

KS WILD NEWS

The Journal of the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center

FALL 2022



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NOTES FROM THE TRAILHEAD

Two years ago, the Labor Day Fires swept through communities and forests in Oregon and California, destroying towns, livelihoods, and claiming several lives. The Almeda Fire in southern Oregon, fueled by strong winds and erratic fire behavior, claimed over 2,000 homes and businesses in the towns of Talent, Phoenix, and parts of Ashland. On the other side of Jackson County, the Obenchain Fire burned 32,000 acres impacting residents of Eagle Point, Oregon. And the Slater Fire in northern California and southwestern Oregon burned over 165,000 acres including the town of Happy Camp, the ancestral lands of the Karuk and where many Tribal members and elders call home. The weather events of that weekend—including lightning with strong easterly winds—saw devastating fires in counties throughout Oregon like Lane, Douglas, Clackamas, and Klamath.

These fires, which hit so close to home for many of us in the Klamath-Siskiyou bioregion, brought to light the many issues facing those of us who live in the Wildland Urban Interface, or the WUI. The WUI is a frontier dividing urban development like houses, towns, and communities—from undeveloped land. Many people in western states like Oregon and California live in the WUI as opposed to city centers because it can offer options for more affordable housing, it allows easy access to a lifestyle closer to nature, or they may require it for professional reasons—particularly if they grow food, wine, cannabis or raise livestock.

Issues with fire in the Wildland Urban Interface are not new, but they are becoming more problematic. In particular, those who live in the WUI are finding themselves at the frontlines of growing problems with fire. For decades, developers built more homes in areas where fires have historically burned, and areas that will most likely burn again.

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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Between 1990 and 2015, one study* found that 32 million new homes were built in fire prone areas—and that number keeps growing. States and local municipalities need to start addressing issues facing home and business owners in the WUI by considering tighter restrictions on future development to ensure greater protections for communities against wildfire when it does arrive. These restrictions might include mandatory “defensible space” and updating building codes to include fire-resistant materials and zoning requirements that could help safeguard communities from devastating fires.

After the smoke clears, communities are looking for new ways to rebuild and for ways to be resilient in the face of climate change and wildfire. But we need to rethink how we build our communities and where they overlap with fire prone landscapes. In this issue of KS News, we look at the topic of the Wildland Urban Interface and how it intersects with our work in forest resilience, riparian protection, and climate mitigation.

Jessica Klinke is Communications Director for KS Wild & Rogue Riverkeeper

For more resources on creating defensible space, home hardening, and living in the Wildland Urban Interface, check out our **Forest & Fire Toolkit** available to download at www.kswild.org/forest-fire-toolkit.



While you're there, check out our fire and climate podcast, **One Foot in the Black** (www.kswild.org/podcast), where we examine wildfire in the West and learn from experts on how to live with fire in the era of climate change. In our third episode, **Communities at Risk**, we address issues around the Wildland Urban Interface and ways to better protect our homes, our communities, and each other.

**Mietkiewicz N, Balch JK, Schoennagel T, Leyk S, St. Denis LA, Bradley BA. In the Line of Fire: Consequences of Human-Ignited Wildfires to Homes in the U.S. (1992–2015). Fire. 2020; 3(3):50. <https://doi.org/10.3390/fire3030050>*

KS Wild and Rogue Riverkeeper acknowledge that we work on the ancestral lands of Native tribes that lived and still live in what we call the Klamath-Siskiyou region. We thank the original caretakers of this land and we recognize our privilege in benefiting from these stolen lands. We encourage action as a way to honor, support, and stand in solidarity with present day Tribes.

THE FIRST, BEST STEWARDS: ABORIGINAL FIRE IN THE KLAMATH-SISKIYOU

By Daranda Hinkey and Tule O'Rourke



Since time immemorial, Indigenous people have been developing sophisticated methods for tending the land, including the use of fire. Indigenous peoples methodically burn certain areas across different elevations and habitats in order to renew food, medicinal, and cultural resources, encourage vegetation regrowth, and add a more nutrient rich environment not only for animals and plants, but for the people too. Traditionally, carefully applied fire by tribal people was also an important tool to reduce excess fuel loading in an effort to safeguard villages and seasonal camps from high intensity fires. Indigenous fire maintains a cultural and spiritual balance between the Earth and its people.

