



Watts Toppin Dam, on Williams Creek just downstream of the Powell Creek convergence. Photo: APWC.

Putting federal funds to work in the Applegate

BY NATHAN GEHRES

Many residents of the Applegate Valley, including myself, have the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as a neighbor. This is unsurprising, as approximately 70 percent of the Applegate Valley is public land, with the BLM responsible for the lion's share. As with any good neighbor, the agency is taking an active role in maintaining, and even improving, the amazing natural landscape that defines the Applegate.

One way in which the BLM supports local ecology is through Title II grants offered through the Secure Rural Schools Program. The Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council (APWC) successfully secured four such Title II grants in the last round for the projects described below.

Provolt Recreation Site (PRS). Williams Creek will be the setting for three of the Title II-funded projects. At PRS, APWC will be installing approximately three instream log structures and five to six log structures on the streambank, involving 120 harvested trees (from elsewhere at PRS) at sites where the streambank currently lacks tree cover. These logjams will slow the flowrate of the stream, retain spawning gravels, provide shaded habitat, and build pools that provide cool-water refuges. This will help alleviate the high summertime water temperatures that reach the threshold of what native fish can tolerate.

Watts Topping Fish Passage Improvement Project. Further upstream, this project will construct a roughened channel, basically a rock ramp for fish, over the existing dam to improve access to over 23 miles of habitat for migrating fish. This project has multiple benefits, including enhancing irrigation efficiency for local farmers by upgrading aging infrastructure with modern underground piping and directly improving access to upstream habitat for all aquatic species.

Mungers Creek is a headwaters tributary of Williams Creek. Chas Rogers has developed a project that will be installing approximately ten logjam structures and boulders to increase the quality of the instream habitat in much the same way that the PRS project will. All of these efforts seek to continue the investment in Williams Creek and the species that it supports. The projects should help increase the recruitment of coho salmon, Chinook salmon, steelhead, trout, and lamprey to Williams Creek. All of the Williams Creek Watershed would benefit from more spawning salmon that would lead to more salmon carcasses that infuse nutrients from the ocean environment into the creek and surrounding environment. The community will also benefit economically from these projects that will increase the



Caleb Galloway, APWC riparian restoration project manager, and students from Jefferson Elementary School in the Medford School District at a "Salmon Day" event at Cantrall Buckley Park.

production of a valuable sport fish in the long term, while in the short term, the implementation of this project will provide work for heavy equipment contractors and laborers. Protecting and restoring Williams Creek has always been a high priority and has only increased in importance as our local water resources become ever more strained under surging demand and drier conditions.

Cantrall Buckley Park. The final APWC Title II-funded project involves working with local students at this well-loved community park located just outside Ruch on the Applegate River. The park includes both banks of the river, and it is one of only four access points for the public between Applegate Lake and the Rogue River.

Aside from the valuable community resource that the park represents, it is also the location of APWC's Applegate Outdoor School program that serves hundreds of students each spring. This Title II project aims to remove blackberries and other invasive plants from the park and replace them with native plantings. APWC's Grow Youth program will assist with the removal of the invasives, as well as with trail construction and maintenance with Ruch Outdoor Community School students and various other local school groups. This program provides students with valuable opportunities to learn hands-on skills at a young age that can spark interest and potentially be applied in a later career. These local students will be taking an important role in restoring a well-used park that benefits the entire community.

APWC is very appreciative of the funding opportunities that the BLM provides through the Title II Secure Rural Schools Program and the good work that it funds. To learn more about our projects and partnerships, please visit our website at applegatepartnership.org, email us, or give us a call at 541-899-9989.

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Igniting the flame: A chronicle of Applegate Valley Fire District's storied legacy

BY CHRIS WOLFARD

Since its humble beginnings in 1977, Applegate Valley Fire District #9 (AVFD) has stood as a beacon of community resilience, with volunteers forming the backbone of its firefighting force. Initiated by the Applegate Lions Club, this grassroots effort initially relied on CB radios and phone trees for communication.



Leadership transitions occurred with Brett Fillis taking the helm in 1996, followed by Chief Mike McLaughlin in 2016. On August 1, 2023, after 20 years as the fire district's operations chief, Chris Wolfard assumed the role of fire chief, showcasing the district's commitment to cultivating

leadership from within. The pivotal moment arrived in 1980, birthing the Applegate Lions Volunteer Fire Department and setting the stage for the district's expansion. Ron Yarbrough took the reins as the inaugural fire chief in 1981, propelling AVFD into a new era. Station 1 was constructed in 1982, a testament to the dedication of Chief Yarbrough and his handful of volunteers servicing 136 square miles.

Success burgeoned, as evidenced by a significant success on the Insurance Services Office test in 1982, leading to reduced insurance rates for residents. Station 2 and the acquisition of the first fire engine in 1983 marked tangible progress. By 1984, annexation efforts added 45 more square miles, expanding the district's coverage to a substantial 181 square miles.

The late 1980s saw transformative growth, courtesy of a voter-approved tax base and temporary levies. Thanks to much hard work by fire district leaders and volunteers, Stations 3 (headquarters), 4, 5, 6, and 7 found their places on the map, strategically situated to optimize coverage. The district flourished with each station's incorporation, enabling additional staff positions and making way for operations chief and district office manager roles in 1992.

The financial landscape shifted in 1996 with Ballot Measure 47 and a substantially reduced tax base, resulting in a substantial reduction of fire district funding and necessitating budget adjustments. In response, voters approved a five-year Operations Levy in 1998, securing vital funding. The subsequent years witnessed several successful levy renewals, with the latest in 2023 receiving 72 percent approval by voters, ensuring the district's financial stability and our ability to serve the community effectively.

Presently, Applegate Valley Fire District boasts a robust team: ten full-time employees, one part-time employee, 24 volunteers, and 12 student/seasonal firefighters. As we reflect on our journey, we celebrate the unwavering dedication of past and present volunteers who have tirelessly served the Applegate Valley community.

Join the legacy—we're seeking additional volunteers!

In the spirit of community and service, AVFD extends an invitation to individuals passionate about making a difference. As we commemorate our rich history, we recognize the need for new volunteers to carry the torch forward.

Whether you're a seasoned firefighter or looking to contribute to community safety, your dedication is valued. Join us in preserving the Applegate Valley's legacy of resilience and community service. Together, let's continue the tradition of being the first responders our neighbors can rely on.

If you're ready to be a part of this storied legacy and contribute to the safety and well-being of our community, we encourage you to explore the rewarding experience of volunteering with AVFD. Contact us today to learn more about how you can play a vital role in shaping the future of community safety in the Applegate Valley. Your commitment matters, and together we can ensure a safer and more resilient future for all. Please consider calling AVFD today at 541-899-1050 to start your firefighting adventure.

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HISTORY BITS: AVFD



PHOTO: District 9's first fire trucks

This photo appeared in the July-August 2005 issue of the Applegater along with an article about the Applegate Valley Fire District's 25th anniversary.