager.

Our history has been a story of how we and fire have co-evolved. The same holds for our future.

Stephen Pyne,
Environmental Historian



FIRE RELIEF RESOURCES

One immediate way to support families displaced by fires here in southern Oregon is to donate to the **ROGUE VALLEY RELIEF FUND**, which supplies immediate needs as well as long term support to recovery efforts. www.mrgfoundation.org/rogue-valley-relief-fund

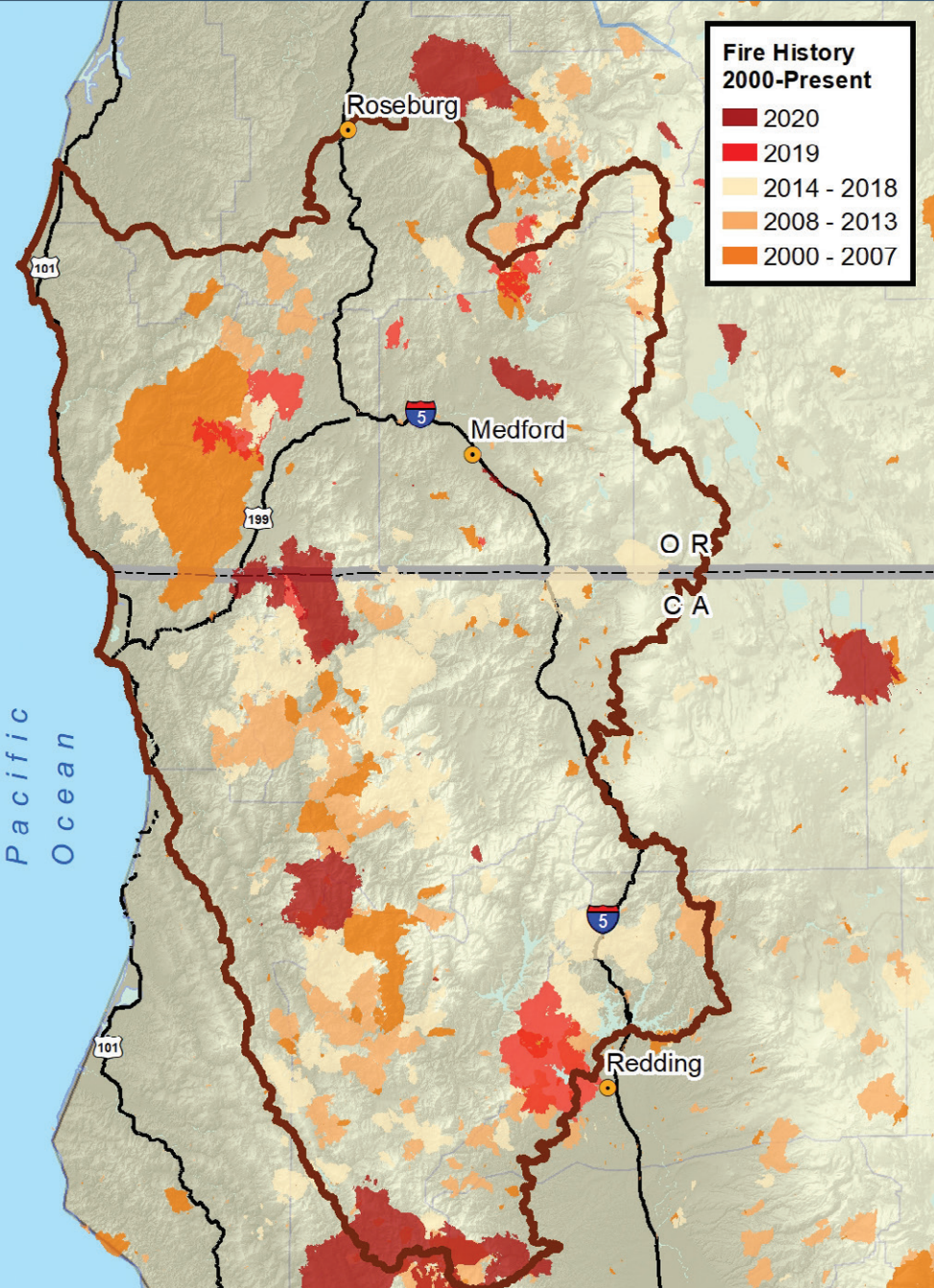
The **PHOENIX-TALENT SCHOOL DISTRICT** has established a fund to directly serve the families who lost their homes in the Almeda Fire. www.phoenix.k12.or.us

