

OPINIONS

20 years of BLM failure

BY JACK DUGGAN

The 1995 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Resource Management Plan (RMP) listed areas to be managed for off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation. "Timber Mountain/John's Peak (TM/JP) 16,880 acres" was one of them. No written description or maps defined any of these areas. These 43 characters within those quotation marks set off a controversy about issues of trash, trespass, noise, and erosion that has impacted Applegate residents for more than two decades. Major players include BLM, local residents, and the Motorcycle Riders Association (MRA).

For five years this undefined area was included in BLM and Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation brochures. In 2000, leaflets declaring that motorcycles were taking over the mountains were distributed throughout the valley. BLM had issued a permit to the MRA to hold a three-day event with routes that would include county roads and private property. The permit was pulled.

In 2003 BLM began an environmental review for the TM/JP with a scoping (public comment) period in which the public could say what issues should be included in the environmental impact statement (EIS). At the first public meeting for that process, Kristi Mastrofini, now BLM's Ashland field manager, Medford District Office, presented slides of the MRA logo and began promoting the organization.

In 2006, while BLM was in the process of developing a draft EIS, area residents finally saw maps of the proposed OHV area. The name and acreage have changed many times since. The draft EIS, released in 2009, was widely criticized for failing to consider scoping issues, failing to show a full range of impacts, and failing to account for the costs of implementation. In 2012 the BLM held a six-month "alternative dispute resolution" process that resulted in an agreement to disagree.

While the draft EIS was in development, the BLM issued a categorical exclusion (CX) to repair damage to an area known as Bunny Meadows. There were no objections to this CX until BLM put up a sign naming it a "staging area" and posted a kiosk map that included the MRA logo and showed trails across private property. The next CX came in 2014, a proposal to "maintain and rehabilitate" 72 miles of OHV trail

over a period of five years. The CX did not meet the criteria for a CX nor for a trail designation and was appealed by numerous individuals and organizations.

In 2016 BLM issued a new RMP that presented an interim plan to be used for "existing roads and trails." No definition of existing roads and trails was provided. That should mean the roads and trails considered existing must be legally established. There are no legally established OHV trails in the Applegate.

Now comes another CX to "maintain" 65 miles of trails over two years. It is little different from the 2014 CX, meeting neither the criteria for a CX nor the criteria for trails. The very damage BLM seeks to repair was caused by their promotion of user-created trails. Many of us see this as an attempt to legitimize user-created OHV trails that have never been legally and appropriately evaluated.

It is clear to me that BLM is biased toward off-road machine recreation. At the time of those 43 characters in 1995 and during the development of the draft EIS, BLM's recreation coordinators were both OHV enthusiasts. The Medford District has the highest number of proposed OHV areas of any BLM District in Oregon. Hikers and bicyclists must pay their own way to do an environmental review before building trails to meet BLM specifications, but OHV enthusiasts get to create trails wherever they like with no cost to them and no environmental review. It is no wonder residents are ignored.

Residents are once more preparing appeals to the latest CX—our First Amendment promises that "Congress shall make no law...abridging the right of the people to petition their government for a redress of grievances." (Unfortunately, this article will be published after the deadline for appeals has passed.)

So let's petition our government. Let's spread the word that this is no way to be a good neighbor or a good member of our community. We may have to live with BLM, but they have to live with us. Together we might all get them to take a more balanced view.

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Jack Duggan lives in the Applegate where he would be surrounded by the proposed OHV area.

From the Siskiyou Crest to the Rogue River: Federal land management in the Applegate Valley

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

The scope and scale of currently proposed or approved federal land-management projects in the Applegate Valley are staggering. The region we love and call home could be significantly altered by the cumulative impact of federal land timber sales, new roads, off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails, and increased livestock grazing on the Siskiyou Crest. From the mouth of the river and through the foothills to the Siskiyou Crest, our neighbors managing federal land have big plans—some good, some bad, some ugly.

In an attempt to produce timber volume, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has recently proposed a flurry of timber sales in the Applegate Valley, some bad and some ugly. They have either proposed or approved timber sales from Wilderville to Williams, Thompson Creek and throughout the Middle Applegate, to Little Applegate and Upper Applegate. The BLM has approved, but not yet logged, the Pilot Thompson Timber Sale, extending the length of Thompson Creek. They have also approved, but not yet sold, the controversial Nedsbar Timber Sale in the Little and Upper Applegate Valleys. That sale would cut some of the last low-elevation, late seral forests in the Little and Upper Applegate watershed, build new logging roads, and generally reduce both forest health and fire resilience by logging large, old trees and dramatically reducing canopy cover. The BLM has proposed "re-packaging" the sale for auction in the fall.

