

Spring 2025

News



Southern Oregon
LAND
CONSERVANCY

Bear Gulch Preserve Extends Conserved Connectivity Corridor

On a blue-skied autumn day, Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC) staff visited a special landscape, an undeveloped 142-acre private parcel tucked away within the southwest corner of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument just north of the California border. We learned from a partner that this living ecological gem was on the market, and quickly realized that its conservation

would secure a valuable piece of wildlife connectivity. We were also struck by its varied habitats, flowing streams, and plant diversity. Once we learned that the landowners support conservation and were willing to work with us on an acquisition, we moved to purchase the land to permanently secure its many conservation values.

Visiting what we now call Bear Gulch Preserve, one can almost feel

the connectivity. From a prime vantage point on the land once slated for residential development, the view to the west looks directly at cliffs and oak woodlands already conserved under an SOLC conservation easement, one of 11 that we steward in a priority focus area. Further westward, U.S. Forest Service lands and vast wilderness areas link together a world renowned

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“Bear Gulch Preserve lies within one of Oregon’s most significant ecological corridors, a crossroads between three mountain ranges: the Cascade, Siskiyou, and Klamath Mountains.”



Message from the Executive Director Finding Lichen Heaven

Southern Oregon Land Conservancy's newest preserve at Bear Gulch is a story of community collaboration that illustrates how we create conservation impact together.

The path to conserving the spectacular rolling slopes and canyons of mixed forest, grassland, scabland, and cliffs around Bear Gulch began when we were alerted by neighbor and conservation partner, the Selberg Institute, that one of the largest undeveloped parcels in the Colestin Valley—private land within an SOLC priority focus area—was available. A conservation-minded seller was willing to base a sale on an appraised conservation value, a standard accredited land trusts must follow.

We recognized the opportunity that Bear Gulch represented to extend the mosaic of SOLC protected conservation easement lands nearby, more than 2,400 acres in total. The land crosses key wildlife connectivity and climate resilience zones within the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument (CSNM). In Bear Gulch Creek and East Fork Cottonwood Creek were two wild steelhead supporting creeks, tributaries to the now undammed Klamath River.

Volunteers, lands committee members, and community partners helped reveal the exceptional biodiversity and variety of habitats. The observation of heavily grazed

shrubs was an early sign of healthy, vigorous deer and elk browsing. Naturalists from field survey partner Siskiyou Biosurvey scanned the ground and were startled to identify, in a space of a square meter, three vagrant lichens, rarely found and perhaps never before found together, miles and miles west from prior sightings in the Green Springs. Said one, "This... is lichen heaven." A flood of inspiring details illuminated the ecological richness of overlapping, undisturbed landscapes. Permanent protection in this case also



involved legal withdrawal of mineral rights that had been attached to the land, canceling potential destructive activity that quietly underlies many lands in Southern Oregon.

Bear Gulch Preserve is the next step in SOLC's quest toward landscape-scale conservation corridors. Its addition to our conserved lands underscores the importance of private land protection, especially alongside the public CSNM. Its conservation



begins the western 'on ramp' to the migratory wildlife corridor along the Siskiyou Summit that will feature the region's first highway wildlife crossing.

SOLC reached the relatively rapid completion of the organization's 83rd land conservation journey entirely through private, community-based support. This is only the second time SOLC has purchased conservation land, but to do so becomes an increasingly important strategy alongside traditional, voluntary conservation actions. Key lands may come on the market, at risk of deforestation, subdivision, or other activities that could disrupt fragile ecologies and threaten vulnerable wildlife and their habitats. Support from our generous individual donors means we can make this major step toward connectivity without public grant support, and much faster than the 2-3 year cycle that grant funding often requires.

We are grateful for the fleet-footed, dedicated staff who brought Bear Gulch's conservation to being, for our community partners, and members' support that fuels our efforts. For people, for nature, forever.

Steve Wise

Steve Wise,
Executive Director

The Vagrants, My Friend, Are Blowing in the Wind

Lichen is a composite species with two or more partners (fungi, green algae, cyanobacteria, yeast) that together form a unique and hardy living organism. Lichens are so unique and so hardy that even when exposed to outer space while dormant, they can be revived back on Earth. And they provide incredible ecological services to the world such as food, shelter, medicine, water and carbon storage, and some species are critical in nitrogen cycling.