HAPPY CAMP RELIEF FUND through Community Foundation of the North State supports over 150 families who lost their homes in the Slater Fire www.cfnorthstate.org/donations/happy-camp-relief-fund

Established by IVCando, the **ILLINOIS VALLEY EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND** helps feed and support firefighters, volunteers, and evacuees of the Slater Fire in the Illinois Valley. www.ivcdo.org/emergencyrelief

20 YEARS OF FIRE

The Klamath-Siskiyou is fire evolved and fire adapted. The past 20 years of fire is a harbinger of what is to come. Climate change is forcing us to come to terms with a future of more fire, fires that can threaten our communities and change how we experience the natural world. Read more about this season's fires and how we can best prepare for a future of fire.



IN THE AFTERMATH OF OREGON'S FIRE DISASTER, A CALL FOR A NEW APPROACH

Many have called this year's wildfires "unprecedented" or "unnatural." However, fire is nothing new to the American West. Fire plays an integral role in the ecosystems here and Indigenous People have used fire as a tool to manage vegetation for millennia.

What is unnatural and unprecedented about 21st century wildfire is the exponentially increasing level of destruction these fires cause to our homes and communities each year.

These are not your ordinary wildfires. These fires are driven by climate change.

Some say the best way to protect people from future wildfires is to increase industrial logging. This idea has gained significant momentum in recent years, and the U.S. Congress is now picking up the debate and proposals are on the table to mandate more industrial forestry.

Advocates for the industrial logging solution ignore the overwhelming evidence that today's large wildfires are primarily driven by weather conditions that are becoming more extreme as a result of climate change. These climate-driven fires rip right through industrially-managed forest lands that are extremely fire prone with densely packed trees. Industrial forest management removes the large, more fire-resistant trees and dries out the forest. It is part of the problem, not the solution.

Reducing fuels, thinning in dense tree plantations, and maintaining defensible space around communities can actually save lives. But, climate change will only continue to bring hotter and drier conditions to the Pacific Northwest, which will only continue to increase wildfire activity across the landscape. We can't wait. We must do more. We must rapidly accelerate our efforts to bolster the resilience of frontline communities to future climate fires.

We also need to fight fire with fire. We need to intentionally set fires in the cool, wet winter months to help reduce brush buildup. Many Pacific Northwest tribes are bringing fire back on the ground to restore forests and make the landscape less fire prone in the hot, dry summer months. Support for this work needs to expand.

Focusing on climate adaptation and community preparation efforts is a new approach to this complex problem, and it requires bold leadership amongst local, state, and federal officials. But it is the kind of leadership that is required if we are going to decrease the likelihood of a future filled with climate fire disasters. Bold leadership is also needed to stabilize our climate. We must aggressively decrease excess carbon levels in the atmosphere to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Our leaders have a choice. They can continue to bury their heads in the ashes and claim that industrial logging will get us out of this mess. Or, they can prioritize adaptation measures that prepare our communities and landscapes for the next climate-driven firestorm.

Joseph Vaile is the Climate Program Director for KS Wild.

A MORE RESILIENT FUTURE

My brother lost his home to the wildfire that devastated Talent. A friend from my wedding party lost his home in the wildfires, too.

