

# A whole-community approach to wildfire preparedness

BY RYAN PERNELL

Spring is a very special time in the Applegate Valley. But along with the joy of longer days and blooming flowers comes the uncertainty of the impending fire season. At A Greater Applegate's (AGA's) Neighborhood Listening Sessions, we ask folks across the Applegate Valley what is important to them and what they believe the community's priorities should be. It is no surprise that wildfire preparedness has been a prominent topic of discussion in every neighborhood we've visited so far. With time and the water table working against us, AGA got right to work considering what it would take to achieve valley-wide community readiness.

Reducing a community's wildfire risk is a complex challenge that can seem overwhelming at times. We decided to start with three focus areas: communication, education, and collaboration. Channeling our effort through this three-pronged approach allows us to focus on the community's assets and opportunities, making the task feel much less daunting. The following is a description of the projects AGA has started in an effort to cultivate a culture of resilience in the Applegate Valley.

We began by streamlining the way folks access emergency information online before, during, and after a wildfire. During 2020's hectic wildfire season, we observed that a centralized hub for up-to-date information from trusted local and state officials did not exist, costing folks precious time and much confusion. To remedy this lack of coordinated communication, AGA created the Wildfire Resource Page on Applegate Valley Connect ([applegateconnect.org/wildfire-resources/](http://applegateconnect.org/wildfire-resources/)). Here you will find links to relevant agency pages, preparedness

resources, and current updates regarding planned burns or wildfires in the Applegate Valley. You will also find recordings of "Conversations with the Crew," a collaborative effort between AGA and the Applegate Valley Fire District (AVFD) to broadcast messages intended to educate the public, familiarize the community with the AVFD crew, and provide an opportunity for folks to ask questions. Conversations with the crew are broadcast via Facebook Live. Keep an eye out for future broadcasts on the AGA and AVFD Facebook pages.

We then took our efforts offline and into individual neighborhoods, where we helped interested individuals build emergency communications systems with their neighbors. We assisted neighbors in the Little Applegate, Upper Applegate, and Humbug Creek create or update their emergency phone trees. These communications systems are tailored to individual neighborhood needs, ensuring folks without reliable internet or cell phone service can be contacted in the event of an emergency. If you are unsure if an emergency communications system exists in your neighborhood or would like help starting one, let us know and we can advise you on the process.

In the long term, AGA hopes to enhance the community's capacity to respond to emergencies by coordinating a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program in the Applegate Valley. CERT programs educate volunteers about disaster preparedness and train them in basic disaster response skills. Starting this program will require coordination among multiple stakeholder groups, fundraising, and, most importantly, community engagement. If you are interested in

## Don't miss the final AGA listening sessions

A Greater Applegate is more than halfway through our listening sessions. AGA has held listening sessions for residents of Little Applegate, Upper Applegate, Humbug Creek, North Applegate, Thompson Creek, Ruch, and Gyda Lane. We've also done focused listening sessions for Spanish-speaking residents, businesses, community-based organizations, and people engaged in the local food system.

Everything we are hearing is being used to develop an Applegate Valley Vision to ensure that the people who live and work here have a voice in our area's future. What we've learned so far is that each neighborhood may have one or more specific and very local concerns, but there is also a strong, collective vision for the Applegate Valley. Priority concerns like reliable internet, fire safety, emergency preparedness plans, more opportunities to gather together, and a strong commitment to preserving the natural beauty resonate across the watershed.

If you haven't had a chance to participate in an AGA listening sessions, please join us at one of the remaining events. It is one of the best ways we know to gather with neighbors for fun and to imagine our collective future. We bring food and refreshments and provide kid care. You bring yourself and your neighbors. We hope to see you soon!

The following listening sessions are scheduled as of press time (please contact Megan Fehrman at [Megan@AGreaterApplegate.org](mailto:Megan@AGreaterApplegate.org) to confirm logistics and reserve your space):

- Sterling Creek/Griffin Lane: Sunday, June 13, 2-4 pm at Wild Wines
- Provolt: Thursday, June 24, 5:30-7:30 pm at Dorothy Gale's Event Center
- Williams: Tuesday, July 13, 5:30-7:30 pm at Pacifica
- Applegate Lake: Sunday, July 25, 2-4 pm at Greeley Wells's place
- Wilderville and Wonder: Tuesday, August 10, 5:30-7:30 pm at Apricity Vineyard
- Murphy: Thursday, August 26, 5:30-7:30 pm, at Applegate River Golf Course.