Most lichens are attached by holdfasts to rocks, trees, moss mats, soil, and even to other lichens. However, there are also the tumbleweed lichens—or vagrant, aerolichen or most delightfully, wanderflechten—that blow in the wind. Today, it is believed that the "manna from heaven" mentioned in the Bible may have been referring to people eating vagrant lichens as an emergency food. Vagrant lichens



are found in wide open places in the Arctic, Eurasia, Australia, South Africa, and the Great Plains. Tumbleweed lichens are also known at the Bear Gulch Preserve, recently discovered by two lichenologists, John Villela and Jay Scelza, on rocky scabland. Remarkably, they found three species of vagrant lichens next to each other, which is rare, and one

of the species, *Aspicilia californica* var. *gigantea*, is quite rare and only recently described.

Tumbleweed lichens are an indicator of intact and resilient places, and we are proud to protect habitat for tumbleweed and regular lichens, as well as many other plants, fungi, and animals, at Bear Gulch Preserve.

Spring Fruiterers

One of Oregon's first fruiterers of spring is the Mica Cap (*Coprinellus micaceus*). Aptly named for the cap surface is coated with a fine layer of reflective cells that resemble the mineral mica. Although small and thin, the mushrooms are bountiful, as they typically grow in dense clusters.

In just a few hours after erupting from the soil, the gills will begin to slowly dissolve into a black, inky, spore-laden liquid—an enzymatic process called *autodigestion* or *deliquescence*. This deliquescence creates a chain reaction, starting with the end of the gills closest to the stem. Spores are released from here first, then autodigestion of gill cells takes place, releasing a liquid that is a potent digestive. The liquid is taken up by the neighboring cells, which are turned into more liquid, and the wave of destruction travels along, nipping at the heels of the maturing spores until the entire cap is reduced to just an "inkling" of its former self.



Photo: Harley Barnhart



Bear Gulch Preserve

(continued from front page)

wildlife migration area known as the Cascade-Siskiyou land bridge. Along the opposite edge of the preserve, Monument lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) connect eastward to the Mariposa Lily Botanical Area and to the site of the planned wildlife overpass over Interstate 5.

Bear Gulch Preserve lies within one of Oregon's most significant ecological corridors, a crossroads between three mountain ranges: the Cascade, Siskiyou, and Klamath Mountains. It stretches through our Colestin-Siskiyou Summit Focus Area, one of several key zones whose distinctive diversity prioritizes their conservation. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) mapped statewide connectivity zones, the network of land and waterways that deliver the highest value for migrating wildlife. This newly protected area comes up as high priority for a variety of priority species. Conservation in connectivity zones allows seasonal movement needs of animals for foraging and dispersal as well as maintaining genetic diversity over long time periods.

