

# The Upper Applegate Fire Area is in bloom

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

Native plants respond to wildfire in many different ways, and the vegetative response from last summer’s Upper Applegate Fire has been interesting to observe. Like many botanists and naturalists who flock to post-fire environments for the often-spectacular wildflower blooms, I enjoy watching the natural recovery after wildfires. I have hiked off-trail throughout the burn areas of every wildfire that has burned in the Applegate in the past 24 years and have learned about the way different native-plant communities respond to wildfires, depending on elevation, soils, aspect, and many other conditions. Post-fire environments are among the most fascinating, abundant, and botanically rich habitats for people who study native flora.

Wildfires are not all the same. The slow-moving, beneficial 2017 Abney Fire burned up to my property in the Upper Applegate. This fire provided fuel reduction, habitat enhancement, and post-fire super blooms like you wouldn’t believe. However, I have also watched my mother-in-law deal with the trauma of losing her home in the 2020 Almeda Fire in Talent. Last June’s Upper Applegate Fire was a little too close for comfort for many local landowners in the Applegate. Thankfully, it didn’t do too much damage to human infrastructure, but like all wildfires in the Applegate, it has had positive influences on the natural ecosystem—after all, we live in a fire-dependent and fire-adapted landscape. The Siskiyou Mountains have

long evolved with wildfire, and sediment-core studies done at Acorn Woman Lake show that wildfires have been a regular occurrence in the Applegate for thousands of years. Native plants have evolved to take advantage of them!

Although many people describe the aftermath of wildfires as having “destroyed” the landscape, that is typically not the case in natural ecosystems. The post-fire environment is rich in wildlife and botanical biodiversity and is usually a boon for pollinators. In fact, firefighting bulldozers usually do more ecological damage in natural ecosystems than the wildfires themselves.

The Upper Applegate Fire area has had such a beautiful wildflower response this year that many locals have been out hiking the area to check out the gorgeous blooms. Species blooming this year include grass widow, spring gold, Tolmie’s cat’s ears, blue dicks, western buttercups, Pacific hound’s tongue, woodland star, western trillium, Shelton’s violet, Douglas’ monkeyflower, lomatioms, popcorn flower, Henderson’s fawn lily, California poppies, seablush, blue gilia, meadow larkspur, and many more, including the endangered Gentner’s fritillary and its relatives scarlet fritillary and checker lily. All these species have responded positively to the wildfire. In fact, many are growing much larger, in more abundance, and with more blooms this year, precisely because of the fire, the deposition of nutrient-rich ash that acts like fertilizer, and increased sunlight and changes in soil pH.

Many wildflowers, trees, and shrubs growing in the Upper Applegate Fire footprint are simply growing from an existing root system that survived the fire unscathed. Trees can be underburned and survive, or if they are a stump-sprouting species and were top-killed in the fire, they can sprout from their root systems, a phenomenon called epicormic sprouting. Madrone, Oregon white oak, black oak, live oak, and other hardwood trees are putting on abundant growth. Many even started to sprout within a few weeks after the fire was out. Some are also responding with seed germination—under many madrone trees in the Upper Applegate Fire area, thousands of tiny madrone seedlings are emerging under the shade of fire-scarred snags. This two-pronged strategy for renewal—seed germination and epicormic sprouting—aids survival. Many stump-sprouting shrubs are also growing quickly, including silk tassel, deer brush, mock orange, serviceberry, and mountain mahogany.

Most of the wildflowers that are blooming this year in the fire footprint are also growing from existing root systems that made it through the fire: bulbs, corms, rhizomes, tubers, and fibrous root systems. The annual species that are in bloom, including popcorn flower, seablush, blue gilia, and others are growing from seeds that germinated this spring, right out of the ash and burned soil.

Native seed germination can be triggered from the flames of a wildfire itself. Species like manzanita have thick seed coats that need to be scarified to trigger germination; the serotinous cones of knobcone pine open from the heat of fire. But in the post-fire environment, changes in soil chemistry, a different pH, increased sunlight, and more subtle changes trigger massive seed germination and super blooms. With increased native



Scarlet fritillary (*Fritillaria recurva*) blooming in the footprint of the Upper Applegate Fire in April 2025. Photo: Suzie Savoie.



Bluedicks (*Dipterostemon capitatus*) blooming in abundance in the footprint of the Upper Applegate Fire in April 2025. Photo: Luke Ruediger.

seed germination come more biodiversity and more beautiful wildflower blooms in the Applegate!

Suzie Savoie  
klamathsiskiyou@gmail.com

## Conversations with the land When the trees keep talking

BY GAY BRADSHAW

There was a summer ritual in my family as I grew up.

