

# Exploring botanical values in the Bear Grub Timber Sale area

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

The Applegate has exceptional botanical diversity throughout the watershed, but with the current community focus on the Bear Grub Timber Sale, it seems pertinent to highlight some of the unique and special plants that grow in this particular area. The Bear Grub planning area is located in the foothills dividing the Rogue Valley from the Applegate Valley, above Ruch, Sterling Creek, and Little Applegate.

Some of the most high-profile Bear Grub timber sale units are located along the East Applegate Ridge Trail, one of the most popular hiking trails in the Applegate. People flock to the East Applegate Ridge Trail in the spring to enjoy the wildflower displays and gorgeous views. Many common wildflowers are abundant along the trail, but some rare plants grow there, too. Some hikers may be lucky enough to encounter the red, bell shaped flowers of Gentner's fritillary (*Fritillaria gentneri*), the Applegate's most well-known rare plant that is protected under the Endangered Species Act. You can also find Gentner's fritillary in the Wellington Wildlands portion of the Bear Grub planning area.

The highest elevation of timber sale units within the Bear Grub planning area is on Bald Mountain, a 5,628-foot peak within the Bald Mountain roadless area. Bald Mountain was proposed as a 590-acre Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) for its roadless character, importance to wildlife, and rare plants. Ecologists and conservationists are still working to protect Bald Mountain for its unique plant assemblages and wildland value.

One of Oregon's rarest plants grows within the Bear Grub planning area on Bald Mountain. The Siskiyou mariposa lily (*Calochortus persistens*) grows in only this one location in Oregon, on the ridge that divides the Little Applegate from Talent. The entire population consists of just a few plants, in a vulnerable and precarious site. Siskiyou mariposa lily was previously a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act, and although it is extraordinarily rare, it is currently only listed as a sensitive species by the BLM. The Oregon Biodiversity Information Center (ORBIC) lists



A unique population of tall bugbane grows in unit 21-2 of the Bear Grub Timber Sale area on Bald Mountain.

the species "List 1: Threatened or Endangered Throughout Range." This species otherwise only grows in a handful of locations west of Yreka; it is listed as rare and critically imperiled in California.

A unique population of tall bugbane (*Cimicifuga elata*) comprises a good percentage of the understory plant community in unit 21-2 of the Bear Grub Timber Sale on Bald Mountain. This species was once listed as rare in Oregon but was recently stripped of its protective status. Although not technically on special status plant lists, tall bugbane is still rare in the Applegate and is a special plant worth protecting.

The Bear Grub planning area is home to the westernmost population of Western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) in Oregon. The Little Applegate Valley is the driest watershed in western Oregon, and the low rainfall and arid habitat have allowed many species from the high desert, like Western juniper, to feel right at home. Just this spring, along with Luke Ruediger, I helped confirm and document a large population of Henderson's lomatium (*Lomatium hendersonii*) on Bald Mountain that was previously unknown by local botanists. This population represents the westernmost occurrence of Henderson's lomatium in Oregon and the first documented in Oregon's



A population of Henderson's Lomatium was recently discovered on Bald Mountain.



One of Oregon's rarest plants, the Siskiyou mariposa lily, grows on Bear Mountain within the Bear Grub planning area. Photos: Suzie Savoie.

Siskiyou Mountains. Otherwise known as a mostly east-side, desert-dwelling species, Henderson's lomatium helps demonstrate why the Applegate Siskiyou have such a high degree of botanical diversity due to the wide range of habitat types that occur here. The high desert influence from the east is prominent in the Little Applegate and the Bear Grub planning area.

Other rare and sensitive plant species that grow in this ecologically

important area include clustered lady's slipper (*Cypripedium fasciculatum*), mountain lady's slipper (*Cypripedium montanum*), California chicory (*Rafinesquia californica*), and slender flowered evening primrose (*Tetrapteron graciliflorum*).

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## ■ LOMAKATSI

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Marko was quick to observe that Lomakatsi is working closely to finetune its firefighting preparedness plans with

its many partners, from Native American tribes to government agencies, local landowners and environmental groups. Lomakatsi is involved in several long-term projects in the Applegate River

watershed, including the Rogue Forest Restoration Initiative which involves nine other partners.

"This fire season, we will closely follow guidelines from the authorities, which may include folks wearing masks and maintaining social distancing," he said of plans still being developed when he was interviewed.

Lomakatsi, which has employees living in the Applegate Valley, took the pandemic threat seriously at the outset, he noted.

"It was pretty intense when it first hit, but we saw it coming. We started paying attention to it in February," Marko said. "We had to be agile, nimble, and adaptive. We've done a lot on the COVID-19 front in terms of establishing safety guidelines. We have even become a resource for a lot of contractors and other nonprofits wanting to follow our protocols. I'm really proud of our entire team and its response."

The group, which has 54 full-time and 40 seasonal employees, closed its Ashland office on March 12 so its administrative and program staff could all work at home. The bulk of its employees include three on-the-ground crews, predominately

Latino and tribal workforce members from southern Oregon and northern California.

"We take good care of our workers," he said. "We had a strong pandemic preparedness plan in place when COVID-19 hit. We followed (Oregon) Gov. Brown's executive order to a 'T.'"

A COVID-19 safety officer has been appointed for each ground crew.

"We no longer transport our crews in vans," he said. "Each worker drives alone to the job site. We have an inspection in the morning and afternoon. We could have shut everything down, but our crews really wanted to work. If someone gets sick, they are automatically quarantined for two weeks. We are practicing social distancing, even when we are out on the ground."

The bottom line, he stressed, is that Lomakatsi provides an essential service and will continue its mission.

"The COVID-19 response has certainly meant a culture shift for us," Marko concluded. "But, whatever it takes, we will be ready."

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Lomakatsi crew members conduct a controlled pile burn to enhance the health of an oak woodland and reduce the risk of severe wildfire. Photo: Tom Greco.