For years, I worked in remote, mountainous terrain fighting wildfires. Today, I research wildfire risk management at Oregon State University's College of Forestry. I have seen and felt large fires up close. I have run from fire, alongside those under my command. The risks were clear to us, and we accepted those risks. The current wildfires highlight a different risk; a risk that continues to grow. The risk of wildfires close to home.

You hear plenty of blame for these wildfires. Climate change. Forest management. Lack of forest management. Utility companies. Homes built in forests. Arsonists. California. The president. We are at a moment where instead of placing blame for these wildfires, we need to take steps to adapt to them and help protect communities and landscapes throughout the western United States.

For more than 50 years, scientists have warned of the impending consequences of human-induced climate change. We no longer have the luxury of deferring these consequences to the future. We are living it.

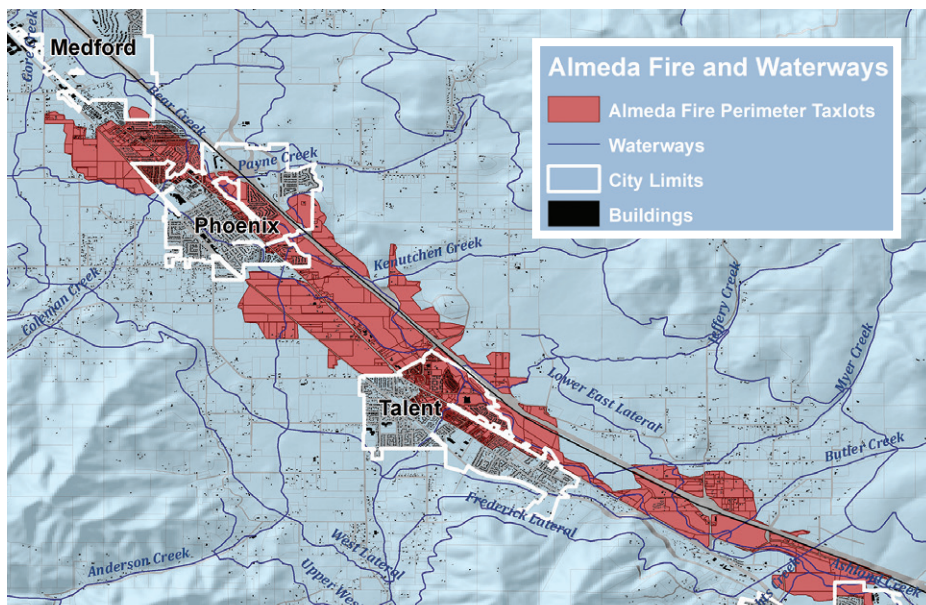
This year, the western U.S. has already experienced its worst fire season since federal and state efforts to suppress wildfires started about 100 years ago, and we are not finished yet. California's worst fire weather typically arrives in the coming months.

We were all surprised by the ferocity of these wildfires, our inability to do something about them, and by a smoke-filled valley with no refuge, not even in our homes. But should we have been? Research has documented these types of fires in this forest type. Newspaper stories from the 1800s describe their occurrence. How come we chose not to be prepared? Why did we let our guard down, despite the extreme fire weather forecasts? Is there a way to break our short sightedness, to learn from the past, and to listen to the scientific evidence? I think so.

Have climate-driven increases in fire extent reached our wet forests, like those in western Oregon, too? It is difficult to say, but if not now it may only be a matter of time. Not long ago, I remember sitting on the fire line hearing the old firefighters refer to western Oregon forests as "asbestos forests," meaning they were inherently resistant to burning, at least with any appreciable severity. Today, I find those words hard to write.

What has surprised me the most in recent years is what I call suburban wildfires. Suburban wildfires, where ignitions are associated with human infrastructure or caused by humans themselves, burn homes as the primary fuel source and are transmitted between neighborhoods by green belts and parks. The fire that burned my brother's home – just a half-mile from Interstate 5 in Talent – is an example of this. We fight these fires like they are in the wildlands because we have no other means, but that does not mean we do not have choices.