The Grant Pass BLM is proposing the Pickett West Timber Sale in the western Applegate Valley near Wilderville, Murphy, and North Applegate Road. The sale would log healthy, fire-resilient old forest and build numerous new roads into relatively intact native habitats. Many logging units are located along the proposed Applegate Ridge Trail, and two new roads would be built on top of the proposed trail corridor. Recently, the BLM also proposed a new timber sale in the Middle Applegate and has identified the entire area from Ruch to Thompson Creek for potential logging and "vegetation management." This includes places like the Wellington Butte Roadless Area, China Gulch, Forest Creek, Humbug Creek, Ferris Gulch, and Slagle Creek.

The BLM also recently approved a categorical exclusion (CX), allowing OHV trail maintenance and de facto designation on 23,000 acres and 65 miles of unauthorized motorcycle trails. The project covers a vast region from Forest Creek, China Gulch, and Upper

Humbug Creek to Jacksonville, Central Point, and the Rogue River. Despite the massive scale of the project, the CX shields the agency from environmental analysis and public comment. All 65 miles of unauthorized OHV trails have been built without authorization or attention to trail standards, creating extreme environmental impacts. The BLM has approved motorized use on "existing" trails (with no definition of "existing") that impact the endangered Gentner's fritillary (the official flower of Jacksonville), northern spotted owl nesting habitat, riparian areas, the Wellington Butte Roadless Area, and the proposed Applegate Ridge Trail, a broadly supported nonmotorized trail. The CX can only be described as ugly and is being appealed by numerous community organizations.

On US Forest Service (USFS) land, the agency is updating its grazing management plans for the first time since the 1960s. The project is known as the Applegate Grazing Complex and covers 166,452 acres in the Little and Upper Applegate watersheds, including the high meadows of the Siskiyou Crest. The agency is considering grazing in long-ungrazed areas, including the Red Buttes Wilderness Area and numerous botanical areas. Public land grazing is currently impacting water quality, biodiversity, and a multitude of other resources.

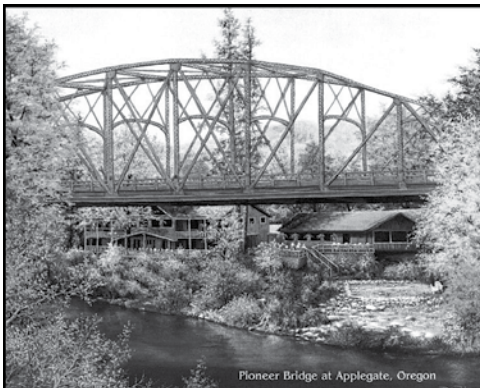
Meanwhile, the BLM and USFS are proposing a joint project in the Upper Applegate. The project is being planned under the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA). The concept is to promote innovative and ecologically balanced public land management through collaboration and public input. Currently the project is developing into a comprehensive plan encouraging outdoor recreation, improving pollinator habitat, reducing watershed impacts from damaged or unnecessary forest roads, reducing fuel risks, and maintaining resilient forest conditions through the use of prescribed fire, fuel reduction thinning, and commercial thinning in both natural (but previously logged) and plantation stands. Many in the community are hopeful that the final proposal is one we can support.

Through the good, the bad and the ugly, Applegate Neighborhood Network will be here representing community and conservation interests. Join us. There is a lot to do.

Luke Ruediger
541-890-8974

Applegate Neighborhood Network

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Applegate Lions Club members go back to school

Members of Applegate Lions Club recently completed work on a new swing set at Applegate School, bringing with them their expertise, tools, heavy equipment, and lots of opinions about how to proceed! "These guys were lots of fun," said Darrell Erb, principal. "They all had ideas about the best way to do things. I did my best to stay out of the way as they do great work!"

The Applegate School staff and students want to shout out a giant thank-you to our local Lions Club!

Lions Club members volunteered at Applegate School. Top photo: Larry Hogan. Bottom photo: Stephen Rapp.