For most of the last 100-150 years, government agencies have considered fire a dangerous and destructive element, actively suppressing and excluding it from the land. The previous stigma that fire is bad, and the resulting age of fire suppression and intensive industrial forestry, has led to the current reality of vastly overgrown forests, loss of large old trees that are more resilient to fire, higher intensity fires, and the decline of natural meadows and prairies. These conditions all have a ripple effect on the ecosystem, and local tribes' ability to gather valued species that they have relied on for thousands of years.

Today we are encountering an "out of balance" landscape that has been left without the healing medicine of fire on the land. Native American Tribes and communities are working to integrate their knowledge and practices into Traditional Ecological Knowledge—including bringing fire back to the land in a good way. Native tribes provide a framework for improving fire management; this includes reduction of fuel loading, restoration efforts, and cultural revitalization through fire use. Reclaiming this heritage is now resurging as we face increasingly frequent megafires and the destruction they have been causing.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Western Science are being woven together to develop best practices in ecosystem stewardship. Understanding the immense knowledge from these two systems can benefit the environment and people. With government agencies seeing the value of this approach, and community-based restoration organizations establishing strong partnerships with tribes, it has further empowered Native American tribes on a growing scale with their models of ecological forestry practice and long-term thinking. On a national scale, academia, foresters, and place-based conservation organizations are following Native tribes' traditional knowledge, as their wisdom serves as a model to help guide ecological forestry practices through a whole systems approach to resource stewardship. Continuing their long-term vision for the environment, and being the first and best stewards of the land, make tribes invaluable allies and leaders in forest and watershed restoration.

"Aboriginal fire is resurging across tribal communities, as an important land stewardship tool. Fire has been used on the land for time immemorial to manage vegetation, influence landscapes and increase diversity in the ecosystem."

Belinda Brown

Lomakatsi's Tribal Partnerships Director
& member of the Kosealekte Band of the
Ajumawi-Atsuge Nation

Landscape-scale restoration projects aimed at improving ecosystem resilience can also enhance sources of traditional subsistence food and medicines, while presenting opportunities for employment of Indigenous people in stewarding their ancestral lands. It is therefore critical for organizations concerned about ecological and social health to engage with Indigenous people in ecological restoration, to be inclusive of the first, best stewards of the land, and also to realize the multiple ecological and social benefits that come from incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge into restoration planning and evaluation.



Daranda Hinkey is an enrolled member of the Fort McDermitt Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, located in northern Nevada. Tule O'Rourke is an enrolled member of the Yurok Tribe located in northern California. In Spring 2020, while completing Environmental Science and Policy degrees at Southern Oregon University, they served as interns with Lomakatsi's Tribal Partnerships Program and helped coordinate the tribal panel for the 2020 Fire & Climate Summit, hosted by Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, Lomakatsi Restoration Project, and other partners. This article was originally written as a blog post accompanying a presentation by the same name, featuring a moderated panel of cultural fire practitioners and scholars. You can view the full presentation on our website at kswild.org.

Daranda and Tule, pictured here with Belinda Brown. Photos courtesy of Lomakatsi Restoration Project

PROTECTING COMMUNITY FROM WILDFIRE:



YREKA, CALIFORNIA

Rick Donaldson, 2014

Following the summer 2022 McKinney Fire, the safety of homes and towns that abut forestlands is on all of our minds. Two years prior to the McKinney fire, in 2020, the Klamath National Forest began work on the Craggy project located in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) where the forest merges with Yreka. While the Klamath National Forest has a very controversial timber sale program the Craggy project was widely applauded and appreciated. What made the Craggy project both popular and effective was its focus on thinning dense second-growth timber plantations in the WUI and then following-up with low intensity prescribed fire. The combination of plantation thinning and prescribed fire is intended to bring these forest stands back closer to what they would have been like had not clearcutting, tree planting and decades of fire exclusion occurred.

WHAT TOOK SO LONG?

