

Pacifica in a time of COVID-19

BY GERI LITTLEJOHN

I'm writing this at Pacifica on May Day, 2020.

It's a beautiful day. The sun is shining. The fragrant garden is blooming, the pollinator garden is filling out, and everything is verdant. The birds are singing—so many varieties of birds! People are enjoying the trails on foot or horseback. I hear the drone of lawn mowers and weed eaters. I'm keenly aware of how dry it is underneath the surface and the coming perils of this early fire season. Everything has changed. And nothing has changed.

In the past, activity at Pacifica was predictable, based on the seasons. Every spring we would gear up for school programs, review curriculums, coordinate with teachers at over 25 schools, and hire staff: for the Caterpillar, for field trips, and for PODS (Pacifica's Outdoor School Program). This year, no buses came to Pacifica. The air wasn't filled with the voices of thousands of students exploring the beauty and diversity of the property while learning about conservation and natural sciences.

In other years, the maintenance crew would be taking care of the land and the buildings in preparation for hosting parties of friends and families celebrating weddings, dancing all night, or gathering as community to sip cider, eat food, listen to music. There are no gatherings, yet the maintenance goes on. The costs of maintaining a large property and paying the expenses associated with the land

continue. Early into the period of social distancing, the board agreed that it was important to keep the property open, so people could continue to tend to their physical, emotional, and spiritual health by being outside, moving their bodies, and connecting with nature at Pacifica.

So much of the programming that happens at Pacifica depends on the gathering of people. Yet we are more than our programming. Pacifica is the land and all that happens on it. Pacifica itself exists as a place to be loved, appreciated, and tended by humans.

During this time the biggest revelations to me as board chair have been the deepening relationship with the land itself, a recognition of what a resource it is for a community to have access to a large property teeming with life (even when no people are present), and an appreciation of how many people love this place, as we on the board do.

In the time of COVID-19, it was necessary to create a new budget in which usually predictable revenues were zeroed out—no schools in session, no field trips. Couples are cancelling weddings because family members don't have the financial resources to travel. In one sense this is a time of great uncertainty. But the land is steady, constant.

This spring, Pacifica's board scheduled a series of volunteer days later in the year for a deeper engagement with the organization and the land. We envision joyous work



The Pacifica pollinator garden continues to buzz, unlike the rest of the grounds during a quiet, socially isolating time. Photo: Geri Littlejohn.

parties helping with trail maintenance, building and installing more bird boxes, beautifying the old post office. We look forward to being able to call you together in service to this nurturing place again. We look forward to being able to host events in celebration of community, the arts, and education again.

Until then, we invite you to enjoy the beauty of this place, to tune into the changes on the land with the turning of the seasons. If you come for a sunset stroll, you might hear native flute music in the air. We invite you to leave donations on site or online. We invite you to help us with projects that can be done solo or safely with one or two

others. If you are interested, please call Ray Prag at 541-846-1100.

We cannot predict what the future holds. In this present moment, we invite you to deepen your relationship with Pacifica as a special place, to think about what it means as a community gathering place, to come here, to be present, and to see it as a place where you are welcomed and needed.

We hope to gather with you again en masse at the Harvest Faire. Let's all hold that thought together.

Gerri Littlejohn, Board Chair
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Forest service gets ready for fire season in the Siskiyou Mountains

BY ANNE TRAPANESE

The Siskiyou Mountains Ranger District (SMRD) is presently preparing for the upcoming fire season. To protect employees against COVID-19, SMRD

has conducted risk assessments and implemented mitigations for the onboarding process.

As of early May, SMRD fire crews

were minimally staffed for five days a week. When at full capacity, SMRD will have two engines with thirteen firefighters and two fire prevention folks. ODF announced the beginning of fire season on May 1, which is an uncommon shift from the usual June start date.

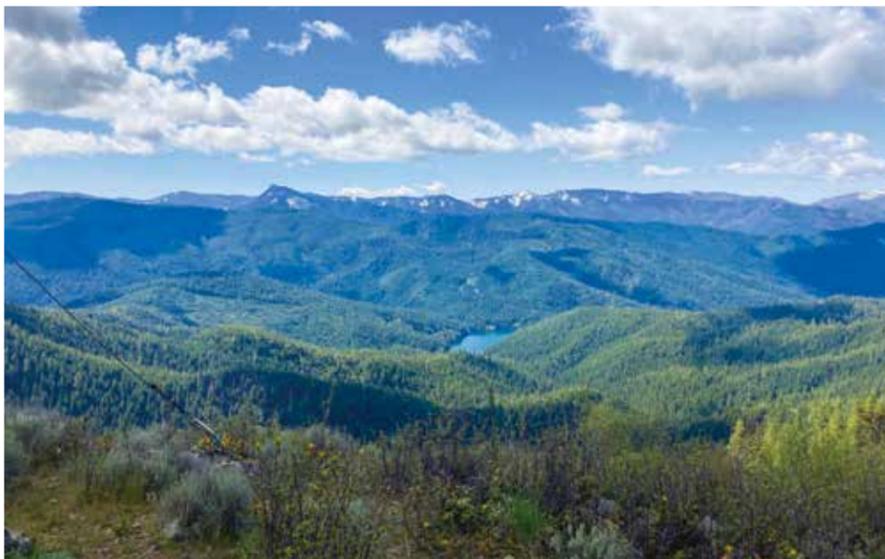
The Applegate Basin is showing 50 percent of normal snow-water equivalent. The SMRD fire crew typically shifts to seven-day coverage in June, but weekly coverage could occur sooner if drier conditions persist.

Additionally, due to COVID-19, the Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest made the decision to suspend all burning this spring because of the increased risk to the public and employees from smoke. The forest will plan fuels treatments for the fall season as appropriate. Despite a short season, over the winter and spring the district completed approximately 700 acres of pile burning and 70 acres of under-burning.

The Siskiyou Mountains Ranger District asks that you please be particularly careful with fire this summer if you are recreating on public lands. The Forest Service has received direction to do everything they can to catch fires when they are small. Please make an extra effort to prevent human starts, so that SMRD firefighting resources are available for unpreventable lighting starts.

SMRD is closed to the public as of this writing in early May, but our phone line is open for messages. If you have any questions or concerns, please call us at 541-899-3800. We are checking our messages two times a day and promise to get back to you promptly. All fires should be reported by dialing 911 and providing clear information on the location of smoke.

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The view from the fire lookout on Squaw Peak. Fire season started May 1, unusually early. Photo: USFS.

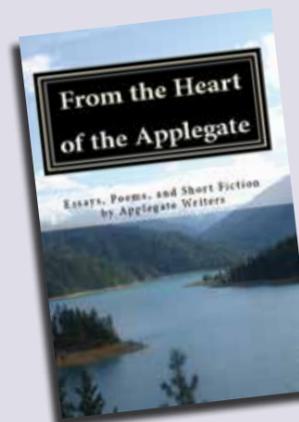
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