



**ROGUE VALLEY
PRESCRIBED BURN
ASSOCIATION**

ANNUAL REPORT

2022/2023

SUMMARY

The Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association is a community-based organization that supports private land prescribed fire users. RVPBA members share equipment, skills and labor to make this tool accessible for those who want to restore Good Fire to the land, making the ecosystem healthier and reducing wildfire hazard. This year the RVPBA did four burns that provided training to 150 participants including rural residents, fire departments, and even youth groups! Strong partnerships with agencies and fire districts have been crucial to the RVPBA's success, including the newly established cooperative equipment cache hosted by the Oregon Department of Forestry and used on all our burns this year. The upcoming prescribed fire season will bring growing opportunities for training through the new Certified Burn Manager program that will be a focus of collaboration between the RVPBA, ODF and Oregon State University Extension.



MISSION

The Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association fosters community safety and preparedness, ecological land stewardship, and resilient ecosystems by educating and training community members in the use of prescribed burning.

BACKGROUND: PRESCRIBED FIRE IN THE ROGUE VALLEY

The forests, oak woodlands and grasslands of the Rogue Valley depend on a healthy relationship with fire. What does a healthy relationship with fire look like? Learning from fire history recorded in tree rings and Indigenous oral history, we know that fire visited our landscapes about every 8 years. Today, many places have not seen fire in over a century, which is unprecedented for these ecosystems. The result is the gradual decline of fire-dependent species deprived of this vital force and the increase in high-severity fires due to the abundance of live and dead vegetation. Prescribed fire is needed to revitalize these landscapes and prepare them for the inevitability of wildfires.

But it's not just animals and plants that need the right kind of fire; so do human communities. For millennia, Indigenous people in the Rogue Valley have used fire for diverse purposes, including increasing the abundance of food plants, nurturing high-quality materials for baskets and crafts, and sustaining their stewardship responsibility to other species and habitats. Fire also found its place in rangeland management by early settlers. In the Umpqua Valley, where this cultural heritage remains vibrant, ranchers burned 7,000 acres in 2022 to keep pastures healthy and free of blackberries and poison oak. Intentional burning in the Rogue Valley is now rare outside of its use by federal agencies and at select conservation areas such as Table Rocks. The Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association is working to change this.

"It's gorgeous to me. It's so exciting to see the safety buffer that I now have on my property. I know that if [wild]fire comes this way my property is going to help slow fire down. When I see the burn that was done and the smoke that's still floating around it's very exciting because it makes me feel that much more safe"

Cheryl Johnson, Landowner & RVPBA member, O'Brien

WHAT IS THE RVPBA?

·Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) are networks of individuals and organizations interested in using prescribed burns for healthy lands and communities. Like other PBAs across the country, the Rogue Valley PBA includes a wide range of people: firefighters, landowners, ecologists, agricultural producers, and curious neighbors. Prescribed burns can't be completed by individual landowners, so the Rogue Valley PBA connects members to share equipment, skills and labor, similar to traditional haying or barn raising community events.

Working with agencies like the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and local fire departments, the Rogue Valley PBA helps landowners access technical assistance, acquire the necessary permits, and coordinate with other members and volunteers. When the weather conditions are right, PBA members join the landowner to conduct the burn and celebrate the achievement of restoring this important natural process, making communities safer and landscapes healthier, one burn at a time!

Volunteers lending a hand to Cheryl Johnson (right) to bring Good Fire back to her property in O'Brien



WHY PARTICIPATE IN THE RVPBA?

Participants are drawn to the RVPBA for numerous reasons, including:

- To help their neighbors and community;
- To see if prescribed burning is right for their land;
- To learn about fire ecology;
- Because of being tired of waiting in fear of catastrophic wildfires;
- Because it's fun, beautiful and rewarding;
- To process climate anxiety and/or trauma from wildfires;
- To share their knowledge as firefighters, practitioners or ecologists;
- To be part of this crucial ecological and community process.

Putting fire on the ground deliberately is a serious task. But the RVPBA exists to demonstrate that it's also accessible with the appropriate training and connections with other community members, practitioners, and agency partners. We believe that anyone can participate at a level that feels comfortable to them. For some this might mean carrying a driptorch along with other igniters, for some it's holding a shovel and holding watch from the edge of the burn, and for yet others it might mean baking cookies, or simply talking to their friends and neighbors about prescribed fire. Many people feel a sense of accomplishment and empowerment from working as a community.



Local firefighter and community member Elishua Reardon sprays down pitch burning on a tree trunk



Many hands make light work at the Parsons/Clover Burn in the Applegate Valley

BURNS THIS YEAR

4 burns, 18 acres, 150 participants

APPLEGATE: CLOVER/PARSONS BURN – 6 ACRES

Fall burns can be challenging in the Rogue Valley because the weather goes from very hot and dry to wet in the blink of an eye. Still, we used a dry spell in November to do a 6-acre burn in the Applegate Valley, at Annette Parsons' and Jim Clover's home. Rural Metro and Applegate Valley Fire District 9 contributed equipment and used the burn as a training opportunity. Some troubleshooting was needed before the burn as two engines had technical difficulties. Good thing we had two more! During this time, Mike (NAME?) from Rural Metro shared his experience with more novice burners. Our association thrives on this type of exchange and we are grateful for everything our participants contribute. This was our first burn using equipment from the shared tool cache established at ODF's Medford headquarters. The burn was patchy due to the moisture below the canopy, but some areas burned well and participants received a valuable experience and a hearty bowl of Annette and Jim's chili!