On our first visit, we were thrilled to see native bunchgrass covering

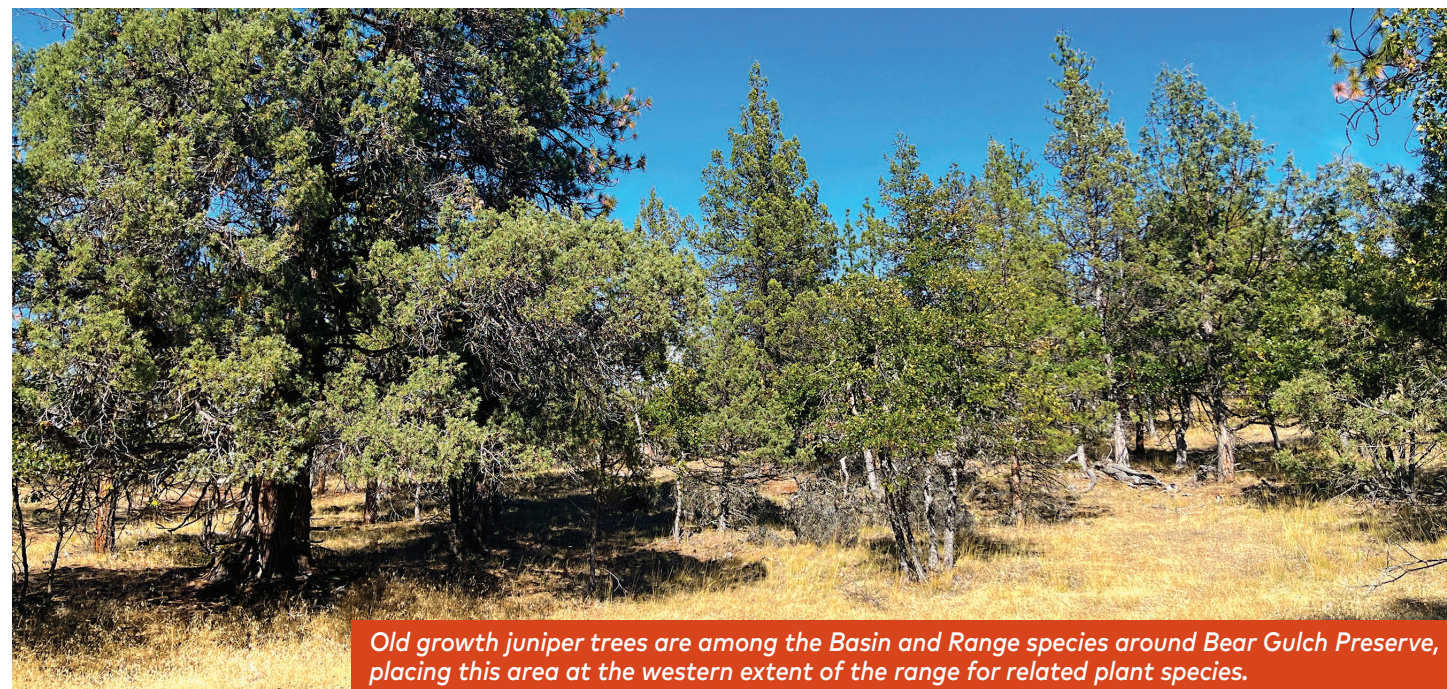
most of the land's open slopes, along with pine-oak woodlands, with undisturbed stands of Oregon white oak and California black oak trees. Oak woodlands are a priority habitat type because they support a diverse array of wildlife. The Preserve also contains patches of conifer forests, along with Basin and Range species such as western juniper, rabbitbrush, and buckwheat plants, alongside fritillary and likely rare lilies. This area is near the edge of the western range for some of the species, an important indicator of species range diversity and another measure of how conserving this area is important for biodiversity.

The Preserve drains into the Cottonwood Creek subwatershed of the greater Klamath River. Three streams run through the property and flow to the recently undammed Klamath. East Fork Cottonwood Creek, horsetail plants lining its banks, defines the Preserve's western edge, supports Klamath Mountain Province wild steelhead and likely rare frogs and amphibians. Bear Gulch Creek runs through the middle of the property, descending from above Interstate 5, with its headwaters conserved within another SOLC conservation easement called Sky King Cole. Bear Gulch supports steelhead during high water periods. The seasonal Chocolate

Falls Creek winds through a gorgeous little canyon with 80 foot tall cliffs, dropping eventually to a waterfall on adjacent BLM land. Other habitat types include rocky outcrops, riparian, chaparral, and scablands dotted with dozens of lichens.

With several site visits and surveys under our belt, we have observed an abundance of life: special status (rare and declining) plants like the Ashland thistle, dwarf isopyrum (a buttercup), and Detlings microseris (an aster), and special status animals like the Acorn Woodpecker, Band-tailed Pigeon, Mountain Quail, Western Meadowlark, and Western Bluebird. The rare Greene's mariposa lily has known locations just a stone's throw away from the Preserve, and there are records of Pacific fisher in the area. Signs of deer, elk, black bear, and cougar are abundant. Additionally, experts recently found three very rare lichens on the property, clustered together on the rocky scabland.

We look forward to discovering more and sharing the Bear Gulch Preserve with our community members. We are immensely grateful to Mark Greenfield, The Earth and Humanity Foundation, Watershed Row, Cathy Shaw, and the extraordinarily generous support of other dedicated donors.



Old growth juniper trees are among the Basin and Range species around Bear Gulch Preserve, placing this area at the western extent of the range for related plant species.