Preparation began when north-facing snow on the bumpy dirt road leading to the peaks cleared. Wax-papered sandwiches, apple juice, oranges, peanut butter saltines, and pickles were tucked into the wooden basket pushed up against a square box in the station wagon. The box wasn’t for us. Its homemade cookies, wine, peaches, cheese, and the Sunday paper were destined for others. Elsewhere, jackets, sneakers, a first-aid kit, binoculars, canteens, a canvas bucket, a shovel, and a USGS map were secured. Last, but not least, were Parrot and Beagle. One last check that nothing and no one had been forgotten, car doors slammed shut—one, two, three, four—and we were off.

As unending sea-green forests swept by, the wind pushed back my bangs and filled my lungs with the breath of cottonwood and Douglas fir. Then, suddenly, the vista transformed. We were catapulted into the dazzling green of the subalpine world strewn with orange, magenta,

and yellow wildflowers. In low gear, we crawled up a nail-bitingly steep and narrow trail. My brother and I unconsciously leaned forward as if to help the car’s struggling progress. Finally, we made it. We had arrived.

We sat awestruck by the mountains’ peace. Then a banging screen door and cries of welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Von Stein, veteran viewers of Dutchman Peak, broke our reverie. They wrapped us in a huddle of hugs. After a few minutes of chattering friendship, the box was handed over.

One particular day of this yearly ritual stands out. That day, I had an experience that would shape my entire understanding of life and the wondrous beings with whom we live.

On that first picnic of the summer, my parents, brother, and I set out for our favorite spot, a little roadside space overlooking the meadows below. While we unpacked, my mother spread a tablecloth on the grass and laid out lunch. That day, though, we weren’t alone. An unexpected guest arrived.



Lupine growing wild in the Applegate Valley. Photo: Gay Bradshaw.

Carrying a small rucksack and hiking staff, his long gray hair tucked behind his ears, the stranger nodded a warm greeting. My parents waved him over, handing him a sandwich and a bottle of beer. My brother stood near, lunch in one hand, binoculars in the other. I sat by the stranger, watching a pair of Golden Eagles soar in casual circles, almost at eye level.

While looking for ant lions and arrowheads, I felt the stranger’s hand touch my shoulder as he whispered, “Look over there.” I followed his gaze, and there, in the shadow of a nearby grove, were a mother black bear and two young. The man and I exchanged grins. The bear looked up, raised her nose in greeting, then settled down in the long summer grass with her frolicking cubs.

“They know you, don’t they,” I said. The man replied, “Yes, we’ve become good friends, but it takes a lot of listening and understanding.” Sensing my puzzlement, he explained, “Belonging somewhere isn’t just up to you. The animals and the land have to feel you belong. You can live in a place, but you don’t belong until the land says so.”

We watched the bears sleep and the eagles glide. After a few minutes, I turned and asked, “Do you think I belong?” The man answered with a question, “First, what do you hear when you walk in the forest?” “Nothing,” I said, “just my breath and the wind.” He shook his head, “No, I don’t mean the wind. There’s something else. When the land feels you belong, the trees will keep talking—and you’ll be able to hear what the trees are saying.”

As morning turned to afternoon, the stranger rose to leave, saying his goodbyes as he went down the hill and disappeared into the grove where the bears had played.

I’ve thought a lot about what he told me. It’s taken time, a lot of listening, and a lot of care—just like he said. I listened and waited, and now, when I wander in the mountains where he walked, the trees keep talking.

Gay Bradshaw • bradshaw@kerulos.org

### TRANSFORMATIVE POWERS

Continued from page 16

- They are helping to keep the air conditioner running and the lights on, so that our entire community can join together in learning, celebrating, and creating.
- They are celebrating joy and sharing memories through parties, baptisms,

- weddings, and memorial services held at JCC.
- They are finding friends and building networks of support.
- They are sharing their special skills with others.
- They are taking steps to enjoy and extend their lives in healthy and creative ways.

- They are learning, thinking, pondering, and sharing ideas.
- JCC offers each of our community members a place to find themselves, to find others, and to build a more satisfying life. We encourage you and all our neighbors to drop by and see the possibilities for yourself in answering life’s big questions through service, philanthropy, volunteerism,

participation, and celebration at JCC. If you need ideas, check out our website for summer classes and events, or find information on donating and volunteering at [jacksonvillecommunitycenter.org](http://jacksonvillecommunitycenter.org). We happily take calls as well at 541-702-2585. Julie Rae field, JCC Executive Director [jraefield@jacksonvillecommunitycenter.org](mailto:jraefield@jacksonvillecommunitycenter.org)