The Forest Service first proposed the Craggy project back in 2010, yet work did not start until 2020. Instead of prioritizing the safety of Yreka, Klamath National Forest timber planners were instructed to put Craggy on hold from 2010 through 2017 while the Forest developed massive backcountry “salvage” logging timber sales that targeted old-growth forests stands far from homes, communities and the WUI. Community protection took a back seat to salvage logging in remote wildlands.

PLENTY OF PLANTATIONS

The unsustainable clearcut logging boom that occurred on Forest Service (and Bureau of Land Management) lands from the 1970s through the early 1990s has left a legacy of hundreds of thousands of acres of dense flammable timber plantations that exhibit little resilience to wildfire and provide minimal benefits to wildlife. By thinning these

communities, land managers can reduce fire hazard and increase forest resilience. To the credit of the Forest Service, the Craggy project is an example of second-growth small-diameter thinning in the WUI that will result in improved forest conditions and greater community safety.

THINNING IS NOT ONE SIZE FITS ALL

Nowadays just about every logging project on public lands gets described as “thinning” regardless of the forest stand type or the logging prescription. Simply calling a timber sale “thinning” does not necessarily mean the project will improve forest health and resiliency or increase community safety from wildfires. There is a world of difference between thinning a dense second-growth timber plantations adjacent to town and removing old-growth forest canopy in the backcountry- yet both types of logging often get described as thinning.

THE RIGHT PRESCRIPTION AT THE RIGHT PLACE

An encouraging lesson from the Craggy Project is that stakeholders, communities and public lands managers can come together to implement treatments where they will do the most good, namely in the vast expanse of timber plantations that have been established in Wildland Urban Interface areas throughout the region. It is a shame that it took the Klamath National Forest a decade to get around to prioritizing the Craggy Project, but sometimes old habits die hard and at least they finally got it right.

George Sexton is KS Wild's Conservation Director



Dense second growth timber plantation targeted for thinning near Yreka.

MANAGING RIPARIAN AREAS TO PREVENT WILDFIRES

Much of the Rogue Valley consists of urban areas surrounded by forests, which can bring many challenges during wildfire season. In the greater Medford Metropolitan area, streams and creeks—like Bear Creek— feed into the Rogue River as it traverses across the landscape. The riparian forests that surround these vital water sources to the Rogue River can act as buffers to protect our communities from wildfire, but can also act as corridors for wildfire to cut across landscapes depending on how they are managed.



Riparian areas that are vulnerable to high-severity fire (due to unnaturally high fuel levels, tree densities, and seasonal dry conditions) may benefit from upland fuel reduction treatments to promote resilience to wildfire. Treatments that reduce tree and brush density allow more light to reach the forest floor and can have positive effects on understory plant diversity and aquatic productivity in some riparian areas. For example, riparian areas with black cottonwood, Oregon ash, and other key hardwoods provide important habitat for wildlife species. The characteristic hardwood species common to riparian areas tend to bounce back quickly from fire.

Erosion from wildfires under normal circumstances is important for maintaining stream productivity and biodiversity. However, severely burned hillslopes are more likely to generate water and sediment that can lead to flooding, stream channel erosion, and debris flows, which can pose short-term threats to people and infrastructure and longer term threats to aquatic habitat. Significant increases in sedimentation rates may negatively affect sensitive aquatic organisms and reservoir water quality and capacity.

Urban development into riparian areas is more common than ever with an increase in population in the Rogue Valley. These special forests that are made up of hardwood trees and shrubs are important because they provide habitat for terrestrial and aquatic wildlife, act as filters for our drinking water, and retain soil moisture that can act as barriers to wildfire spread. Where our urban environments meet water sources require special considerations and management practices. Rogue Riverkeeper is reviewing local municipal ordinances to make sure the strongest protections are in place to protect this key habitat from overdevelopment.