Solutions to our global fire challenge require addressing climate change, but our social or political will is not rising to the challenge. We must continue to strive for real, long-term solutions, but in the meantime we must adapt. We must adapt our communities



We are all in this together. We have always been. Nature is there with us too.

and infrastructure through zoning regulations, improved building standards and materials, and active and lasting maintenance. We must restore our landscapes so they can adapt to this new fire reality and receive fire with fewer negative consequences. We must adapt fire management to get more of the right kind of fire, at the right places, at the right time, and for the right reasons. And we must adapt our expectations from the natural world.

Instead of searching for blame, take this opportunity to reflect. And recognize there is no blame to pass, only blame to accept. We all have a stake in this; a stake in the health of our natural ecosystems, in a resilient society, in the beautiful western landscapes we enjoy. We are all in this together. We have always been. Nature is there with us too. We can forge a path to a more resilient future.

Christopher J. Dunn is a research associate at the Oregon State University College of Forestry. This OpEd originally ran in the Medford Mail Tribune on October 11, 2020 and has been reprinted with permission by the author.

FIRES AND RIVERS: POST-FIRE RESPONSE TO PROTECT BEAR CREEK AND THE ROGUE



On September 8th, severe fires tore through communities throughout the Rogue watershed. One immediate way to help folks who have been displaced by fires here in southern Oregon is to donate to the Rogue Valley Relief Fund at bit.ly/rvfirerelief. This fund will be used to aid those most in need. In the weeks and months to come, as communities begin the long process of rebuilding, Rogue Riverkeeper will be working to minimize the impacts of these fires on Bear Creek and the Rogue River.



Reducing post-fire pollution to Bear Creek and the Rogue

When water flows over burned structures, it can pick up anything that was exposed in the fire, including lead paint or asbestos. These pollutants can get washed into local rivers and streams, which can be toxic to humans and fish. High severity fires that burned trees and shrubs can leave bare soil behind, which can cause erosion and increase sediment pollution in waterways.

As we continue to support community efforts to provide direct relief to people displaced by the fires, we will also work to minimize pollution to our local water resources by:

Collecting baseline water samples to compare with samples that will be taken after the rains come to check turbidity in our waterways due to runoff. We do not currently have the equipment to test for toxins or heavy metals, but we will advocate to ensure this testing is done by our partners.

Meeting with local cities, state agencies, and other non-profits to develop a coordinated response to minimize polluted runoff and erosion into streams. We will participate in working groups to address riparian issues around Bear Creek and pollution concerns along Little Butte Creek.

Coordinating volunteers to help with clean ups along the Bear Creek Greenway, photo monitoring, and water quality sampling when public access has opened up to burned areas along Bear Creek.

Sign up for our emails or check out www.rogueriverkeeper.org for updates and opportunities to support clean up and restoration efforts for Bear Creek and the Rogue!

Stacey Detwiler is Conservation Director for Rogue Riverkeeper.

2020 Water Quality Program Recap

Every summer, Rogue Riverkeeper runs a water quality program collecting water samples at popular recreation sites to test for the presence of E. coli bacteria. This helps us determine whether the samples meet the state water quality standard for human contact and let's you know where it is safe to swim. The information is uploaded onto The Swim Guide site each week, so you can check the water quality at your favorite recreation sites. This summer was a bit different due to the COVID-19 restrictions but we were still able to run a modified program with the help of two stellar volunteers! Below are the results from this summer.

The Good News

The majority of waterways we sampled tested below the Oregon DEQ state standard for E. coli (406 MPN) including: Evans Creek in Rogue River, Rogue River in Gold Hill, Baby Bear Cr. at Bear Creek Park in Medford, Bear Creek at North Mountain Park in Ashland, Ashland Creek and the Ashland Swim Reservoir, Emigrant Lake, and our three lower Rogue sites at Agness, Quosatana, and Lex's Landing.

