

Diverse opportunities for prescribed fire skills training and learning

BY AARON KRIKAVA

This spring the Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association (RVPBA) is collaborating on several opportunities for hands-on learning, training, and certification in the use of controlled burning and wildland firefighting skills.

All Things Fire Fair!, March 9. This fire fair, at the Applegate Valley Fire Department's community center, will offer presentations, demonstrations, and a chance to mingle with groups, agencies, and contractors working to make our community more resilient to the effects of wildfire. The RVPBA will be presenting on the importance of controlled burning to maintain fire resilience and increase the health of our fire-dependent forests. Our Applegate fire marshal, Brian Mulhollen, will demonstrate techniques for building burn piles and for using safe pile-burning procedures.

Certified Burn Manager (CBM), April 1-3. This course, offered by Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service, is for individuals who have had experience managing prescribed burns and would like to increase their knowledge and gain liability protection from the state and access to the Prescribed Fire Claims Fund. The purpose of the CBM program is to increase the use of prescribed burning on private lands through training, certification, and liability protection. A controlled burn conducted by a CBM following an authorized burn plan protects the landowner and burn manager from civil liability.

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) rolled out their new CBM program at the end of last year. This will be the first opportunity for individuals in our area to complete the course. After the three-day classroom and field-based course and a final exam, students will receive a field certification book with tasks to complete while they participate in a minimum of three controlled burns under the mentorship of a current Certified Burn Manager. Pile-burn management and broadcast-burn management have different certification books. The completed certification book is submitted to ODF for final approval. Our RVPBA burns offer the perfect opportunity to complete the certification book.

IGNITE Prescribed Fire Skills Training, April 6-7. The OSU Extension Service, ODF, and RVPBA training will cover many of the skills for conducting a controlled burn. Some of the stations will include burn-site layout, water-handling equipment, ignition patterns, radio communications, fire-weather readings, fire ecology, and cultural burning. This event is open to all and is ideal for those interested in learning the how, what, and why of prescribed burning. This event will also serve as the



Community members learn about various hand tools and drip torches at an RVPBA training event. Photo: Reanna Feinberg.

orientation weekend for participants in the Rogue Basin TREX (Prescribed Fire Training Exchange). RBTREX will then go on to provide on-call opportunities to participate in federal burns (US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management). The announcement for TREX is forthcoming.

Free Field Day Exercise, April 14. RVPBA will present an excellent introduction for anyone interested in learning the basic tools and skills of wildland firefighting or getting certified for employment as a wildland firefighter. Some of the training stations will include the use and maintenance of hand tools, ignition devices, fire engines and hose lays, and radio communication. In conjunction with free online S-130 and S-190 coursework, this class will allow participants to complete the requirements to become a National Wildland Coordinating Group (NWCG) Fire Fighter Type 2 (FFT2/basic firefighter). For individuals seeking FFT2 certification, the necessary fire shelter deployment and arduous pack test will also be offered. (This date is tentative; contact us at the email below to stay informed.)

The RVPBA also has a fun-filled spring of controlled burns planned! These live-fire training events are a great way to put all these fire skills to use. Whether it's your first time observing a controlled burn, or you're ready to drag a drip torch or want to manage a burn for your CBM certification book, we have opportunities for everyone. Burns are planned all across the Rogue Valley, ranging from two to 30 acres. Keep your fingers crossed for good weather!

If you have questions about these training events, send me an email at roguevalleypba@gmail.com or visit blogs.oregonstate.edu/ignite.

To keep updated about all of the RVPBA's events, sign up for our newsletter at roguevalleypba.com.

For the third year, RVPBA has gathered funding support from the US Department of Agriculture/US Forest Service, the US Department of the Interior, and The Nature Conservancy through the Fire Learning Network for the networking needed to bring people together in support of good fire and providing outreach, including the writing of this article.

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Ecological commercial thinning under way in Upper Applegate Watershed

BY TOM GRECO



Ecological commercial thinning as part of the Upper Applegate Watershed Restoration Project.

We are pleased to announce that a commercial thinning phase of the Upper Applegate Watershed Restoration Project is under way in the Applegate Valley. This long-term, community-informed restoration effort aims to improve forest health and enhance wildlife habitat while reducing the risk of severe wildfire to the ecosystem. Across the 52,000 acres of watershed lands, mostly administered by the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest (RRSNF) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Medford District, 18,000 acres have been strategically selected for treatment with ecological thinning and prescribed fire. The project is implemented through a Master Stewardship Agreement among the RRSNF, Lomakatsi Restoration Project, Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative, and The Nature Conservancy. Further collaboration guidance is provided by Rogue Forest Partners.

Lomakatsi, the lead nongovernment implementation partner for the UAW project, has contracted the ecological commercial thinning with Timberline Helicopters, Inc., through a competitive selection process involving the US Forest Service (USFS) and other partners. This tree-cutting phase is taking place on 878 acres of land managed by RRSNF. In December 2023, timber fellers from Timberline began cutting small- to medium-diameter trees (mostly Douglas fir) that were carefully marked by Lomakatsi's ecological forestry team with oversight from USFS foresters.

The goal is to retain and encourage the growth and health of large old trees and hardwoods—trees that are more resistant to fire and the impacts of climate change—by thinning younger trees around them. This reduces competition and issues with insects and disease, while shifting the forest back to the more open, historic conditions present under frequent mild fires from lightning and cultural burning by Indigenous peoples.

In January, a Timberline helicopter began moving the cut trees to a staging area onsite. The use of a helicopter greatly diminishes soil impacts while removing trees from steep slopes. At

the staging area, trees are being cut to length, loaded on trucks, and shipped to the Murphy Veneer mill. Revenue generated by Murphy's purchase of the logs will help offset the cost of operations.

After this commercial phase, Lomakatsi and USFS fuels specialists will oversee understory thinning within the same units. This will involve the cutting and piling of small diameter

trees (again, mostly Douglas fir) and "ladder fuels"—including dead lower limbs of trees that could carry fire up into the forest canopy—to further improve forest health. The piles will subsequently be burned when conditions are safe. These project phases will be funded by federal and state grants.

The ultimate goal is to restore the forest to a healthier, less dense condition that supports the application of prescribed fire through underburning, which brings many ecological benefits to the fire-adapted ecosystem and is the most cost-efficient method of maintaining restoration treatments into the future. This work will increase the likelihood that a wildfire will burn at lower severity and ideally bring ecological benefits, rather than cause the "stand-replacing" destruction seen in recent megafires, requiring a century or more for a forest to recover.

The use of the collaborative Stewardship Agreement allows federal agencies to work with community-based partners toward ecologically centered goals. A similar agreement shaped the nearby successful Ashland Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project, which has become a national model. Thousands of additional acres of forestlands in the Rogue Basin need restoration. The ability to use logs generated from restoration activities will leverage state and federal grant investments and allow partners to implement forest health treatments across a higher percentage of the landscape. This project also supports the "restoration economy" by generating business for local and regional forestry-services providers and mills.

It takes a lot of skill and experience to work across steep, forested terrain. Project partners are grateful to Timberline, Murphy Veneer, and our many industry partners who make this stewardship model possible by providing capacity for implementation—sustaining jobs and supporting local economies—and a means by which trees thinned from overly dense forests—byproducts of restoration—can be used for wood products.

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