

Burn association held its largest-ever community understory burn in November

BY AARON KRIKAVA

On November 20, a diverse array of individuals and groups came together in the Applegate to accomplish the largest community understory burn yet for the Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association (RVPBA). After years of work organizing and growing the RVPBA, we were deeply moved to experience collaboration on this scale. The support came in many forms, each critical to the successful and safe implementation of the controlled burn.

A grant from the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District provided hand tools, backpack pumps, drip torches, and jerrycans. A grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board provided mixed diesel/gasoline fuel for the drip torches, funding for some of the professional fire practitioners and fire engines, and some project management costs. These grants were implemented through the Applegate Partnership & Watershed Council.

The Oregon Department of Forestry provided 2,600 feet of progressive hose lay and a 1,500-gallon fold-a-tank. “Progressive hose lay” is a hose lay in which double shutoff wye (Y) valves are inserted in the main line at intervals and lateral lines are run from the wyes to the fire edge, thus permitting continuous application of water during

extension of the lay, according to the National Wildlife Coordinating Group. These sections are connected to form a perimeter around the burn unit. This hose lay serves a dual purpose: to put out any spot fires that cross the control line and to mop up after the burn, when all burning or smoldering fuel within the unit is completely extinguished.

For the event, Rural Metro Fire Department, based in Grants Pass, provided a Type 6 fire engine and an experienced structural and wildland firefighter, who greatly enjoyed sharing his experience and knowledge regarding the tools and practice of using fire as a land-management tool.

The new interim fire chief for Applegate Valley Fire District #9, Chris Wolford, provided four of our valley’s firefighters, a Type 6 fire engine, and an all-important water tender, for filling the fold-a-tank supplying our hose lay. These wonderful people, who work to keep the Applegate safe year-round, were able to accomplish training for some of their crew while also helping to support the community with their equipment and skills.

Four different wildland firefighting contractors provided multiple fire engines, professional wildland firefighters, and a qualified Type 2 burn boss to oversee the event. These resources were made



The Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association organized a community understory burn in November. Photo: Reanna Feinberg.

possible through funding from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and donated equipment and services from the contractors.

The Oregon State University Extension Service’s regional fire specialist provided a Type 6 fire engine, hand tools, drip torches, and hand-held radios that kept all participants in constant communication as the burn progressed.

The landowners supplied water, hydration drinks, and snacks during the burn and provided delicious chili, cornbread, and cookies after the burn was completed. Additionally, they bought supplemental drip-torch fuel to refill the jerrycans and made a generous donation to the Applegate Partnership & Watershed Council to support future efforts of the Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association.

Besides all the supplies and equipment provided by various groups, over two

dozen community volunteers provided the workforce to implement the understory burn. Under the guidance of the burn boss, volunteers wielding drip-torches spread burning fuel across the burn unit in varying patterns and amounts to control the size and speed of the fire as determined in the burn plan. Other community members, armed with backpack pumps and a variety of hand tools, kept a watchful eye from the perimeter of the burn unit, ready to extinguish any flames or embers that might have spread outside the control lines.

RVPBA also gathered funding support, now for a second year, from the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service, the 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.

Responsible stewardship of rural property for fire resilience and ecological health can often feel like an insurmountable task. The Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association’s method of working together with friends, neighbors, fire professionals, and supportive local groups can make accomplishing those goals manageable—and fun too! If you would like to get involved and learn about the use of fire as a land management tool on your property and in your community, or contribute to the continued success of the RVPBA, go to our website (roguevalleypba.com) and sign up to receive email updates about our upcoming events and training burns.

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A discussion of fire safety precedes the burn.

Photo: Reanna Feinberg.



A drip torch is used to ignite the understory burn.

Photo: Reanna Feinberg.