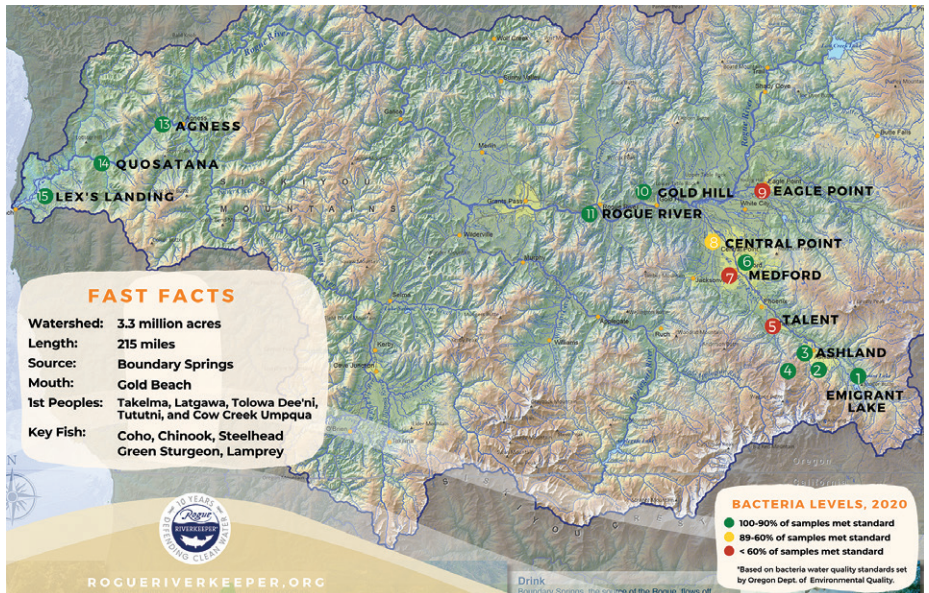
The Not So Good News

Several sites were routinely in violation including: Little Butte in Eagle Point, Bear Creek at Upton Bridge, Bear Creek at Bear Creek Park, and Wagner Creek in Talent. Impacts to these waterways include irrigation returns, agriculture, polluted urban runoff, and other pollution sources.

2020 Rogue Basin Water Quality Report Card

The Rogue Basin Water Quality Report Card highlights the results of our 2020 water quality monitoring program where we tested for bacteria pollution across 14 sites in the Rogue watershed.

Water quality monitoring is managed by Sara Mosser.





TIMBER INDUSTRY AND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION TARGET FORESTS

In the waning days of the 4th year of the Trump Administration the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has been feverishly working with their friends in the timber industry to undermine the environmental laws and rules regarding forest management and public participation. Big Timber isn't shy about its disdain for the rules that protect wildlife, watersheds, and wildlands of our region and they are exploiting a time of crisis to advance a reckless logging agenda.

A Landscape of Clearcuts

It is easy to see how the timber industry would like public lands to be managed—simply view how they manage their own forests. From the giant clearcut directly above the town of Wilderville to the dense timber plantations that surround Butte Falls, industrial timber corporations have turned much of southwest Oregon and northwest California into a patchwork quilt of clearcuts and dense young tree-farms. Their hope is to do the same to the remaining native forests on public lands. Indeed, a Portland-based timber trade organization has filed lawsuits across the country in Washington D.C. to try to force the BLM to accelerate clearcut logging throughout southern Oregon. The same trade organization regularly files administrative protests and objections to local thinning and restoration projects in hopes of increasing the amount of “regeneration” harvesting. They also work to weaken environmental laws and limit public involvement in the management of public lands.

Above: Google Earth images of the Klamath-Siskiyou in Oregon.