Pacific Crest Connectivity

Spanning over 2,650 miles from the border of Mexico to Canada, the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) has long been considered the crown jewel of hiking trails in the Western United States. This ribbon of wonderment winds through 26 national forests, seven national parks, five state parks, and 33 federally mandated wilderness areas. The PCT also traverses through six of the seven eco-zones: alpine tundra, subalpine forest, upper montane forest, lower montane forest, upper Sonoran (oak woodlands and grassland), and lower Sonoran (the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts). The connector trail from the PCT to Ashland, OR (at mile 1,727) is a long 13-mile trek downhill to the serene Lithia Park. "Thru hikers," people that attempt to complete the trail in one continuous journey, can often be seen in downtown Ashland in the summer months, scarfing a well-deserved burrito or wrapping the blisters on their trail-hardened feet.

In Jackson County, SOLC holds three conservation easements that the PCT passes through, totaling 1,509 acres of conserved trailside lands on the Siskiyou Summit. Two of these conserved lands directly adjoin the Pacific Forest Trust's 1,771 acre conserved lands. This collaborative stretch of wilderness creates

a key wildlife bridge between the Rogue River Siskiyou National Forest and the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, protecting ecological diversity and scenic beauty as hikers and wildlife tromp hand in hoof over the 7,000 ft. high crest. Key species in this area identified in the Oregon Dept. of Fish & Wildlife's Oregon Conservation Strategy include the Great Gray Owl, Northern Spotted Owl, and the elusive Pacific fisher.

Approximately half of the Pacific Crest Trail runs through wilderness, while a whopping ten percent of the trail, and a number of important viewshed properties along it, are still owned by private individuals and companies. With strategic land acquisition and collaboration with organizations like the Pacific Crest Trail Association, land trusts across the West can coordinate resources to protect expansive and undeveloped landscapes like those along the PCT. These areas provide space for mental reset and the ability to wander and seek respite from the incessant grind of the modern world. They also cycle clean air and water to our cities, as well as serving as wildlife sanctuaries for our commonly displaced animal inhabitants.



"This ribbon of wonderment winds through 26 national forests, seven national parks, five state parks, and 33 federally mandated wilderness areas."

Looking Back, Moving Forward

SOLC's Fall 2004 newsletter debuted our preservation of lands in the Colestin Valley, the first of 11 conservation easements added over the years. SOLC now stewards 2,400 acres of conserved land in this conservation focus area, more than the organization's entire conservation coverage when the first Colestin easement arrived. Our newly acquired Bear Gulch Preserve, (highlighted throughout this newsletter) adds a chapter to a continuing success story that began more than 20 years ago.



SOUTHERN OREGON LAND CONSERVANCY

Combining the New and the Old

We've decided to combine our new logo with an old title of our newsletter--The Terra Firma Times. It seemed fitting to resurrect this name meaning *solid ground*, given our mission to protect special lands in the Rogue Basin and remain a vital organization in the region.

The name Terra Firma also gives an emotional sense of connection to the land. It reminds us that we are merely a reflection of the values that are important to the people who live here. Those of you who support us are saying 'yes' to the land and 'yes' to preserving its beauty. Thank You!

40 Acres For Sale

We are very grateful to one of our easement donors, Judith Wible, for generously donating 40 forested acres to the Land Conservancy. We are seeking a conservation buyer for this remote property with two rustic cabins located 10 miles outside Merlin. This land has no septic or electricity. Priced at \$68,000. Contact us at 541.482.3069 for more information.

Terra Firma Times

Fall 2004

Colestin Valley Properties Protected



View of Mt. Shasta from protected property in Colestin *photo by Thomas Kirchen*

The Southern Oregon Land Conservancy placed conservation easements on two parcels of land in July, permanently protecting 75 acres in the Colestin Valley southwest of Ashland. The easements were placed on these properties with the help of the Carpenter Foundation and donated to the Land Conservancy to benefit the community by Alex and Jennifer Liston Dykema and Annette Dykema.

The Conservation Easements prohibit development and require a forest management plan approved by the Land Conservancy for any timber harvesting. In addition, any activities that would degrade the conservation values of the properties are prohibited.

