

## THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAIN ADVOCATE

# Spinning their wheels at BLM

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

For decades, unauthorized off-road vehicle use and the associated impacts on public lands in the Applegate have been extremely controversial. Although opinions vary, one thing is certain: For more than 25 years, land managers at Medford District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have been spinning their wheels.

In the 1995 Resource Management Plan (RMP), the BLM was directed to conduct Travel Management Planning (TMP). This process would require an analysis of motor vehicle use, including human and environmental impacts. Based on that analysis, the agency would be required to designate routes or areas either open, limited, or closed to motorized use. TMPs are important because they help create a sustainable, responsible system of roads and motorized trails while reducing environmental impacts, addressing conflicts with other public land users, and eliminating private land trespass, cross-country motorized travel, unauthorized route development, and the general free-for-all we have historically called BLM off-road vehicle management—or, in this case, mismanagement.

During the 1990s, the BLM began identifying areas for potential motorized use but never conducted an open, transparent approval process for motorized trails and never implemented TMP. Instead, they looked the other way and allowed motorbike riders to build hundreds, if not thousands, of miles of unauthorized, user-created trails in our area. With a wink, a nod, and a few words in the RMP, the BLM had identified areas for potential motorized use, but they did

not actually approve that use. They also did not analyze or disclose the environmental effects, fully consider the social concerns or user-conflicts, or provide a public comment period.

What they did do was spin their wheels and let the problem get worse, while the impacts to wildlife, soils, surface erosion rates, stream sedimentation, rare plant populations, intact plant communities, and wildland habitats kept mounting.

Recently a new and particularly troubling invasive species, shiny geranium (*Geranium lucidum*), was introduced into the Applegate Valley in the Forest Creek watershed. Invasive shiny geranium was discovered in 2016 after it was introduced along an unauthorized, user-created motorcycle trail. For numerous years, BLM failed to adequately treat this site of the new and highly aggressive noxious weed or to close the area to OHVs, and shiny geranium has continued to spread quickly. Despite repeated requests by Applegate Neighborhood Network and others to close this noxious-weed-infested off-road vehicle trail and others nearby to reduce spread, the BLM has completely failed to act.

In some places unauthorized routes have become so badly rutted and eroded that four-foot-deep erosion gullies are now extending down ridgelines, heavily altering existing water drainage patterns. The region is now riddled with unauthorized, user-created routes that were driven, not constructed with sustainable grades or planning. These routes extend across streams and down nearly every semi-accessible ridge or drainage on some portions of BLM



Extreme soil erosion from an unauthorized, user-created, off-road vehicle trail on BLM lands. Photo: Luke Ruediger.

land. Unauthorized motor vehicle routes also extend through nesting sites of the northern spotted owl, rare plant populations, and noxious weed sites; across non-motorized trails; and into beloved areas for non-motorized recreation like the Wellington Wildlands, Anderson Butte, and the Sterling Ditch Trail.

In 2016, the BLM approved a new Resource Management Plan and authorized a “limited to existing” designation for motorized trails, but completely failed to produce an accompanying route inventory, which would have made this policy somewhat enforceable and at least somewhat effective. They also failed to acknowledge that there was not a single existing authorized motorcycle trail when the 2016 RMP was approved, making their “limited to existing” designation meaningless. Instead of addressing the

problem, the BLM has allowed the free-for-all to continue. Reports of illegal cross-country use and unauthorized motorcycle trail development are often ignored by the BLM, and many new routes have been developed through illegal motorized use since the new RMP’s approval.

Also in the 2016 RMP, the BLM again identified a need to implement Travel Management Planning across the entire Medford District BLM by the end of 2021. To date, they have not conducted TMP on a single acre of BLM land, allowing illegal use to continue and expand into new areas. We ask the BLM to keep their promise, abide by their management plan, immediately analyze a TMP across the entire Applegate Valley, and quit spinning their wheels.

Luke Ruediger  
siskiyoucrest@gmail.com

Located at 12800 Williams Hwy. in the Applegate Valley on the 238 Hwy. between the Provolt Store & Water Gap Rd.

**Whistling Duck Farm Store**  
Provolt Oregon

whistlingduckfarm.com | (541) 761-6772 | Open all year | Tues-Fri 11am-6pm, Sat 11am-5pm | Closed Sun & Mon

Natural foods & goods | farmstead ferments | Oregon coast fish | local fine foods | organic produce

**PROVOLT VOLUNTEER TEAM**  
[www.apwc.info/programs/provolt-volunteer-team](http://www.apwc.info/programs/provolt-volunteer-team)

*The Provolt Volunteer Team is working with BLM to help plan, develop, fund, and implement improvements that will benefit the Provolt Special Recreation Management Area and our community.*

*Opportunities include but are not limited to: volunteer days, help planning, webpage design, carpentry, trail building, photography, artwork, education and interpretation*

**JOIN THE TEAM, MEET NEW COMMUNITY MEMBERS, SHARE YOUR SKILLS, INVEST IN YOUR COMMUNITY**  
[provoltvolunteerteam@apwc.info](mailto:provoltvolunteerteam@apwc.info)

**HAVE YOU CONSIDERED STRAW BALE CONSTRUCTION?**

**Natural Plasters**

**Why Straw Bale Buildings?**

- Fire-resistant
- Energy-efficient
- Environmentally healthy
- Locally sourced natural building materials
- Beautiful!

*New construction, remodels, owner-builder consulting*

**MANY HANDS BUILDERS**  
Jim Reiland CCB #198392  
541-899-1166  
[manyhandsbuilders.com](http://manyhandsbuilders.com)

**Rainwater Harvesting Systems**

**Call Today for a No Obligation Consultation!**

**Applegate River Lodge & Restaurant**

Lodge open 7 days a week  
Restaurant open Thursday - Sunday 5 - 9 pm  
Local jam Sunday 7 - 10 pm  
Available for Retreats, Weddings, Family Reunions  
Book the entire lodge for your private event

Lodge 541-846-6690 • Restaurant 541-846-6082  
Retreats, Weddings, Special Events 541-660-0244  
15100 Highway 238, Applegate, Oregon

**ADVERTISERS!**

**We can help you reach your market!**

The *Applegater* is the only newsmagazine covering the entire Applegate Valley. With a circulation of 13,000 and a readership of more than 20,000, the *Applegater* covers Jacksonville, Ruch, Applegate, Williams, Murphy, Wilderville, Wonder, Jerome Prairie, and areas of Medford and Grants Pass.

For more information, contact:

**Jackson County**  
Ron Turpen @ 541-601-1867 or [ron.turpen@gmail.com](mailto:ron.turpen@gmail.com)

**Josephine County**  
Max Unger @ 541-373-1445 or [imaxunger@gmail.com](mailto:imaxunger@gmail.com)

**Next deadline: August 1**