

The wildlands of the Lower Applegate

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

The Lower Applegate, between Murphy and Wilderville, is known for its agricultural flats, not its wilderness habitat. As it blends into the outskirts of Grants Pass, the area is the most heavily populated portion of the Applegate Valley; however, two significant wildlands tucked into the surrounding mountains provide important habitat for wildlife. Although not remote, the wildlands are obscure and seldom visited. They support interesting serpentine habitat, clear flowing streams, and dense old forests. Without recreational trails, access into their interior requires difficult off-trail hiking. Those who do venture there, though, will be rewarded with solitude, spectacular forests, abundant wildflowers, and long vistas across the mountains and valleys of southwestern Oregon. These last wild habitats in the Lower Applegate support a unique piece of the Applegate Valley's biodiversity and natural heritage. They should be protected for future generations as an important refuge for wild nature.

Slate Creek Roadless Area

The unprotected Slate Creek Roadless Area, at the headwaters of Slate Creek on the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, is roughly only 3,500 acres but contains unusual serpentine habitat unique to the Applegate River watershed. Its 386-acre Cedar Log Flat

Research Natural Area protects the only population of the insectivorous cobra lily (*Darlingtonia californica*) in the Applegate River basin and numerous rare plant populations, including Waldo buckwheat, which is otherwise found only in the Illinois River Valley.

Slate Creek is the first major tributary of the Applegate River. It supports runs of chinook salmon and steelhead and some of Applegate River's most abundant runs of coho salmon. It flows along Highway 199 through Wonder and Wilderville before dumping into the Rogue River west of Grants Pass.

This area receives roughly twice as much rainfall as the driest portions of the Applegate Valley and supports abundant winter fog. Its weather, vegetation, and unique soils make it similar to portions of the Illinois Valley with its endemic serpentine flora. Although significant concentrations of heavy metals and a lack of basic plant nutrients make serpentine soils toxic to most plant life, unique plant communities have evolved to thrive on them. These unusual soils support barren red rock openings, carpeted in low chaparral, sparse grass, and twisted Jeffrey pine. Majestic Port Orford cedar, bay laurel, western azalea, and alder dominate the stream corridors, and boggy wetlands flow down serpentine slopes into grassy clearings lined in cobra lily.



Cobra lily (*Darlingtonia californica*) is found in the Applegate only on Slate Creek.
Photo: Luke Ruediger.

Round Top Mountain Roadless Area

The Round Top Mountain Roadless Area is located on the high, rocky ridgeline dividing the Illinois Valley from the Lower Applegate Valley. Portions of the area drain into the Deer Creek watershed near Selma, while the northernmost portions of the wildland drain into Jackson Creek, Murphy Creek, and Panther Creek in the Applegate River watershed.

The area is a patchwork of rock outcrops, serpentine barrens, and mixed conifer forests. Located in the moister western portion of the Applegate Valley, it receives abundant rain and winter fog. On productive soils, old-growth forests of Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, sugar pine, white fir, incense cedar, live oak, and madrone grow in contiguous unlogged forest habitats. The vast old-growth canopy is occasionally broken

by serpentine outcrops, young forests regenerating from historic wildfires, and mixed hardwood groves.

In the 2016 Resource Management Plan, BLM protected the core of the area by designating 5,295 acres as the Round Top Mountain Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC). However, significant unroaded habitats at the margins of the LWC are currently unprotected.

Bolt Mountain

Bolt Mountain is not quite a wildland, but it makes an interesting and beautiful hike for exploring the serpentines of the Lower Applegate Valley. The low, rounded butte is a unique and isolated hump of serpentine rising 1,258 feet from the valley floor above Jerome Prairie and the Applegate River near Fish Hatchery Park.

A 3.3-mile trail beginning at Fish Hatchery Park climbs through beautiful Jeffrey pine woodlands with spectacular views and incredible floral displays. The trail climbs to the 2,227-foot summit and provides an accessible hike in the serpentine habitats of the Lower Applegate.