The fall season is the perfect time to assess the surrounding natural landscape to your home and how you can decrease wildfire risk. If you own or manage property that is adjacent to a riparian area, now is the time to think about your management plan for the next year. If you plan to remove any vegetation, it's important to have a plan in place to restore the area with native plants. Before removing non-native vegetation within the riparian corridor it's important to have a Riparian Landscape Plan approved by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). The local ODFW staff are eager to assist the public with developing a plan that will reduce wildfire risk but also promote a healthy riparian habitat. Before you start cutting, call your local ODFW office to ask for help developing a Riparian Landscape Plan.

Emily Bowes is Rogue Riverkeeper's Conservation Director

BEAR CREEK: TWO YEARS AFTER THE ALMEDA FIRE

As one of the core members of the Bear Creek Restoration Initiative (BCRI), Rogue Riverkeeper and our partners took quick action in the weeks after the 2020 Almeda Fire to protect water quality and reduce the potential of polluted stormwater runoff along the Bear Creek Greenway.

A coordinated effort to seed the bare soil along the streams successfully covered most of the bare soil by the time the rain began that fall. What could have resulted in a muddy slurry entering the creeks and eroding stream banks was, for the most part, very limited as the light fall rain and sprouting vegetation kept the soil and ash in place that first winter after the fire.



Rogue Riverkeeper established photo monitoring points to document the changes after the fire. Sharing the photos with restoration practitioners helps them see how restoration planting projects are faring after the fire, how the legacy and pre-existing vegetation is regenerating, and how invasive plants have responded to the fire, which helps in planning new restoration projects and maintaining current vegetation. We appreciate our team of volunteers who collected this important data.



The recovery process of the Bear Creek riparian area will take a long time. Vegetation management, monitoring, and emergency responsiveness are important ways we can prepare and adapt for more arid conditions and increased wildfire risk due to climate change.

Frances Oyung is Rogue Riverkeeper's Program Director

THE ROOT CAUSES OF INCREASED WILDFIRE

As much of the world attempts to come to terms with increased climate enhanced wildfire, it is important to remember just how we got to a place where wildfire is reshaping our landscapes and our communities. Of course, climate change is a primary cause of the increase in fire severity, but there are other factors. KS Wild's Climate Program works with policy makers, scientists, and land managers to advance climate smart forest principles on federal land. We've identified these root causes of increased wildfire that help drive our work.

FIRE IS INEVITABLE, BUT WHAT KIND?

Perhaps the most talked about reason for the increase in devastating wildfires is that we've been too good at putting out fires for too long. The result is a buildup of flammable fuel that now carries larger, more explosive wildfires that, when they do burn, are much harder to control. What is not talked about enough is how Native People depend on and use fire for cultivation of roots, berries, grasses and countless other reasons. Changing policies to allow the return of cultural fire as well as increasing the use of prescribed fire would help lead to better land management today. Visit <https://www.culturalfire.org/> to learn more about the Cultural Fire Management Council which facilitates cultural burning on the Yurok Reservation and Ancestral lands.

CUT LARGE TREES, PLANT SMALL TREES, RINSE, REPEAT

For decades, our approach to forest management was simple: cut down the largest trees, send them to the mill for processing, and replace the old-growth forest with a fast growing tree plantation. We did this across almost all of the oldest forests in the Pacific Northwest. What we did not realize is that we were removing the most fire resilient trees and replacing them with small, highly flammable trees. We made the environment more fire prone by logging out centuries-old trees with thick bark adapted to fire; trees that had already withstood many past wildfires. Now, in densely packed tree plantations, fires burn with much higher severity. Protecting our older forests and managing for older forest conditions would restore more balanced fire cycles. Read more about KS Wild's old-growth protection campaign on our website.



WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

Forest Defender Training Series
October 5th, 12th, 19th & 26th, 2022
6pm-7pm

Beginning this fall, KS Wild is hosting a Forest Defender Training Series covering the critical functions of old-growth forests, wildfire in the Klamath-Siskiyou, climate adaptation, and the current status of forest protections. Learn how to advocate for our forests through phone banking, letter writing, and actions that ensure federal land managers take swift action to protect our most important trees from logging.

