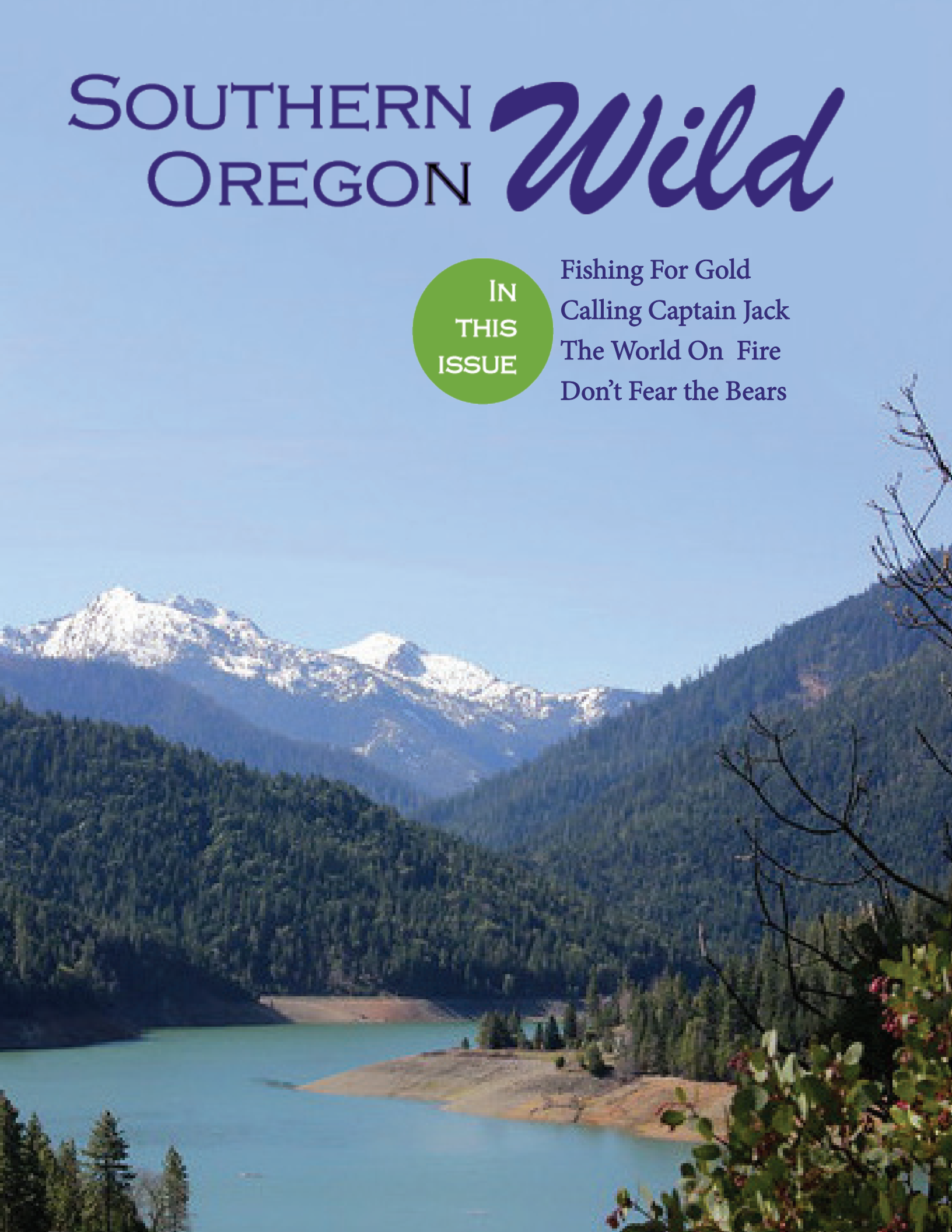


SOUTHERN OREGON *Wild*

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Fishing for Gold on the Applegate River

By Zach Urness

For one month each year, a seemingly ordinary river in Southern Oregon is transformed into fly-fishing's El Dorado. Legends of crimson-and-chrome fish slamming every other cast are told with regularity in this corner of the world, one of the quirkiest hotbeds for winter steelhead in Oregon.

