

Cleaning up the mess: Cheney Creek benefits from cooperation in tackling noxious weeds, trash

BY NATHAN GEHRES AND BARBARA SUMMERHAWK

When we hear the words “garlic” or “mustard,” we may think of Italian cuisine or a delicious sandwich spread, but the garlic mustard is neither. Adjectives such as pernicious and invasive are more descriptive of this giant nuisance growing throughout the valley. The Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council (APWC) is working with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) botany crew, who were the primary motivators for attacking the invasion of the plant along Cheney Creek, where it can grow up to six feet. This work is being carried out as a part of a larger stream restoration project funded by the BLM’s Western Oregon Resource Advisory Council through the Secure Rural Schools Title II Program.

Garlic mustard gets its name from the distinctive smell of its crushed leaves. It was brought to North America from Europe and Asia in the mid 1800s as a medicinal herb and erosion control. Since then, it has become a damaging invader in temperate forests from the Northeast to the Pacific Northwest. This invasion is the result of the ability of each plant to produce up to 7,000 seeds in its two-year life cycle; the capacity of those seeds to spread widely via wind, water, and animals; and their persistence on the landscape and in the seed bank for up to 10 years. Garlic mustard has other advantages over our native plants. It emerges earlier in the spring than most other species and can use that head start to shade out and otherwise outcompete the native plants. This noxious weed also introduces compounds into the soil that inhibit the mycelium network that is essential for trees to absorb nutrients.

After confirming that garlic mustard was found on a property along Cheney Creek in 2016, Kyle Strauss, a local weed-treatment expert, began reaching out to landowners. A state weed board grant through Rogue Basin Partnership helped fund the work so that, if garlic mustard was found, Strauss could offer assistance with removal. Kyle says, “Invasive weed removal is something I do all the time for my job, but I’ve particularly enjoyed getting to know landowners along Cheney Creek and helping remove a threat to their creekside habitat.”

2022 is the first year that Kyle has found garlic mustard on the BLM section of Cheney Creek. The seeds are moved by water, so most properties along the creek have this weed. He has assisted staff from APWC and the BLM with hand pulling, bagging, and hauling away enough garlic mustard to fill four pickup-truck beds.

Other noxious and tenacious weeds that have been cut, pulled, or otherwise dealt with along Cheney Creek include black locust trees, French broom, English ivy, vinca, and blackberries.

Along with the weed removal, the team has worked at cleaning the trash along the creek, resulting in the removal of enough tires, used hypodermic needles, disassembled laptops, soiled clothing, and a disheartening array of household trash to fill the equivalent of a 30-foot-long trailer. The dumpsites were being accessed by old, rough trails that aren’t part of the official BLM numbered road system. These routes are harmful to the habitat of the stream,



APWC and BLM staff worked in the middle of June to reduce garlic mustard numbers on Cheney Creek.



APWC and BLM staff clean up a transient campsite on a gravel bar along Cheney Creek, one of several abandoned campsites and trash piles that were remedied through this project.

and they pose risks (hazardous materials, unattended fires, transient campsites) to the public and surrounding private lands. I personally have put out one active campfire and one smoldering campfire during the past two years that I have been visiting Cheney Creek. To help reduce these risks, at least for a short time, barriers on these routes encourage the public to use the official road system with their vehicles when enjoying the beautiful spot that is Cheney Creek.

Thanks to this hard work, Cheney Creek is now flowing through a more pristine watershed. Hopefully, the work can lead to more weed removal and trash pick-up all over the valley, one watershed at a time. For more information on this and other riparian-restoration projects, contact Nathan Gehres at the phone number or email address below.

More information about garlic mustard can be found at invasivespeciesinfo.gov/terrestrial/plants/garlic-mustard.

Nathan Gehres • 541-890-9989
APWC Habitat Restoration
Project Manager
nathan@apwc.info
Barbara Summerhawk
APWC Board Member
contact@apwc.info



Camp trash left by campers and spread by wildlife on the Middle Fork Applegate River in July 2022. Photo: Suzie Savoie.

Camping and trash threaten bears on Middle Fork Applegate River

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

Bears and trash don’t mix. Increasingly on the Middle Fork of the Applegate River, bears are taking the brunt of a human garbage crisis. This summer an adult black bear was shot in the back, most likely by a camper, and left to die at the camp. A juvenile bear was found dead in the creek nearby, possibly another victim of irresponsible campers.

I wrote an article for the summer 2015 *Applegater*, “USFS taking action: Trash mars headwater streams of Applegate River,” at a time when the US Forest Service (USFS) was poised to address the problem by considering an alcohol ban, similar to the one on the Illinois River, or turning Middle Fork into a day-use-only area to prevent garbage left behind by campers. USFS began notifying the public that behavior in the area must change if the dispersed camping was to continue.

But USFS leadership at the Rogue-River Siskiyou National Forest changed, and solid plans to update management in the Middle Fork area went by the wayside. Seven years later I’m once again writing a similar article, but now the problem is so bad that bears are being killed.

Instead of making permanent changes that could prevent human trash from impacting bears, USFS took the drastic measure of closing the area from all entry for three weeks last summer. The area was closed to camping, swimming, hiking, etc., from August 10, 2021, through September 2, 2021.

Both before and after those dates, bears have been entering camps and stealing food and garbage that has not been correctly stored in bear-proof containers or locked vehicles. In this way bears become habituated to food rewards, a potentially dangerous situation for both humans and bears. Generations of black bears have become accustomed to digging through illegal garbage dumps, trash piles, and abandoned campsites. YouTube videos show campers feeding black bears

on Middle Fork. Bears target problem humans—hard to call them problem bears, when humans created the issue.

As someone who lives in the area and sees the garbage and the wildlife feeding on the garbage when I drive past camping spots, I have, on many occasions, cleaned up trash in the area with both USFS and other community members. However, I feel that merely cleaning up the trash has not helped over the last 20 years or so that this problem has been increasing. Management of the area needs to change drastically before more bears are killed and sanitation issues become a severe public health concern. (Feces and toilet paper mar most camp spots.)

There used to be official USFS campgrounds and guard stations at Cook and Green Camp on Middle Fork and Hutton Camp on lower Elliott Creek, back in the 1930s when Medford had only 13,000 people. Later, in the 1970s and ’80s, hippies and families squatted in the mining cabins that once dotted every riverside flat along Middle Fork.

After the official USFS campgrounds and guard stations closed and lived-in cabins disappeared, the area became a free, “dispersed” camping area with no facilities, no bathrooms, and no trash service. Medford has now grown to 88,000 people, many of whom head up to Middle Fork during the heat of summer to camp and swim, often leaving their garbage behind when they leave.

To protect wildlife and recreational opportunities on the Middle Fork of the Applegate River, something must change. I support the Forest Service in an effort to more appropriately manage recreation in one of the most popular and spectacular watersheds in our region. Middle Fork needs bear bins, vault toilets, and managed camping with trash service, or permanent day-use-only restrictions.

Suzie Savoie
klamathsiskiyou@gmail.com

A black bear as seen by a trail camera in the Upper Applegate in July 2020.