Both properties are located in the Cottonwood Creek Watershed within the Klamath River basin. The area is grass and oak woodland with mixed conifer species of incense cedar, ponderosa pine, Jeffrey pine, sugar pine, white oak, and Douglas fir. Dramatic views of Mt. Shasta and the Colestin Valley can be seen from many points on the properties. These spectacular lands are adjacent to the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument and will extend the wildlife corridor in the area and also add to the scenic backdrop of Colestin Road. The addition of these two easements brings the total acreage of land protected by the Conservancy to over 2,300 acres.



2025 Spring Hike Series

Explore, Discover, Enjoy!

There is no better way to see the value of conservation than by getting out onto the land. Each spring, our expert hike leaders and outdoor educators offer a series of nature outings open to members and the community.

Agate Desert Preserve Wildflowers
Agate Desert Preserve
Wednesday, April 9, 3-5 p.m.

Open Lands Day w/two hike options: Flowers & DIY Nature Book
Rogue River Preserve
Saturday, April 19, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Explore the Bluff!
Harry & Marilyn Fisher Preserve at Pompadour Bluff
Wednesday, April 30, 3-5 p.m.

Hydrology Hike in the Illinois Valley
Rough and Ready Creek Preserve
Saturday, May 3, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Sounds and Sights in Spring
Jacksonville Woodlands
Sunday, May 4, 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Explore the Bluff!
Harry & Marilyn Fisher Preserve at Pompadour Bluff
Wednesday, May 21, 3-5 p.m.

Illinois Valley Hike
Rough and Ready Creek Preserve
Saturday, May 17, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Wander Bear Gulch
Bear Gulch (New Preserve)
Saturday, May 24, 12:30-4:30 p.m.

A Fen-Tastic Hike
Sharon Fen Preserve
Sunday, May 25, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Open Lands Day w/two hike options: Tour & Photography
Rogue River Preserve
Saturday, June 14, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Flowers
Cobra-lily Springs (Future Preserve)
Wednesday, June 18, 12:30-4:30 p.m.

Dragonflies
Cobra-lily Springs (Future Preserve)
Saturday, July 12, time TBA

Registration opens online one month in advance before the date of the hike. For more information and details, please visit our website at www.landconserve.org.



Welcoming Stasie Maxwell

Meet SOLC's newest Board Member

Stasie is the Indigenous Partnerships Program Manager for the Vesper Meadow Education Program and weaves her varied experiences of program management, psychology, DEI and wellness facilitation, and environmental advocacy within her role. She also is a Program Assistant for the Traditional Ecological Inquiry Program and co-facilitates wellness sessions through an Indigenous lens for NW Treatment and Soul Circle. Though born in Alaska, she has spent most of her life on the territories of the Takelma, Shasta, and Latgawa peoples (now known as the Rogue Valley). She credits her reverence for the land and its inhabitants to her upbringing in

the local intertribal Native community. Stasie also sits on the board with the Friends of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument and is a Native Advisory Council member for the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network.

Stasie has a B.S. in Psychology and a minor in Native Studies from Southern Oregon University. Through her undergraduate studies, she especially enjoyed learning about conflict resolution tools and how to refine interpersonal and cross-cultural communications. Her post-graduate experience is diverse and has ranged from program development and



Southern Oregon
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Our Mission

Conserving and enhancing land in Southern Oregon to sustain our human and natural communities forever.

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- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
- Responsible Governance
- Lasting Stewardship

community building to peer recovery facilitation and guest lecturing. Stasie was originally introduced to SOLC through her support of the Indigenous Gardens Network and is excited to bring her expertise, insight, and strategic planning capabilities to Southern Oregon Land Conservancy, in particular, to serve the Indigenous descendants of the homelands that SOLC stewards.



Southern Oregon

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**SAVE
the
DATES!**

Mark your calendars and get ready to step outside,
take in the incredible views, and connect with one
another through a series of nature loving events.



SATURDAY, APRIL 19
Open Lands Day
at the Rogue River Preserve



SATURDAY, JUNE 7
Annual Member Picnic
at the Rogue River Preserve



SATURDAY, JUNE 14
Open Lands Day
at the Rogue River Preserve



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4
Conservation Celebration
*at the Rogue River Room at
Southern Oregon University*



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18
Open Lands Day
at the Rogue River Preserve

2024 AT-A-GLANCE

*Scan the code to view a gallery
of photos from our 2024 events*