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taking an active role in Applegate Valley emergency management, let us know!

Ultimately, we've learned from the past year of separation that in-person gatherings are the best way to educate, communicate, and collaborate around the topic of wildfire preparedness. All Applegate residents are invited to join AGA, AVFD, and a variety of other local fire and forest management organizations and agencies at the Wildfire Education and Community Connection Fair planned for Saturday, June 26, 2021, from noon to 4 pm in the AVFD station #9 parking lot (1095 Upper Applegate Road). The purpose of this event is to share wildfire

information and preparedness resources, provide folks the opportunity to get connected with projects and programs aimed at reducing overall community risk, and build stronger connections between Applegate Valley residents and the organizations and agencies that serve them. We hope to see you there!

Please don't hesitate to reach out with questions, suggestions, or more information on how we all can contribute to the Applegate Valley's readiness for wildfire!

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# Trying to save Pipe Fork Creek for the future

BY CHAS ROGERS

On the eastern flank of the massive Grayback Mountain complex of granitic and metamorphic terranes lies the Pipe Fork Creek stream system. The easternmost range of the stately Port Orford cedar, this stream supports a wide variety of forest species within a narrow valley from 2,500 to 4,000 feet in altitude. Clear water from numerous perennial mountain springs supports the salmon-bearing waters of Williams Creek and Applegate River.

Hiking up the Pipe Fork canyon, which rises from the Williams Valley to the flanks of Sugarloaf Peak, is a delight and a challenge. The going is slow, through a rich forest supporting a vibrant growth of ferns, Oregon grape, salal, ocean spray, vine maple, and a variety of rare and endemic floras and flowers. The forest floor becomes a carpet of moss and lichen and gives way underfoot, like a sponge. Fallen logs lie everywhere, decaying into the ground to build the base of the soil that gives the forest life. In the stream, fallen logs form a rich, complex habitat for aquatic life.

Climbing and slipping along wet rocks and fallen logs, my hiking partner and I encounter the first of the falls that cascade over steep rocks. The water splashes over the lip, forms deep pools in the ledges and grooves, and pounds the base. Bands of

quartz and feldspar cut across the stream channel in what seems like a lightning bolt swallowed by the torrent of water. Scrambling upstream we find more falls and pools in a line of giant steps climbing the mountain.

This is a beautiful place, but it is a place in danger. The Josephine County Forestry Department is proposing a clearcut on the south-facing slopes of Pipe Fork, a move that would have severe impacts on this ancient habitat: ground dried and baked by summer heat waves, loss of stream flow and water quality—impacts found in studies of clear-cuts on other streams.

The Williams Community Forest Project and Williams Creek Watershed Council have mobilized to save this amazing environment. Concerned citizens have sent more than 1,500 letters to the Josephine County Commissioners protesting the proposed clearcut. They have attended numerous community meetings with the commissioners.

For the county commissioners, the issue is money. The timber sale would fund part of their county budget, including juvenile detention and other programs in Grant Pass. It seems reasonable, then, that if it was purchased by a reputable group intent on making it available for



Pipe Fork waters support the salmon-bearing Williams Creek and Applegate River.  
Photo: Chas Rogers.

Wild and Scenic designation, the county could buy other land without a rare forest and beautiful creek. So the Williams Community Forest Project went looking for a buyer more interested in conservation than in cutting timber.

We have now located a funder who is willing to acquire the land and then transfer it to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to protect it as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern in conjunction with the existing BLM

Pipe Fork Research Natural Area, adjacent to the proposed timber sale. We hope to complete the purchase of the land from the county before any clear-cutting occurs and to place the property into holding until BLM can acquire appropriate grant funding.

But the Josephine County Commissioners have made no promises. We can only hope they will follow through with what seems to be the best plan and sell the land for conservation purposes to preserve the forests for the future and keep the water flowing.

The fresh clear water, the falls and pools, the giant trees and lush undergrowth call to us all. This is a place for all life—humans and the native wildlife of bears, mountain lions, fishers, elk, and deer. Fish and salamanders in pools and on gravel bars thrive, as do the magnificent ferns, understory plants, and giant trees. We must save this landscape

for its beauty and atmosphere that soothe the soul and relax the mind as much as for the water that flows from the mountains and feeds the salmon-bearing streams of Williams and Applegate.

Contact us and help us on our journey to Save the Pipe Fork. We're not out of the woods yet!

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For more information about Pipe Fork Creek, go to [williamscommunityforestproject.org](http://williamscommunityforestproject.org).