

**THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAIN ADVOCATE**

# Forest defense: An Applegate Valley tradition

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

Over the past decade, Applegate Siskiyou Alliance (ASA) has successfully opposed thousands of acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) timber sales targeting mature and old-growth forests across the region, including the Pilot Thompson, Nedsbar, Middle Applegate, and Pickett West timber sales. Our opposition has not only saved thousands of acres of public land from being logged, but it has also sustained a movement, putting the Applegate Valley at the center of grassroots forest activism in the region.

This activism is woven into the fabric of the Applegate Valley community, and its successes are expressed on the landscape wherever towering old forests remain. Chances are, if you have a favorite forest in the Applegate, it was saved by residents in this community. Since the 1970s residents in the Applegate have fought for our forests, organized around wildlands, and joined together as a community to defend the region's incredible natural beauty and biodiversity. This legacy began with Chris Bratt, Paul Tipton, and Chant Thomas, among others, and continues today with residents all across the region who support Applegate Siskiyou Alliance and other Applegate-based environmental organizations.

For example, residents in the Applegate worked for the past four years to oppose the controversial Bear Grub Timber Sale, located in the mountains around Ruch and extending east towards Sterling Creek and the headwaters of the Little



Applegate Valley residents rally to stop the Bear Grub Timber Sale in the spring of 2020.

Applegate River. The Bear Grub Timber Sale proposed group-selection logging, a form of staggered clear-cut logging where whole groves of mature trees are targeted for removal in "groupings" up to four acres in size and up to 30 percent of a given timber sale unit. Thus, if 100 acres were identified for logging, 30 of those acres would have been clear-cut.

The project proposed this group-selection logging along the popular community-built East Applegate Ridge Trail, in the Wellington Wildlands along the proposed trail corridor for the Center Applegate Ridge Trail, at the headwaters of the Little Applegate River near Bald Mountain, and near the Jack-Ash Trail. Fortunately, after years of

activism and conflict surrounding this timber sale, the BLM withdrew the Bear Grub Timber Sale decision following consistent community opposition and directly after ASA and Applegate community members filed appeals with the Interior Board of Land Use Appeals (IBLA).

At the same time, rural residents in the Applegate Valley have been at the center of the opposition to the IVM (Integrated Vegetation Management) Project, a massive region-wide logging proposal that would allow the BLM to approve up to 20,000 acres of commercial logging and 90 miles of new road construction per decade, while eliminating numerous levels of public involvement, public comment, scientific review, and public accountability. This logging could take place virtually anywhere on Medford District BLM lands, but would focus on logging Late Successional Reserve (LSR) forests designated specifically to protect old forest habitat for the northern spotted owl.

The first timber sales proposed under the IVM Project include two large timber sales above Williams and Murphy in the western Applegate Valley. The Late

Mungers Timber Sale is located mostly in the Murphy Creek-Spencer Gulch watershed and on the lower flank of Mungers Butte. Penn Butte Timber Sale is located on Mungers Creek, Marble Gulch, Mule Gulch, and Powell Creek—all critical tributaries of the Williams Creek watershed as it flows through the Williams Valley and into the Applegate River.

ASA spent months monitoring timber sale units and reviewing the tree-removal mark in these timber sales. What we found was significant group-selection logging, proposing to remove whole groves of trees up to 36 inches in diameter and down to as low as 30 percent canopy cover. The current timber-sale mark would convert closed, cool forests into hot, opens stands, removing habitat complexity and northern spotted owl habitat. In fact, according to BLM's own timber cruise data, over 5,247 trees over 20 inches in diameter are proposed for removal in just the Penn Butte Timber Sale portion.

Over the past three years ASA has monitored these timber sales, documented their potential impacts, organized protests, administratively challenged the IVM project, and filed a lawsuit against both the larger IVM Project and the Late Mungers/Penn Butte Timber Sales. Our goals are simple: the protection of the last mature and old-growth forest remaining in southwestern Oregon and the protection of the Late Successional Reserve network. Our case against the IVM Project will be heard in court on April 2, 2024, and we hope to tack another 20,000 acres onto the list of forests we have helped save.

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