

# Applegate Outdoor School abounds at Cantrall Buckley Park

BY CHARLOTTE HYDE

The spring 2025 season of Applegate Outdoor School (AOS) drew to a close at the beginning of May. Throughout the month of April, AOS served approximately 350 sixth-grade students from the Medford School District's Hedrick Middle School in weeklong sessions of outdoor, inquiry-based learning at Cantrall Buckley Park. Now in its third year, the AOS program has honed in on its most successful attributes while continuing to explore new ideas, resulting in ever more exciting and impactful experiences for the students we serve.

The foundation of the AOS experience is the curriculum. Composed of field studies on water quality, aquatic macroinvertebrates, forestry, soil science, and fire ecology, the curriculum engages students in hands-on, place-based learning experiences that cater to a variety of interests and learning styles. Activities include chemical testing of Applegate River water samples, collecting aquatic insects, using forestry tools to "map" tree data, building soil sculptures, and creating landscapes out of playdoh and matches to model fire behavior. Each member of our excellent team of spring 2025 instructors, who represent a range of careers, brought a unique flair to their lesson delivery, emphasizing the value of diversity in the field of environmental education.

While the field studies that comprise the core of the AOS curriculum were carried over from previous years, our 2025 season introduced exciting changes

to the first and final day of each session. The new approach to day one focused on building rapport among the six groups of instructors, while grounding them in the environment of Cantrall Buckley Park, through a flexible blend of team-building activities, nature-journaling prompts, and a scavenger hunt highlighting the park's unique features. This mellow opening sought to gently ease students into what can be an intimidating experience for many while providing them with a thorough orientation of their classroom for the next week.

The challenge of designing an accessible yet exciting kickoff to a day-only outdoor school program is exceeded only by that of designing a satisfying conclusion. AOS met this challenge by concluding each session with an afternoon of "choose your own adventure," in which students were able to participate in one or more of a range of activities, including a nature walk, board games, arts and crafts, fairy garden building, field games, and, causing much excitement, archery. Introducing an element of free choice increases students' sense of autonomy, thus increasing their sense of ownership over their outdoor school experience.

A notable addition to AOS programming this year has been the development of a high school leadership (HSL) program, piloted by Cheyenne Palmo, Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council's United Community Action Network AmeriCorps Environmental

Education Specialist. This year, ten students from North Medford High School and one homeschool student accompanied an AOS instructor throughout a week of programming. The aim of the HSL program is to provide high schoolers with an opportunity to mentor younger students in their community, thereby building leadership skills, gaining experience working with children, and growing deeper roots within their community. Likewise, sixth graders benefit from the presence of HSLs by connecting with a positive role model. High school leaders are also valuable assets for field instructors. Each HSL was trained to lead specific activities, including a team-building game and a complex water-quality test, as well as to support instructor and student needs throughout the week. Our amazing first batch of high school leaders has left us excited to build upon this program in the future.

As a state-funded outdoor school provider, AOS is participating in an Outdoor School Evaluation Project through the Oregon State University Extension Outdoor School program. This project seeks to elucidate the various impacts of outdoor school on students, ranging from learning outcomes, socio-emotional development, environmental stewardship, and career interests. In addition to contributing to a state-wide dataset, data from AOS participants will also be shared with program staff.



Hedrick sixth graders line up to study forestry.



A high school leader discusses aquatic macroinvertebrates.

This valuable feedback will allow us to continue to adjust our program to improve the student experience. Just as we ask our students to learn and grow, AOS is a growth-oriented program that will continue to evolve in years to come.

For more information, visit our website at [www.applegatepartnership.org/outdoorschool](http://www.applegatepartnership.org/outdoorschool).

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# An update from Rogue Forest Partners

BY TOM GRECO

Rogue Forest Partners is a collaboration between six agencies and four nonprofit organizations to plan and implement strategic forest-health and fuels-reduction projects around the Rogue Basin. Projects use ecologically based thinning and prescribed fire to protect forest values and communities across federal, municipal, and private lands. Partners raise funds for this work from multiple federal, state, and private philanthropic sources and work with tribes, fire districts, landowners, and other community-based organizations to inform our efforts. Here is an update on recent accomplishments and what community members can expect over the coming months, in the Applegate Valley and beyond.

The Upper Applegate Watershed (UAW) Restoration Project spans 52,000 acres of land largely administered by the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This long-term, community-informed restoration effort aims to improve forest

health and enhance wildlife habitat, while reducing the risk of severe wildfire to the ecosystem. Since December, the lead implementation partner Lomakatsi Restoration Project has completed 141 acres of surface- and ladder-fuel thinning and nearly 500 acres of hand pile-burning within the UAW project. Working closely with the United States Forest Service, Lomakatsi also contracted Timberline Helicopters, Inc., to complete another 215 acres of helicopter-based ecological commercial thinning. To date, Rogue Forest Partners has completed 956 acres of surface and ladder treatments and an additional 878 acres of ecological commercial thinning, with 1.5 million board feet of small- to medium-diameter trees removed as the byproducts of restoration and sold to Murphy



A Lomakatsi crew member conducts ecological thinning on private property as part of the West Bear All-Lands Restoration Project.



Lomakatsi crews implement a controlled hand-pile burn on private land near Jacksonville as part of the West Bear All-Lands Restoration Project.

complete pre-treatment monitoring over the summer, with 275 acres of ecological thinning scheduled to begin in the fall.

Just over the ridge that separates the Applegate Valley from the Rogue Valley, the West Bear All-Lands Restoration Project spans 27,000 acres of the wildland-urban interface west of Bear Creek and the I-5 corridor, from Talent to Jacksonville. To date, Lomakatsi has overseen completion of 4,093 acres of ecological thinning, working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to engage 170 different private landowners across the project area, as well as with the City of Jacksonville and local partners for treatments within the Jacksonville Woodlands. Over the past several months, we've been focused on burning hand piles across 556 acres. Ecological thinning on an additional 1,057 acres is planned to resume this fall.

While we are getting essential work done in forests and neighborhoods, we are also creating opportunities for tribal and rural youth. These projects provide training opportunities through Lomakatsi's Inter-Tribal Conservation Corps and Youth Ecological Forestry Training Program, helping to build local workforce capacity and support pathways to natural resource careers.

### Sign up for updates

Rogue Forest Partners provides occasional updates to the community about operations, especially when controlled burning is planned. To stay in the loop, text "RFPupdate" to 855-594-2793 or follow Rogue Forest Partners at [rogueforestpartners.org](http://rogueforestpartners.org) or on Facebook (@rogueforestpartners).

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[www.applegatepartnership.org/upcoming-events](http://www.applegatepartnership.org/upcoming-events)

**APPLEGATE  
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& Watershed Council**

[www.facebook.com/applegatepartnership](http://www.facebook.com/applegatepartnership)

"promoting ecological, economic and community well-being in the Applegate watershed through on-the-ground projects and strategic collaborations."

Veneer. The revenue helps to offset the cost of restoration work.

Partners are gearing up to continue work on the Williams Project, designed to reduce wildfire risk to nearby communities and enhance ecosystem health on private and BLM-administered land. To date, partners have completed 194 acres of ecological thinning across six parcels of private land, and an additional 80 acres on BLM land. Lomakatsi's technical forestry team, working closely with the BLM, will