

THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAIN ADVOCATE

The global significance of the Siskiyou Crest

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

In the Applegate River watershed we are fortunate to have clear and cold mountain streams flowing from the northern slope of the Siskiyou Crest, along with old-growth forests, plentiful wildlife, world-class biodiversity, and beautiful wildlands. This landscape is our beloved home, but it also has global significance with unusually high conservation value.

Tucked into the remote borderlands of southern Oregon and northern California, the many subranges of the Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains create a haphazard jumble of rugged and diverse mountains, jagged peaks, wild rivers, and deep forests. Yet only the Siskiyou Crest cuts east to west across this landscape, connecting the Cascade Mountains to the Coast Range.

Starting near Siskiyou Summit, where Cascade Mountain bedrock collides with the granitic soils that predominate near Mount Ashland, the Siskiyou Crest runs west into the headwaters of the Applegate River to Dutchman Peak, Condrey Mountain, and out to Cook and Green Pass. From Cook and Green Pass the crest continues into vast wildlands in the Red Buttes and Siskiyou Wilderness Areas, then ends in obscurity at the Coast Range, just a few miles from the Pacific Ocean, on both the Smith and lower Klamath rivers.

This land bridge is vital for regional connectivity and renowned for its undisturbed, wilderness-quality habitats, including those in the Applegate River watershed. As the axis for biodiversity in the Pacific Northwest, the Siskiyou Crest and the surrounding Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains may also be the most diverse conifer forest in the world (DellaSala, 1999). The Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion contains 35 conifer species (15 more than any other ecoregion in North America), more than 3,500 native plants, and 281 endemic species found nowhere else in the world (Sawyer, 1996).

These ancient, weathered mountains bring together the fog-drenched forests

of the redwood coast; the westernmost vestige of high desert vegetation; the chaparral, arid grasslands, and oak groves of California; the snow forests of the Cascade Mountains; and the dry mixed-conifer forests of the Sierra Nevada. Essentially every major plant community in western Oregon is represented, and although the Klamath-Siskiyou region represents only 15 percent of California's landmass, it contains 65 percent of the state's native plant species (Smith and Sawyer, 1988).

In the Applegate watershed, scientists have documented 22 species of conifers and numerous endemic species, such as the Siskiyou Mountains salamander, Marshall's currant, and the Applegate stonecrop. These species are endemic specifically to the Applegate River watershed and are found nowhere else in the world, while other species, like Brewer's spruce and Port Orford cedar, sustain healthy populations in this watershed but are endemic to the larger Klamath-Siskiyou region.

The Siskiyou Mountains are also famous for the wide variety of what ecologists call "range extensions." A range extension occurs when a species is found at the edge of its range, in disjunct or isolated populations. In the Applegate watershed, small populations of Pacific silver fir and Alaska yellow cedar occur at the southern extent of their ranges on cold, north-facing slopes on the Siskiyou Crest. Various chaparral species reach their northern extent in the sunbaked foothills around Ruch and the Upper Applegate. Great Basin species like western juniper cling to the arid slopes of Anderson Butte, creating the westernmost populations in Oregon, while the Pipe Fork of Williams Creek supports the easternmost population of Port Orford cedar in Oregon, growing from a particularly moist pocket of dense, coastal conifer forest.

The Siskiyou Crest region contains abundant carbon-rich, old-growth forests



Looking west across the Siskiyou Crest from the headwaters of Elliott Creek in the Condrey Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area.
Photo: Luke Ruediger.

important for carbon sequestration and the health of our global climate. The protection of federal forest lands as National Carbon Reserves should include the vast old forests of the Klamath-Siskiyou, including those on the Siskiyou Crest and in the Applegate River watershed. Researchers have also identified our region as a "climate refugia," where the same biological features and unique microclimates that created our

world-class biodiversity could support connectivity and refugia habitat, allowing species to persist, disperse, and migrate in a changing climate (Olson, 2012).

Protecting our public lands and carbon-rich forests does more than benefit our local communities and economy. It is part of the global climate solution.

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OPINION

Time to change for the changing times

BY GAY BRADSHAW

Bob Dylan's words from 1964 couldn't be more apropos today:

*Come gather 'round people,
wherever you roam*

*And admit that the waters around you
have grown*

*And accept it that soon you'll be drenched
to the bone*

*If your time to you is worth saving
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll
sink like a stone*

For the times, they are a-changin'

For us in the beautiful Applegate Valley, southern Oregon, and the West, it's not the growing waters that is the pressing issue, but drying waters, heat, and fire. Still, the song holds a relevant message: *The times have changed.*

You wouldn't think change would be so hard on our species, because every aspect of life evolves. We are who we are because we have changed ever since birth, and we have a completely new set of cells making up our bodies every seven years. So we are built to change.

Despite this biological reality, we humans seem to have a hard time dealing with certain changes, which is one reason we have created rituals and cultural patterns, which give a sense of security that life is okay even though it is changing. Though this is true, it is also true that when we do not keep up with nature's changes, we fall out of sync, out of harmony, and out of place. Scientists call this behavior maladaptive, meaning it does not work.

Nature's ethic of fitting in and embracing change are key elements of

her sustainability. That's why deer rotate their grazing, hummingbirds migrate, and bears move up and down elevations—they live Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire style. Wildlife dances with the rest of nature.

Everyone arrived here at some point, whether hundreds of generations ago as First Nation peoples, five generations ago as timber, cattle, or mining pioneers, or more recently, as immigrants entranced by the magic and beauty of the Applegate and Rogue valleys. We planted ourselves here to become part of this beauty and richness. This worked for a while, but now there are many more humans, many more structures, roads, noises, and fences—and there is climate change. The land and the animals need us to be flexible and change so that they can live and thrive. Human habits that do not support the land and wildlife need to change.

It is not the time to hunt deer, bears, raccoons, wild turkeys, coyotes, and other wildlife who are struggling to survive. It is not only the grand elephant who is on the brink of extinction. Our own wildlife is on that edge, mentally and physically. It is time to give back. Give back water, room, and peace for the wildlife who have given us so much. This is human change for the better. Why is it better? Because one day, unless we change, unless we stop killing, unless we share food, shelter, and water with wildlife, we will wake up alone. The animals will be gone, and then our hearts and souls will sink like a stone.

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