

THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAIN ADVOCATE

The Tallowbox Trail: The Applegate Valley's newest, community-based, hiking trail collaboration

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

Applegate Siskiyou Alliance (ASA) and the Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have spent numerous years working to design the Tallowbox Trail, a newly approved, nonmotorized hiking trail adjacent to the Burton-Ninemile Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) in the Star Gulch watershed. This winter, after getting the final go-ahead for the project, ASA laid out the portions of the trail needing new construction and began recruiting partners to make this beautiful new trail a reality.

Joining our collaborative effort is the Applegate Trails Association, a local non-profit trail group advocating for non-motorized trails and dedicated to building the Applegate Ridge Trail, planned to traverse the foothills of the Applegate Valley along the Applegate/Rogue River divide between Grants Pass and Jacksonville. We are also joined by Pacific Oasis, a firefighting company with offices in the Rogue Valley. Pacific Oasis has volunteered to clear and build trail during the company's spring training exercises with new firefighter trainees. The work will benefit their crews, facilitate their spring training needs, and help train local firefighting crews, while providing an invaluable service to the Applegate community and outdoor recreation in our area.

The Tallowbox Trail will provide trail access into a beautiful and little-known portion of our region. The Burton-Ninemile LWC is one of only two habitats in the Applegate Valley currently



A view from the soon-to-be-created Tallowbox Trail in the Burton-Ninemile Lands with Wilderness Characteristics area. Photo: Luke Ruediger.

protected as BLM Lands with Wilderness Characteristics. As the only official trail either adjacent to or within the Burton-Ninemile LWC, the Tallowbox Trail will traverse closed and recontoured roadbeds on the wild and beautiful slopes above Star Gulch, a tributary of the Upper Applegate River.

Once completed, the trail will begin along the banks of Star Gulch (along BLM road 39-3-28) at the Ladybug Gulch Trailhead and climb gradually through mature mixed conifer forest into the heart of the Burton-Ninemile LWC. Following a recontoured road, the trail will travel upstream along Ladybug Gulch, a small seasonal tributary of Star Gulch. The streamside area contains large overstory Douglas fir, patches of live oak, maple, and madrone, with small, scattered rock outcrops.

After roughly seven-tenths of a mile, the trail will cross Ladybug Gulch for the third time, reaching a primitive gravel road. The trail will follow this road upward onto the rocky slopes southwest of Tallowbox Mountain's broad southern face. Traveling east, the trail will climb through live oak groves, deciduous oaks, madrones, scattered conifers, patches of chaparral, and spectacular grasslands filled with impressive spring wildflowers, rare plant species such as giant death camas (*Toxicoscordion exaltatum*), which grows in only a few locations in all of Oregon, and dramatic views across the Upper Applegate Valley and Burton-Ninemile LWC, to the towering summits of the Siskiyou Crest and the rugged Red Buttes Wilderness.

Ultimately, the Tallowbox Trail will end in a rugged saddle between

Tallowbox Mountain and Mount Baldy, with a commanding view across the Upper Applegate River watershed. In total, the trail will traverse a little under two miles, but starting at roughly 2,500 feet and reaching to approximately 4,500 feet at its high point, the trail contains a significant climb from the banks of Star Gulch at the Ladybug Gulch Trailhead to the ridgetop at the upper Tallowbox Trailhead. Once completed, the trail could also be hiked by walking mostly downhill. This requires hiking the trail with a friend and shuttling vehicles to either end. This still includes a 500-foot climb in the first half mile or so, followed by a sustained downhill walk to Ladybug Gulch and its confluence with Star Gulch below.

No matter how you hike it, you will enjoy the Tallowbox Trail, its sweeping vistas, colorful wildflowers, gnarled oaks, and towering forests. We hope to have the trail constructed and ready to hike this spring and open to the public for nonmotorized recreational use.

Here in the Applegate, we know we live in paradise, and we are grateful that local residents, nonprofits, businesses, and the BLM can work together to provide more ways to enjoy the beauty of our region. The Tallowbox Trail is sure to become one of the most iconic trails in the foothills of the Applegate Valley, and the community can be proud to say we played a role in its creation!

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