The stream in question is the Applegate River, and if you've never heard of it, you're not alone. A 51-mile tributary of the Rogue River near Grants Pass and Jacksonville, the Applegate is known more for the wine its valley produces than for its rich fishing waters. Yet during March, the Applegate becomes one of Oregon's best and most interesting places to catch winter steelhead on a fly rod.

A smaller river with lots of gravel banks, the Applegate is fairly easy to fish with a fly rod, even for beginners. The river gets a run of wild and hatchery steelhead, and regulations allow harvesting two fin-clipped fish per day. The river is open to steelhead fishing each year from January 1 to March 31, with the stream hitting its peak toward the end of that time.

In the early season, the fishing is usually best in the lower river, near the Highway 199 area. As the season continues, the fish make their way upstream to Cantrall Buckley Park and McKee Bridge. "During the peak of the season, the fishing can be absolutely ridiculous, to the point that everyone in the group is almost assured of hooking a fish," said Josh White, a guide



Photo by Julie Roche

A beautiful steelhead from the Applegate River in Ruch Oregon.

and owner of the Rogue Fly Shop in Grants Pass. "For winter steelhead, that's pretty rare." The trick, said White, is to locate the schools of steelhead as they move upstream. "Because it's smaller water, they move through in pods," White said. "You'll often find holes with 25, 30 and even 200 fish in them." For many anglers, finding such a pod can feel like striking gold.

The Applegate Valley offers many outdoorsy delights from Bigfoot lore to wine, music, hiking and of course fishing. But the Applegate River isn't the easiest to access. There are only a handful of public access spots

as the river is bordered mostly by private property. Not only that, it's illegal to fish from a boat on the Applegate. This rule originally was put in place to reduce the harvest of wild steelhead,

"Because it's smaller water, they move through in pods," White said. "You'll often find holes with 25, 30 and even 200 fish in them."



Photo by Julie Roche

One of the few public fishing spots near the McKee Bridge.

back when the harvest of wild steelhead was allowed, and has never been reversed. “We considered removing the ban, but there was opposition from the public,” Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist David R. Haight said. “Many landowners and some anglers were concerned that if fishing was allowed from a boat, traffic on the river would increase, the river would become crowded and there would be conflicts between boat and bank anglers.” The most important consideration for fly anglers on the Applegate is water level. The fishing is best when the water flow is between 600 to 900 cubic feet per second on the Wilderville gauge downstream.

Intrepid fly-fishers can spend countless hours during the season searching for steelhead gold: one of those holes filled with a large pod. The best way to find those legendary pods of steelhead, therefore, is by floating downstream in a small kayak, raft or pontoon boat. You stop at fishing holes, get out of the boat and toss in your line. With a cheap Tahiti-style raft and fly rod one can float

the Applegate seeking out those sleek, elusive steelheads. However, anglers need to be careful of hazards when floating the Applegate. There are difficult rapids below the Applegate Reservoir, and Cantrall Buckley Park should be avoided because of downed trees and narrow rocky areas.

The two most popular floats are from Murphy to the Fish Hatchery County Park, and the Fish Hatchery County Park to Whitehorse Park on the Rogue River. The first float from Murphy to the Fish Hatchery County Park requires getting around a diversion dam below the town. There’s a path on the side of the river, but it can be a pain. There also are some moderate rapids on this section above the Fish Hatchery Park.

The easiest float, overall, is from the Fish Hatchery to Whitehorse Park at the confluence of the Rogue and Applegate. Setting up a car shuttle on this run can take forever, so it’s worth it to pay for a shuttle. While floating the river, anglers must remember to respect the rights of landowners

and by sticking to the gravel bars within the river and not straying far from the banks. Your reward will be landing one of those crimson and chrome beauties.

