

# Applegater

Photo by Cate Battles | applegater.org

SUMMER 2023  
Volume 16, No. 2

Applegate Valley Community Newsmagazine  
Serving Jackson and Josephine Counties — Circulation: 13,000

Celebrating  
~29~  
Years

## Reassessing our relationship with fire

BY AARON KRIKAVA

*Fire season.* Uh, most of us respond to that phrase with dread. The calamitous and destructive nature of catastrophic wildfire can generate a feeling of fear. The suffocating and claustrophobic smoke drives us indoors.

And yet, in balance, fire provides for us in so many ways it almost defines us as a species. We heat our homes, cook our food, drive our cars—all through this miracle of combustion. Even without woodstoves, gas ovens, or combustion engines, much of our electricity comes from the burning of natural gas or nuclear fusion of the sun that powers solar panels.

As an element, fire's nature is transformation. You can hold a cup of water, dig up a clod of earth, feel the wind against your cheek. Fire is the element of change. The low-to-moderate expression of each element is healthy and rejuvenating, while extremes of each are dangerous and destructive. Small tremors reduce the stresses that lead to major earthquakes. Regular light rains moisten



Like dead-heading flowers in your garden, native fire-adapted plants benefit from having seasoned growth burned away. Photo: Aaron Krikava.

the soil and revive the plants; torrential downpours wash away soil and flood the land. A light wind carries pollen and seed across the landscape, while extreme winds blow down trees and destroy houses in tornados. Repeated low-intensity fire is also as important to safe communities and a healthy environment.

The policy of completely suppressing wildfires for the previous 70-plus years has resulted in the extremely destructive

See **FIRE RELATIONSHIP**, page 5.



Teresa Kasza holds a steelhead, the largest fish she ever caught in the Applegate River.

## Fishing is good in the Applegate River

BY DIANA COOGLE

When I moved to the Applegate, in 1972, the Applegate Store held an annual fishing derby. The walls were covered with butcher paper depicting the outlines of fish caught in the Applegate River.

I still see cars crowding the pullout past the store on Highway 238 when the steelhead are running, between February and March. One day last March, I found

Brian Dirks and his 14-year-old daughter, Cailin, fishing from the bank there.

Brian said he had fished in the Applegate River as a kid. "I would fish the whole river, all day, every day," he said, "Every time you would put in a lure at a rapid, you would catch a fish." Then came the '97 flood. "After that," he said—"nothing."

See **FISHING IN APPLGATE**, page 24.

## Be well—and drink clean water

BY JULIA PAVLOSEK AND LILLY ANDERSON

There's no doubt that southern Oregon has some of the best-tasting well water in the state. Cold, fresh water from your own well is one of the best benefits to country living. However, just because the water is delicious doesn't mean it's safe to drink. When was the last time you investigated exactly what's in your water? If it was more than a year ago, you could be in for a surprise.

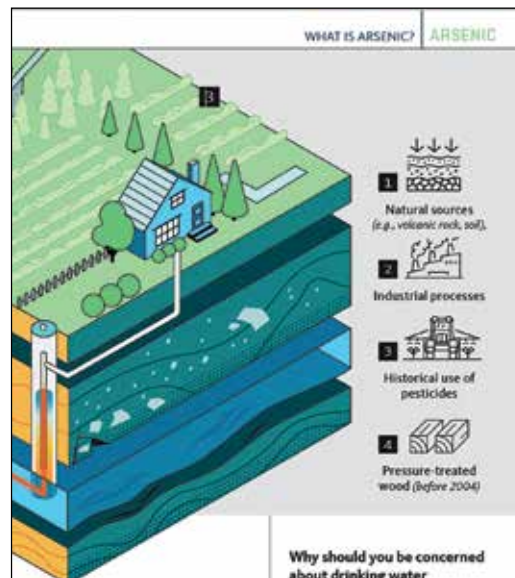
The average person consumes up to 10 cups of water per day, but we don't always think about what could be in the water we drink, cook, and shower with every day. This is easy to do because most dangerous contaminants in your well water are invisible, tasteless, and odorless. In order to avoid nasty surprises, it is recommended to have your well water professionally tested every one to three years. Long-term poisoning from water contamination can lead to chronic issues developing and worsening over time, such as high blood pressure, type two diabetes, and even certain types of cancer.

This year, Oregon State University is partnering with local Extension offices in Jackson County to provide free,

professional well-water tests to qualifying homeowners. If you are a homeowner in Oregon and at least 21 years of age, you may qualify to participate in a study recently launched by Oregon State University's Well Water Program called "The Be Well Study."

Oregon State University's Well Water Program was developed to help rural homes on wells have access to clean, healthy drinking water. Unlike city water, private wells are not monitored for contamination. To make matters worse, rural homes are particularly vulnerable to water contamination due to closer proximity to animal manure, fertilizers, and septic systems. Unfortunately, substances like lead and arsenic have been found to be present in levels above federal water contamination limits in Jackson and Josephine counties.

You may be wondering how it's possible for you to have a problem with your water while your neighbor doesn't. It all has to do with the underlying sources of contaminants. For instance, use of fertilizer on surrounding lands or having grazing animals near a well can lead to a



Graphic courtesy of Oregon State University.

nitrate problem on your property. Arsenic, another common contaminant in Oregon, arises naturally from volcanic rocks. Some areas have more of these rocks, causing higher levels of arsenic. Lead is unusual in that it often arises from man-made products. Lead can be introduced from old household plumbing with service lines, galvanized pipes, and older faucets. Laws have since restricted the use of lead in household plumbing, but you may still be at risk if your plumbing was installed before that change came about.

If you are interested in learning more about well-water contamination and how it relates to your health, there are several free resources for you. You can learn more about ways you can protect your well from contamination at [wellwater.oregonstate.edu](http://wellwater.oregonstate.edu). If you have specific questions, you can navigate to the "Ask Extension" web page through OSU Extension at [extension.oregonstate.edu/ask-extension](http://extension.oregonstate.edu/ask-extension).

The Be Well Study is a research study that includes a 30-minute survey about managing and treating your well to protect your drinking water and your health. You will receive a free water test worth \$130 if you complete this survey. To participate, you must be an adult and have a private well on your property that supplies drinking water. To learn more about the Be Well Study, visit [beav.es/Be-Well-Survey](http://beav.es/Be-Well-Survey) or contact Dr. Veronica Irvin at [veronica.irvin@oregonstate.edu](mailto:veronica.irvin@oregonstate.edu).

Julia Pavlosek  
BioHealth Sciences  
[pavlosej@oregonstate.edu](mailto:pavlosej@oregonstate.edu)  
Lilly Anderson  
Research Project Coordinator  
[lilly.anderson@oregonstate.edu](mailto:lilly.anderson@oregonstate.edu)  
Oregon State University

ECRWSSEDDM  
Medford OR  
Permit #125  
PAID  
US Postage  
Nonprofit Org

Local Postal Customer

# ISSUE

## FIRE - WATER