Mark your calendars!

Applegate Neighborhood Network, along with the Siskiyou Chapter Native Plant Society of Oregon, will be leading a hike to the Cedar Log Flat Research Natural Area on Saturday, May 18. Email info@applegateneighborhood.network for more information.

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Stories from Soweto: Commerce across the globe

BY MARGARET PERROW DELLA SANTINA

As I wrote in the winter 2018 *Applegater* ("Stories from South Africa"), over the past 20 years I've been lucky to get to know some people from Soweto, the townships outside Johannesburg that are home to over a million black South Africans. I first met them in 1998 when they were young adults in their 20s, participants in a youth-development project offering them skills that would help them find jobs.

Although apartheid officially ended with the celebrated 1994 democratic elections, South Africa remains a vastly inequitable country, with racialized poverty, high crime, and unemployment well over 30 percent.

Today, those "young" people are in their 40s. Some are formally employed—Lungile sorts mail at the post office on the night shift; Thabo makes boilers for trucks; Lovely is a receptionist; and Nonhlanhla is a nursery school aid. Others piece together informal work—Isaiesh sells Tupperware from time to time; Ntuthuko occasionally works for an auto-body shop; David collects recyclables; Kgotso has sold perfume and handbags in the street; and Christopher runs a printing business from his grandparents' garage.

Despite incremental, positive changes in their lives over the past two decades, they struggle to make ends meet. They are disappointed that their children's futures are not as secure as they had imagined. Even those who are formally employed often have long commutes

(two hours each way) in crowded minibus taxis.

Education has been officially desegregated, but they generally can't afford the fees to send their children to better public schools. Fee-free government schools are notoriously inferior to formerly white schools in the Johannesburg suburbs.

They all have hopes and plans to build a better future for their children. Before I left South Africa in September 2018, some of them identified a significant "next step" requiring modest funding. Listening to their plans I was struck by one thing they all had in common: in addition to supporting themselves and their families, they all explained how their plans would also benefit their communities.

Back home in the Applegate this fall, I set up my own commercial venture: a GoFundMe campaign on their behalf. I'm an uncomfortable fundraiser, so creating this campaign was a stretch for me. But I'm thrilled to have raised over \$3,000 so far (the goal is \$20,000) towards supporting these projects:

- David collects recyclables and pulls them on foot, on a homemade trolley, to a scrap depot several kilometers away from home. He hopes to buy a shipping container to expand his business to include a "spaza

shop" (corner store), which will help him better provide for his daughter and serve his community.

- Christopher operates a printing business in the family garage. He hopes to buy two computers and a router so he can email documents and customers can use the internet. This will help the business thrive, support his extended family, and provide a much-needed service in his community.

- Lovely has always wanted to earn her bachelor of arts in psychology and plans to attend Wits University to become a child psychologist. She has met the entrance requirements and will attend classes part-time while she continues working as a receptionist to support herself and her daughter.

- Thabo, a boilermaker for a transport company and a father of three, plans to start a business safely transporting children to school. He has developed a viable business plan and hopes to purchase a reliable used microbus.

- Ntuthuko, a father of three, dreams of being an Uber driver. He has experience

driving for a tour company, has researched the market and requirements, and hopes to purchase a reliable used car.

- Isaiesh began a university degree in social work, but unemployment caused her to leave the program after two years. She hopes to pay back her outstanding tuition and complete the degree.

I invite you to contribute to these projects! Every dollar counts in this collective effort to make a real and immediate difference across the globe in Soweto. You may specify which person's project you would like to support, and you'll receive updates as the plans are put into action.

It's easy to donate at GoFundMe: Visit gofundme.com/support-soweto-projects, where you can also watch short videos about each person, curated by them. Enjoy!

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The author is currently writing a book that spans 20 years of her research on youth development in South Africa.

Photo, below left: David at his recycling business.
Photo, below right: David at home with his daughter. Photos: Margaret Perrow della Santina.