The last piece of the puzzle is the decision on what type of fly to use. Bait anglers tend to use spinners, Little Cleos and yarn balls, often drifted below a bobber to keep them from snagging on the bottom. Fly anglers often use a stone fly and nymph combination, or, if the water is dirty, a brightly colored egg pattern. Knowing the conditions ahead of time is the key to a successful day on this river, so it’s a good idea to stop in either Grant’s Pass or Ruch to ask the locals about what’s working best. If pre-planning your trip is too much, you can splurge on a shuttle or guide. Either way, when you across one of those pods of steelhead, you’re sure to strike gold ★

Need help getting started? Reach out to these pros:

- **Rogue Valley Anglers**
(541)973-2988
- **Rogue Fly Shop**
(541) 476-0552
- **DMJ Shuttles**
(541) 476-4382
- **Ruch Country Store**
(541) 899-8559
- **Star Ranger Station**
(541) 899-3800
- **Applegate River Lodge**
(541) 846-6690

The Comedian and Captain Jack

By **Damian Mann**

The 2015 legalization of the cultivation and sale of marijuana for recreational use changed the landscape of southern Oregon, both literally and figuratively. Seemingly overnight farmland that once produced crops like squash, pears and grapes was turned over to the cultivation of cannabis. The smell of maturing marijuana plants, like the smell of money, attracted investors from all over the country. Some were out to make a quick profit while others sought to put down roots.

One such character was none other than the celebrity comedian Jim Belushi. For him, the draw of running his own cannabis enterprise was the natural culmination of a lifetime of memories shaped by the controversial herb.

When Jim Belushi talks about Oregon's favorite weed, he reflects on his family, the fun times at Saturday Night Live and the wild 2018 harvest party he threw. The famous actor, singer and community supporter describes a spiritual connection to

the marijuana he's growing on his 93-acre spread near Eagle Point, known as the Belushi Farm, and its 22,000-square-foot state licensed grow.

He's even got Jack Murtha, known as "Captain Jack", on board. Murtha is a pioneer of cannabis cultivation who spent more than 40 years perfecting his namesake strain, based on Gulzar Afghanica from Afghanistan. It is the same strain he provided to help inspire the cast and writers of Saturday Night Live, dubbed



Photo by Terry Smith

Jim Belushi hard at work trimming plants.



Photo by Sam Jones

Jack Murtha is the man and legend behind the ww“Captain Jack” strain of marijuana.

“the smell of SNL.” “Where do you think Coneheads came from? That weed,” said the 64-year-old Belushi, his voice hoarse from singing at his wild bash the previous weekend. The Coneheads depicted an alien family with cones for heads that was a popular skit on Saturday Night Live in the 1970s. Today, that same strain from Belushi’s farm can be enjoyed legally.

Belushi started his cannabis enterprise five years ago with a 48-plant medical marijuana grow that has expanded into the greenhouses, equipment and manpower to compete in an ever-changing cannabis industry. He’s undergoing a brand change from Rogue’s Lair to Belushi’s Private Vault. He has painstakingly restored old barns and outbuildings, and built a dramatic timber-framed house with views of the Rogue River.

Besides a wide-ranging career, Belushi has lent his name to restoring historical buildings in the valley, including the Butte Creek Mill in Eagle Point and the Holly Theatre in Medford. With his ever-present stogie dangling from his mouth, Belushi jokes that his day job pays for this latest venture.

Belushi and other local cannabis growers have invested heavily in this new industry, watching with concern a market glutted with product and plummeting prices. “It’s worrying everyone,” Belushi said. But the worrying went out the window last weekend for his harvest party. “We had 500 guests, and 490 of them were smoking,” he said with a grin.

Belushi’s Private Vault is being sold at dispensaries in the South of Oregon, and the label will feature his 1,200 pounds of the best quality flower, including Captain Jack’s Gulzar Afghanica and Belushi’s favorite, Cherry Pie, which he said makes him a better husband. He joked that it’s called “the marriage counselor.

Captain Jack said he collected the seeds from Afghanistan and brought them back to the states for cultivation. While many growers prefer to clone plants, Captain Jack grows from seed. “Most other people have gone in a different direction and

hybridized,” he said. Captain Jack describes his plant as having a very wide leaf, joking that it resembles cabbage leaves. “I defy most people on this planet to tell me it’s a pot plant,” he said.