A Wave of Environmental Rollbacks

The push from the Trump Administration, the BLM, and the timber industry to accelerate public lands clearcutting has resulted in numerous rollbacks of the rules concerning management of local forests, watersheds, and communities. These include:

- Modifying the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to reduce public participation, limit judicial review, and remove requirements that environmental impacts be disclosed to the public.
- Exempting 5,000-acre BLM post-fire timber sales from public involvement and environmental review.
- Eliminating the ability of the public to file administrative protests concerning BLM “regeneration” timber sales that remove older forests increase fire hazard for up to four decades in the resulting dense second-growth tree farms.
- Reducing the amount of old-growth forests protected as “critical habitat” for the imperiled Northern spotted owl.
- Removing forest canopy through “gap creation” mini-clearcuts in formerly protected riparian and old-growth reserves.
- Eliminating “Adaptive Management Areas” in which collaboration was encouraged and local communities had a role in developing forest management proposals.

The harsh reality is that we are seeing a concerted effort to bulldoze the environmental laws and rules that protect communities, forests, watersheds, and wildlife. KS Wild is working hard to stem these rollbacks and keep your voice in public lands management.

The Art of Collaboration and Mutual Aid

While the timber industry and the BLM seek a future in which timber planners call all the shots and community needs take a back seat, their hope of returning to clearcutting free-for-all is a backwards looking vision. There is no returning to the logging of the 1970s and 1980s in which entire watersheds were slicked off, the BLM and the Forest Service ignored the public, and the timber industry answered to nobody.

The future is likely going to be one in which communities and stakeholders work together on forest restoration and safely returning fire to the landscape through community wildfire protection plans and projects. Moving forward, carbon storage and climate mitigation will be front and center. Land use planning, home hardening, helping land owners firesafe their homes and property are areas where we can all pull together. The real future of public lands management is going to involve the hard work of engaging the public, listening to each other with empathy, finding areas of agreement, and prioritizing community safety and climate resiliency.

Here in Talent, Oregon, where a wind-driven wildfire event destroyed entire neighborhoods, the challenges of climate change, rebuilding, Covid, smoke, and loss can be overwhelming. But fundamental kindness and goodness is shining through as well. Mutual aid is alive and well. People are eager for real collaboration and real results that address the challenges involving climate chaos, fire safe communities, and resilient landscapes.

George Sexton is Conservation Director for KS Wild.

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR SAFETY

KS Wild has recently partnered with a community led group located in the Little Applegate called Prescriptions for Safety (PFS). The group is focused on implementing fuels treatments along critical evacuation routes in the area.

Living in the rural forested communities of the Applegate Valley of southwest Oregon comes with the responsibility of knowing how to prepare for wildfire. Many residents in these communities have done their part to create defensible space around their homes. A public

survey in 2011 indicated that over 95% of respondents have created defensible space and that almost 90% are maintaining this over time. PFS is bringing local residents together to discuss another wildfire preparation strategy: evacuation routes. If there is a large wildfire that forces the community to evacuate, are the main roads prepared?

For example, Sterling Creek Road is a main road used to access the Applegate Valley. During an emergency situation, can this route handle a sudden influx of hundreds of frightened drivers evacuating through smoke, while busloads of firefighters and equipment try to get in to attack the fire? Is the route cleared of surface fuels and have the limbs been pruned up? These are important questions to ask when preparing a community for wildfire.

One way in which PFS plans on accomplishing this work is through the identification of roads that can serve as both evacuation routes and fuels breaks that help contain wildfires (such as roads, trails, and recent fuel treatments). In partnership with property owners and fire professionals, the goal is to create a space on the forested landscape adjacent to communities that will contain wildfires and promote ecological health by clearing brush along roads that serve as evacuation routes. PFS plans on conducting outreach and educational workshops to property owners on fuels treatments and funding opportunities for this work.