WORRY ABOUT THE WUI

We simply moved our communities out into areas that are fire prone as close to the forest edge as possible. We're building more and more homes in forested areas where fires historically have burned and will most likely burn again. Much like living in a floodplain next to a river carries the risk of flooding, our communities are in a fireplain and are at risk of burning. By developing and building more homes in wildfire country we are more impacted by fire because our houses are burning down. Known as the Wildland Urban Interface, the WUI divides urban development like houses, towns, and communities from undeveloped land. Between the years of 1990 and 2015, one study found 32 million new homes were built in the WUI. We need policies that protect homes that are at risk and plan for a future with more fire. Being ready for wildfire starts with maintaining an adequate defensible space and by hardening your home by using fire resistant building and landscaping materials. For more information, check out KS Wild's Forest & Fire Toolkit on our website.

CLIMATE CHANGE

If you talk with a climate scientist they will tell you to just get used to more explosive fires. The die has been cast. Climate change is the reason we will continue to see fires that are destructive. The climate is heating up and drying out the landscape and it's only going to get worse. This is causing more extreme fire weather and conditions that lead to larger more destructive wildfires on the landscape. Preventing climate change from exacerbating wildfire conditions is an obvious step. Stay engaged with KS Wild's Climate Program for more information on how to adapt to wildfire, address climate change in our conservation work, and protect our wildlands in the era of climate change.

Joseph Vaile is KS Wild's Climate Director



KS TEAM

THANK YOU!

SARAH LILLEY, WATER QUALITY MONITORING INTERN

Sarah spent the summer collecting and testing local water ways as part of the Rogue Riverkeeper Water Quality program. A recent graduate from Portland State University with a BSc in Biology, Sarah will soon be pursuing a Masters degree in Marine Biology next year. Sarah moved to the Rogue Valley in 2001 and has since spent her time hiking, camping, rafting, and exploring the forests and waters of this beautiful state. Sarah was a great addition to Rogue Riverkeeper.

LILLIAN KLEIN, LAW CLERK

Before joining KS Wild as our summer Law Clerk, Lillian finished her first year at Lewis & Clark Law School where she worked on several projects with the Northwest Environmental Defense Center. After receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Studies and Geography from the University of Colorado, Boulder, Lillian spent six years working as a river guide in Southern Colorado and guiding backpacking tours in northern New Mexico. We were delighted to have Lillian join us this summer where she did excellent work for both ForestWatch and Rogue Riverkeeper.

WELCOME!

ISAAK OLIANSKY, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Isaak joins KS Wild and Rogue Riverkeeper as our key fundraiser after spending two years serving as the Executive Director for the Ashland Emergency Food Bank. While earning his Bachelor's degree at University of Oregon, he worked as lead fundraiser for UO's annual giving program. For six years, he worked in case management for social services and housing organizations in Portland, OR. We're excited to welcome Issak to the team!

Celebrate National Public Lands Day! Saturday, September 24th, 2022

Eight Dollar Mountain Botanical Area - 10am-3:30pm

Celebrate National Public Lands Day at Eight Dollar Mountain Botanical area. We will be installing an interpretive sign and repairing buck and rail fencing in an area where you'll find the rare and endemic Howell's Mariposa lily, Darlingtonia fens and over 200 year old Jeffrey Pine trees. Port-o-Potties, water and snacks will be available during the day.

Bear Creek Stewardship Day - 9am-12pm

Rogue Riverkeeper is partnering with Jackson County and other partner organizations to invite all community members to join us on National Public Lands Day in an effort to keep Bear Creek clean! There will be invasive plant removal (blackberry grubbing and cutting) and trash pick-up at Lynn Newbry Park in Talent. All ages welcome.



GIVE TO THE WILD

With approximately 2,000 households across more than 35 states (and provinces) supporting the mission of the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, our network of donors provides the organization with the stability and flexibility to address threats to old-growth forests and wildlife. Our supporters also help us leverage opportunities to advocate for conservation and restoration of the region's public lands and wild rivers.

Signing up for a monthly contribution, or an annual recurring gift, is a great way to support KS Wild and Rogue Riverkeeper on a regular basis. Monthly donations and other recurring gifts provide stability between our two fundraising seasons and allows donors to spread their support over a longer period of time. When you give monthly, your contributions are supporting the ForestWatch, Climate, and Rogue Riverkeeper programs, and benefit our restoration and stewardship projects across 8 million acres of public land.