When Belushi talks waxes on about marijuana, he often mentions his brother, John Belushi, who died in 1982 after a battle with drugs and was known for his outrageous comedic talents. “I wish we’d known then about marijuana being a medicine,” Belushi said. He thinks that the healing properties of marijuana could have helped his brother fight his demons. Coming from the earth he feels that cannabis is a natural product that people can use safely which can also help people spiritually. If only his brother could have taken advantage of it legally. He says that his farm was created as a gateway to healing, and he believes deeply in the spirit and medicine cannabis offers to families, communities and the world. ★

WHERE TO BUY LOCALLY:	
Central Point	Farm to Table North 3434 N. Pacific Hwy. Central Point, OR 97502
Ashland	Laleafaw 1253 Siskiyou Blvd. Ashland, OR 97520
Grants Pass	Diamond Cannabis 300 SW 6th St., Grants Pass, OR 97520

When the World Was on Fire

By Erik Neumann

In September of 2020 the Almeda Fire left unprecedented destruction in the Southern Oregon towns of Phoenix and Talent. While wildfires are nothing new here, the level of urban destruction was striking. The event offers lessons about future fire risks to communities in Oregon.

Six months since the fire, scores of homes, trailers, and commercial buildings lay in jumbles of burned metal and charred concrete adjacent to Talent Avenue. “This is my home town.

It’s really hard to see this,” said climate scientist Dominick DellaSala. “These were homes that I had dined in before with friends. Totally annihilated.” DellaSala is with the environmental non-profit Wild Heritage. His house did not burn down in the Sept. 8th fire, but he did evacuate.

Now as he watches property being cleared and wooden houses rebuilt, he worries nothing will change as Talent is reconstructed in the face of increasing wildfire risks. “We’re just going to do the same thing.

It’s like the definition of crazy,” he said. “You do the same thing over and over and expect a different outcome. We saw that in Santa Rosa, and I hope we don’t see it here again.”

The Almeda fire destroyed more than 2,600 homes and businesses, including whole subdivisions and trailer parks in Talent and Phoenix. Forest fires are a natural part of the landscape in Oregon, but in recent years this type of urban destruction has been more common in places like California’s wine country or further south. “I used to carry around with me pictures of devastating fires in Southern California so that I could convince people that such a thing is



Photo by Clarissa Dunne

The fires raging in Phoenix, Oregon, September 8, 2020.

possible and show them examples of where communities were devastated,” said Chris Chambers, the wildfire division chief at Ashland Fire and Rescue, where he has worked for the past 18 years. “Then I’ve watched over that time as those fires have marched northward.”

Firefighters refer to the patchwork landscape where houses and forests mix together as the “wildland-urban interface.” These days, fires are burning in areas that were not traditionally considered wildlands. That change is stretching our definition of what the wildland-urban interface is, according to Erica Fleishman, director of the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute and a professor of earth, ocean, and atmospheric sciences at Oregon State University. “These aren’t little towns in the woods, when you drive through the woods and you see some really cute little houses with a lot of trees around them and brush around them and think this may not end well,” Fleishman said. “This is a different type of situation.”

Fleishman said a big reason there are more intense fires today is because there is more fuel that can burn. Warming temperatures means more precipitation will fall as rain instead of snow. “Basically, you have evaporation increasing. So, for the same amount of precipitation, it goes away faster, and plants have less ability to use it over a long period of time,” she said. As plants dry out, more fuel is created that can burn in fires. The same dynamics apply to trees in urban areas, like the sliver of woodlands between Ashland and Talent, called the Bear Creek Greenway, where the Alameda Fire started.

This is our new reality, and it changes everything.”

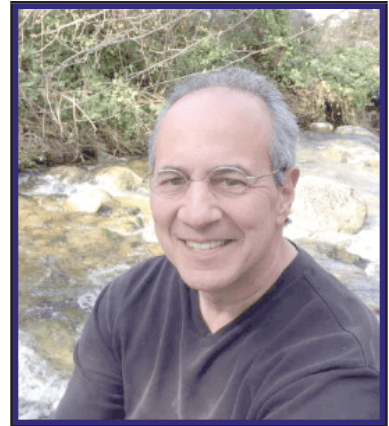
Chris Chambers with Ashland Fire and Rescue said the climate change predictions for Oregon are that three to four times more acres will burn in the coming decades than today. Along with that increase in fire will come an increase in smoke.