Through mutual learning and collaboration, PFS aims to better prepare the Applegate community for a wildfire emergency. This work is getting started in the Little Applegate neighborhood. Please reach out to Rich Fairbanks at richfairbanks2@gmail.com if you would like to get involved.

Richard Fairbanks is a local fire professional with over 40 years of experience in firefighting and forest management. Alexi Lovechio is KS Wild's National Forest Organizer.



Rich Fairbanks maintains understory brush on his property by conducting a small underburn.

FOCUS ON THE KS FAMILY

Lesley Adams

Lesley began volunteering for KS Wild while earning a B.S. in Environmental Studies and Biology from Southern Oregon University, before joining staff in 2003. Six years later, she founded Rogue Riverkeeper and then took a position with Waterkeeper Alliance in 2012. She is currently a Public Services Organizer for SEIU Local 503 where she cross-pollinates labor justice with her environmental advocacy roots. In August 2020, Lesley was delighted to return “home” to KS Wild as a Board Member. An ideal day for Lesley includes hiking, camping, floating and/or fishing with her son in the forests and rivers of the Klamath-Siskiyou. She spends a lot of time thinking about how to leave a better world for future generations, and she knows KS Wild is an elemental piece of that puzzle.



Michelle Hoge

KS Wild and Rogue Riverkeeper are grateful for the contributions of Michelle Hoge, who served as our 2020 Law Clerk. Michelle provided important legal support on a number of projects including the Shasta Agness and Lodgepole timber sales, and research on the Oregon Forest Practices Act and Wild and Scenic Rivers management plans. We appreciate Michelle’s contribution to our conservation efforts, especially in this unusual year. Michelle returned to Seattle to pursue her J.D. at University of Washington.

Thank you, Bonnie Johnson, for your years of service on the KS Wild Board!





Home by
Rachel Bellow
Bhaktibee Art

KS WILD'S "AT HOME" DINNER & AUCTION FOR THE WILD!

Online Silent Auction Open November 9th to 14th
Live Online Event: Saturday, November 14th, 6:30-8pm

Tickets start at \$15:
kswild.tofinoauctions.com/2020

KS Wild's Annual Dinner has evolved over the years, but remains an event where generations of environmental advocates come together to share stories, see old friends, make new friends, and connect to this place we love—the Klamath-Siskiyou. While we can't gather together in person this year, KS Wild worked to shape a meaningful event that honors our grassroots beginnings, and allows as many people as possible to safely join in the celebration. We hope this year, 'At Home in the Wild' connects you to our work, to the KS community, and to the Wild!

~Your KS Wild & Rogue Riverkeeper Family

Special thanks to our top sponsors:





UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN IN THE WOODS... WE MEET ONLINE

While we are unable to gather in person, we're finding ways for the community to experience different elements of the Klamath-Siskiyou. **Join us on a year-long, online learning adventure in our new Love Where You Live Series.** We are hosting a guest speaker each month to illuminate parts of our region: www.kswild.org/events.

Watch recordings of recent speaker events:

October: INDIGENOUS AND PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT TODAY

November: WILD STEELHEAD AND CREEKS

Watch live and sign up for:

THE STORIES OF TRILLIUM, PORT ORFORD CEDAR:

THE EFFECTS OF LOGGING AND WHAT'S NEXT

Thursday, December 3, 6-7:45pm, Online

Port Orford cedar, an endemic conifer, continues to be threatened by an introduced disease, while trillium – a seemingly common plant of the forest understory – appears to be impacted by a changing climate.



Join KS Wild and American River Touring Association (ARTA) for 5 days along the Rogue Trail with raft support and delicious meals.

For more information:
www.kswild.org/events

**ROGUE RIVER TRAIL
RAFT-SUPPORTED HIKE**

MAY 2021





SAVE THE DATE!

Friday February 26, 2021

Rogue Riverkeeper & KS Wild host the



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Cover: Little Duck Lake in the Russian Wilderness, Holly Christiansen