TALENT: TEUTSCH BURN – 7 ACRES

Late winter and early spring did not offer any good burn windows, but things eventually dried out. Our next burn was on Anderson Creek in Talent, at Tucker Teutsch's. Tucker is well connected through his local Firewise Community and his organization, Firebrand Resiliency Collective, which does amazing work uniting the local community around wildfire resilience. This burn was our most well attended, with almost 60 participants! It was also the RVPBA's steepest unit so far. The slope helped produce very positive fire behavior and fuel consumption despite how green the understory vegetation had become. This burn was attended by members of the Northwest Youth Corps' Community Wildfire Protection Corps, who were immensely helpful and appreciated for their enthusiasm and hard work. After all the mechanical thinning they had completed and the classroom fire training they received, this burn was a chance for them to engage in a live-fire opportunity that we hope will inspire possible career paths!



RVPBA coordinator Aaron Krikava briefing volunteers at the Teutsch Burn.



GOLD HILL: COLLINS DEMONSTRATION FOREST – 3 ACRES

OSU's Collins Demonstration Forest in Gold Hill is meant to become a model of "pyrosilviculture" – an approach to forest management that focuses on fire's essential role in the ecosystem. However grand this vision, it needs to start somewhere, and the RVPBA, ODF, and Fire District 5 worked with OSU Extension to take the first step with a 3-acre underburn.

We were fortunate to operate under the leadership of ODF's Prescribed Fire Program Manager, Amanda Rau. Amanda's unparalleled experience as a burn boss in various ecosystems in Oregon brought new perspectives and training opportunities for participants of all levels of experience, from the highschoolers in the Student Watershed Assessment Team taking part in their first ever burn to Brian Bolstad, battalion chief at Fire District 5, who completed his Firing Boss task book. This is another small step in bringing back Good Fire and we are encouraged that within hours, the burn was occupied by a herd of happy deer rolling in the ash and munching on the crispy leaves!





O'BRIEN: JOHNSON - 2 ACRES

The last burn of spring took place just before the official start of fire season, and it was the RVPBA's first in the Illinois Valley. We responded to a moderate turnout (hard to compete with Memorial Weekend!) by shrinking our original plan to a smaller unit right next to the homeowner's residence. Safety demands that we be flexible and adjust decisions based on weather conditions, available resources, and other factors. The smaller unit still provided ample training opportunities and a conversation starter for how more burning can take place in the area.

We were again pleased to welcome personnel from various agencies including ODF, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and IV Fire. The landowner, Cheryl Johnson, was delighted with the outcomes and we all very much enjoyed working with her to take care of her small piece of heaven.

NOTE: As we write this, the Smith River Complex is approaching O'Brien. Firefighters surveying potentially threatened structures praised Cheryl for the work she's done to prepare her house and property. We hope the fire never gets close to O'Brien and to be given more time to prepare this and many other rural homes and communities for wildfire.



OTHER EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

The RVPBA offered two additional educational events this year. One was a workshop on water handling equipment for prescribed burning that included a demonstration on how to build a slip-on unit using an IBC tote and pump (right).



We also joined RVPBA member Monty Zukowski to demonstrate how to scouting and select potential burn units, the first step to take when planning a burn (below).





PARTNERSHIPS

Thank you to all our partners and supporters!

Oregon Department of Forestry - for technical support, providing equipment through our shared equipment cache, and for Amanda Rau's leadership on the Collins Demonstration Forest!

Oregon State University Extension for technical assistance and training!

Northwest Youth Corps for the huge help and enthusiasm on the Teutsch Burn!

Fire District 5 & 9, Rural Metro, IV Fire who provided engines, water tenders and personnel to support burns!

Firebrand Resiliency Collective, Illinois Valley Forest Restoration Organizing Group, Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council, and Wild Rivers Coast Forest Restoration Collaborative for support with community outreach.

Natural Resources Conservation Service for continued interest in establishing programs to support landowners interested in prescribed burning.

We also acknowledge and thank **The Nature Conservancy's Fire Learning Network and Bureau of Land Management** for funding.



FUTURE PLANS...

... and opportunities to participate!

The RVPBA has many plans for the upcoming prescribed fire season. ODF's new Certified Burn Manager training is rolling out, which will provide new training avenues and liability protections for private land burners. We will be partnering with OSU Extension and ODF to offer classroom and field training opportunities to obtain this certification.

We are working with landowners who have burns planned in Ashland and the Colestin, Applegate, and Illinois Valleys. Burning will also continue on the Collins Demonstration Forest with OSU. We're also providing support to start a prescribed burn association in Douglas County and the Illinois Valley.

All of this exciting work relies on interest and participation from our amazing members who offer their time and experience to talk to their neighbors about prescribed fire, help prepare units, make calls, write burn plans, cook chili and cookies for burn volunteers, patrol recently completed units, share knowledge of plants and ecology, and much more. Our deepest gratitude is to all of you working to create a fire-positive culture, and we look forward to getting back out there with you soon!

ODF's new **Certified Burn Manager Program** will include classroom and experiential training for private land burners. When a burn is led by a CBM, this provides additional liability protections to both landowner and CBM. Trainings and certifications will be available in 2024.

More info at:
<https://www.oregon.gov/odf/fire/pages/prescribed-fire.aspx>