“To see three times more than what we’ve experienced, even here, is really hard to imagine for most people, including me,” Chambers said. “But, nonetheless, that’s the prediction for Southwest Oregon.” Chambers, Fleishman and DellaSala agree that the risk to Oregon communities is getting higher. Chambers said it is impossible for firefighters to stop blazes like the Alameda fire because of the dry conditions and the way it was propelled by 40-mile-per-hour winds.

Looking forward, he said, everyone in the Rogue Valley needs to know how to evacuate quickly. Existing homes need to incorporate basic defensible space principles, like removing surrounding wood bark that could act as ignition, and cleaning out flammable material in gutters. He also said new construction needs fire-resistant building codes. In Talent, DellaSala is working with a contractor to design homes made with fire-resistant materials like concrete and steel, instead of wood. He hopes community members will rebuild Talent to avoid another disaster like the Alameda Fire, and to recalculate their ideas of risk to meet today’s

reality.

“This is our new reality, and it changes everything,” DellaSala said. “We’ve got to do things differently about how we design communities, how we build homes, and where we build homes, because this isn’t going away.” Dr. DellaSala hopes that the lawmakers in Oregon will begin prevent tragedies like this from happening again. ★



Dr. Dominick A. DellaSala is Chief Scientist for the non-profit group Wild Heritage whose mission is to protect and restore ecosystem integrity and safeguard the ecological and biological diversity around the world. He is an internationally renowned author and co-author of over 200 science papers as well as several books on fire and forest ecology, biological conservation, endangered species management, and landscape ecology. His most recent book, *The Ecological Importance of Mixed-Severity Fires: Nature’s Phoenix*, presents groundbreaking science on the ecological importance of wildfires.

No Need to Fear These Bears

By Zach Urness

Three of us hiked high into the Siskiyou Mountains Saturday to search for a rare wildflower that lives in the land of fire.

The California lady's slipper, a type of orchid, is endemic to the mountains of Southern Oregon and far Northern California. My wife, Nancy McClain, and I stumbled across a patch of them about 10 years ago on a spring hike in the Siskiyou, and we've been going back to see them ever since.

Nancy is a photographer she especially loves shooting wild flowers and it became a spring tradition for us to hike the Pacific Crest Trail along the edge of the Red Buttes Wilderness to visit that stand of orchids.

The last time we saw them was 2017, about a month before a lightning storm that ignited one of the worst fire years in history. Numerous fires raged across the Siskiyou Crest where we'd seen those flowers, and from the Inciweb fire maps it appeared the flames were pulverizing that section of the crest.

The summer of 2018 was just as bad, with megafires like the Klondike and Taylor Creek fires picking up where the Chetco Bar and Miller Complex fires ended, lighting up the mountains and choking the valleys with smoke.

Last spring, the roads into the area were still closed to protect people from falling snags, so we didn't hike the crest and had no idea whether the orchids had survived.

Last weekend, we planned a summer solstice day hike with former Mail Tribune copy editor Steve Dieffenbacher, another wildflower bum who like us loves to bore his Facebook friends with pictures of leaves and petals in beautiful places.

Steve said he had once hiked into the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in search of a stand of California lady's slippers rumored to be growing there, but he never found them. When he mentioned that story, we decided to head to the Red Buttes and look for the orchids we hadn't seen since 2017.

Our hike started at the Cook and Green trailhead, 10 miles above Applegate Lake. Trails fan out in numerous directions up there, heading to places such as Towhead Lake, Lilypad Lake, Lonesome Lake, the Boundary Trail and Sucker Gap.

The trail in late spring and early summer is a wildflower wonderland, with stands of Siskiyou iris, splithair Indian paintbrush, azalea, phlox, Oregon anemone, larkspur, penstemon and dozens of others, including Siskiyou Lewisia, a native plant named after Meriwether Lewis of Lewis and Clark fame.

After strapping on our packs and heading up the trail, it quickly became apparent we weren't going to break any speed-hiking records that day, with Nancy and Steve stopping every few inches to photograph flowers.

The lady's slippers we sought were just a half-mile down the trail, but it took us almost an hour to get there because the wildflower bloom on the crest was magnificent and there was no way to rush the photographers.