Please consider signing up for monthly giving in 2022. You can conveniently check the "monthly" (or quarterly and annual) options at the top of the donation form on our website at www.kswild.org/join-ks-wild, and you can also use the attached remit envelope to sign up for recurring giving. We provide folks with options to use your credit or debit card, as well as an ACH option for those wanting to contribute via a check or checking account.

Monthly giving is a convenient way to support your favorite non-profits like KS Wild, while also limiting paper waste from renewal notices and future solicitations.

Thank you for your ongoing support!



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

**ROGUE RIVER TRAIL
RAFT-SUPPORTED HIKE**
MAY 2023

For more information:
www.kswild.org/events





SALMON WALKS

WITH KS WILD & ROGUE RIVERKEEPER

Rainie Falls Salmon Hike

Sunday, October 2nd, 2022, 9:00am-4:00pm

Join KS Wild staff for a moderately difficult 4-mile out-and-back hike along the Wild & Scenic Rogue River. We will stop for lunch at Rainie Falls to watch the salmon jump! Fall Chinook are on their way home to give life to another generation in the same river or creek where they were born. Watch them on their journey as they jump over these impressive falls on their way home. This is the perfect time for a hike along the river where we will enjoy the beauty of the fall colors and maybe even see the occasional river runner navigate the rapids.

Salmon Viewing on the Upper Rogue

Saturday, October 8th, 2022, 1:00pm-3:00pm

Explore along the Upper Rogue River at McGregor Park as we look for spawning Chinook salmon and follow the paths through a riparian forest starting to show its fall colors. Enjoy a nature walk with Rogue Riverkeeper Program Director, Frances Oyung and hear about native fish, riparian habitats, and talk about how to protect the iconic salmon. This is a short (.5 mi) easy walk, mostly on flat trails along the riverside. Kids are welcome.

Salmon Viewing on the Applegate River

Sunday, October 16th, 2022 10am-12pm

Every autumn Chinook salmon swim back up the Rogue River to their birthplaces in the Rogue and Illinois Valley's rivers and streams. Join KS Wild and Rogue Riverkeeper staff for this easy walk to look for salmon returning home to spawn in the Applegate River. You will learn about where they live, their behavior, and ways we can help them along their journey home. Kids are welcome.

Salmon Viewing on Bear Creek

Sunday, October 23rd, 2022 10am-12pm

Learn about the annual salmon migration up the Rogue River and Bear Creek on this casual stroll along the Bear Creek Parkway between Ashland and Talent. Rogue Riverkeeper Conservation Director, Emily Bowes, leads this 2 1/2 mile, round trip hike on mostly paved surfaces to places along Bear Creek where salmon are known to spawn.

FALL HIKES

Briggs Creek Trail

Saturday, October 8th, 2022

The Briggs Creek trail travels through towering old-growth stands of sugar pine, Douglas fir, and cedars. This 5 mile hike is moderately difficult, crosses several smaller creeks, and is relatively flat. The hike ends at the old Elkhorn mining camp where we will find old remnants of hydraulic mining in the area.

Mill Rat Old-Growth Timber Sale

Friday, October 21st, 2022

Mill Rat features old-growth trees targeted for logging in the Medford District Bureau of Land Management Poor Windy Timber Sale. This moderately difficult hike is off trail and follows a proposed road through a mature and old-growth forest. We will discuss the BLM's continued attack on old-growth forests and action you can take to protect them.

Upper Rogue River Trail

Friday, November 11th, 2022

This moderately difficult trail hike will take us along the banks of the Upper Rogue River through old-growth Douglas fir forests. The hike ends at Knob Falls, a series of cascades through a narrow basalt canyon. The hike is 4 miles giving us ample time to explore the river edges which are mostly hardened lava flows.



SEE YOU ON THE TRAIL!

Once you sign-up online you will receive more details including carpooling locations and what to bring.

More events and information:
www.kswild.org/events



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Cover: Rogue River Trail on the way to Rainie Falls. Photo Credit: Jessica Klinke