We were looking for a watercourse that tumbles down a steep, red rock slope. The crease cut by the water is packed with fragrant azaleas, maidenhair ferns and if we were fortunate elegant native orchids.

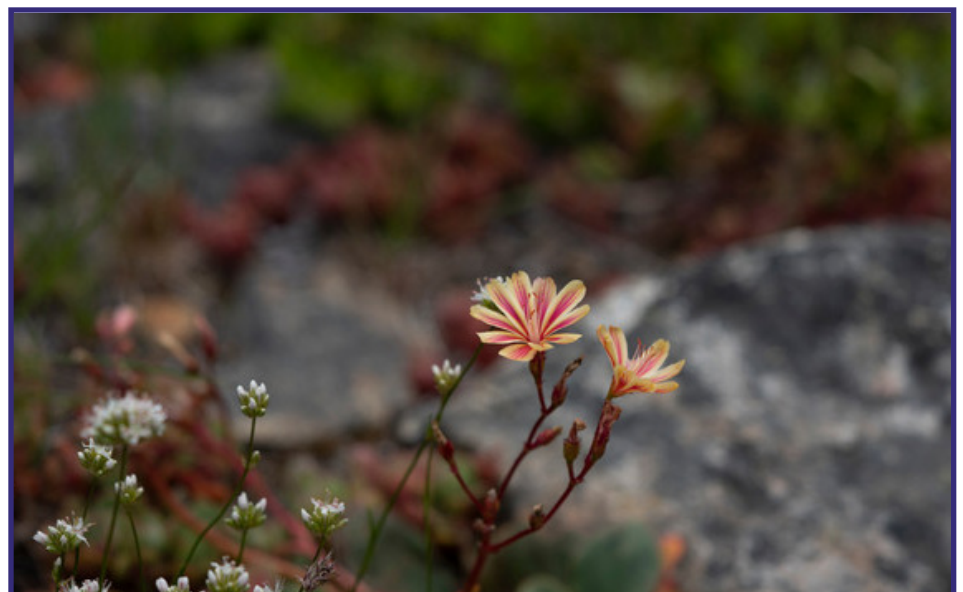


Photo by Nancy McClain

Siskiyou Lewisia was named after Meriwether Lewis fo Lewis and Clark fame.



Photo by Nancy McClain

The snowy blooms of bear grass are an impressive sight

We could smell the azaleas about the same time we heard the falling water, and when we reached the point where the water crossed the trail, there they were, a colony of three-foot-tall plants each bearing 10 to 20 brilliant white pouches suspended beneath golden wings.

To say we felt fortunate would be a great understatement. The International Union for Conservation lists the California lady's slipper as endangered, and we were cognizant of its fragility as we appreciated its beauty.

As the photographers knelt down to slam their shutters and bracket their exposures and jiggle their F-stops and adjust their ISOs, I whipped out my camera phone and snapped off a few shots to post on Facebook.

Then I glanced up at the slopes above our heads and beheld the

largest bloom of bear grass I've ever seen. It was impressive.

Bear grass is a type of lily, and the blooms put off a subtle scent. But when there are 1,000 or 10,000 of them, there's nothing subtle about it. The air was sweet enough to eat.

Red rocks, white orchids, blooming azaleas and fields of bear grass. What a spot! And it's not too far from Jacksonville or Grants pass.

The trail in late spring and early summer is a wildflower wonderland, with stands of Siskiyou iris, split-hair Indian paintbrush, azalea, phlox, Oregon anemone, larkspur, penstemon and dozens of others, including Siskiyou Lewisia, a native plant named after Meriwether Lewis of Lewis and Clark fame. If you stick to the trail, the California lady's slippers are about a half mile

down. Pay particular attention, as the rest of the wildflowers, in such abundant bloom at this time of year, may distract you.

As you continue onward, you will come to where a stream crosses the trail. You should spot a colony of three-foot-tall plants, each bearing 10 to 20 brilliant white pouches suspended beneath golden wings. These are the elusive lady's slippers. The International Union for Conservation lists the California lady's slipper as endangered; take the time to appreciate its delicate beauty.

The bear grass and lady slippers are extraordinary, but please take only photographs and leave these flowers to do their important work. ★