



# KS WILD NEWS

The Journal of the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center

WINTER 2024

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## Notes From the Trailhead

**163. That's how many days I had spent traversing the Klamath-Siskiyou backcountry between two seasons of trail maintenance up until this moment. In those 163 days, I had attempted to really take in every sweeping vista, every explosive sunrise, every ancient tree. I thought I had really felt it all, until this moment.**

I sat with my knees tucked to my chest and my arms wrapped around my shins as my Crocs secured me to the boulder I was crouched on top of. It was 8:18pm on August 7th, 2019, and I was somewhere deep in the southern section of the Siskiyou Wilderness. This was a place that I just knew not many people had seen with their own eyes unless they too had driven hours on dusty Forest Service roads and hiked in countless miles. I was on day three of my crew's 10-day hitch of trying to uncover a forlorn wilderness trail by pulling crosscut saws through massive down logs, lopping overgrown manzanita, and dragging Pulaskis through the dirt. I sat hugging my knees as I admired the Marble Mountains to the east fading into pink and meshing with the sky as the sun set to the west. I watched as fog began to slowly creep into sight, filling the mountain valleys to the south. There were dozens of snags in eyesight defying gravity and still standing despite their charred figures displaying cracks and holes. New growth miraculously pushed through the rocky soil to claim some of the very abundant sunlight on this exposed ridgeline. Manzanita and paintbrush wildflowers created a mosaic of greens, oranges, and yellows on the ground below me. I felt grateful for the breeze pushing in from the west that offered

KS Wild's mission is to protect and restore wild nature in the Klamath-Siskiyou region of southwest Oregon and northwest California. We promote science-based land and water conservation through policy and community action.

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quick moments of respite from the mosquitoes feasting on my blood as one of the few humans they'd see in their short lifetime. Over my shoulder, the day's last glimpse of sunlight could be spotted pouring over a jagged ridgeline, illuminating the sharp rocks around me that jettted up to the sky before nightfall blanketed the wilderness. I was in awe of the picture being painted in front of me.

I don't know what it was about this moment, but on day 163, I truly felt a part of this region—and felt that this region was a part of me. I had quite literally bled, sweat, and cried into the soils, bathed in the waters, and slept under the forested canopies for months on end and was convinced that this little corner of the world was something truly special. It was no longer enough to dig trails into the soil that few would even travel. Everything I could see—the Marbles, the Trinities, every unnamed forested hillside between me and the Pacific—deserved advocacy, and I was determined to be an active participant in that work. This moment inspired me to make the two-year journey that would eventually lead me to KS Wild.

In this winter *KS Wild News* edition, we are switching things up a bit as we share stories with you about moments that fed our souls and nourished our love for this beautiful, wild region of the country. We hope that our stories paint vivid, relatable pictures about our commitment to loving where we live and choosing, every day, to defend what we love in our work. If you enjoy our stories, let me know! Send an email to [haleigh@kswild.org](mailto:haleigh@kswild.org).

*Haleigh Martin, Communications Manager*



"Over my shoulder, the day's last glimpse of sunlight could be spotted pouring over a jagged ridgeline..."

# A DEEP AND ABIDING LOVE FOR MY HOME WATERS

As a young kid growing up in the Midwest, my adventures would often lead me through patches of hardwood forest where I would explore my favorite creek. The Baptist church that my family attended down the road was named for that small waterway—Lewis Creek—where I would escape with friends to go fishing and hunt for crawdads. As we got older, we would challenge ourselves to assemble rope swings and act like we were Indiana Jones crossing a great chasm, but that was short-lived after a few injuries sidelined us. With all the agricultural runoff, it wasn't always the most pleasant body of water to swim in, but Lewis Creek was an escape for me during many hot and humid summers.

The scale of my adventures on the West Coast and the size of the fish are much bigger than that of my childhood. I pinch myself thinking about the journey I've taken to arrive here in the Klamath-Siskiyou, falling in love with whitewater and wild rivers, and I am blessed to work for an organization where river and forest conservation are at the core of the mission.

When it comes to adventuring, not much has changed for me over the years. I still find pleasure and respite on the rivers close to home. This year, I achieved a personal “triple crown” of river excursion—floating the Rogue, North Fork Smith, and Klamath Rivers.

On my Wild & Scenic Rogue trip this year, I enjoyed four beautiful days on the water with friends and got to share with them the conservation work KS Wild is doing in the Wild Rogue corridor. One of the great pleasures of my job today is advocating for the Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act, a bill that would add 59,000 acres to the Wild Rogue Wilderness while creating a new Rogue Canyon National Recreation Area. Along with



View into the Wild Rogue Wilderness. Photo by M. Dotson.





Floating down the North Fork Smith River. Photo by M. Dotson.

benefits to the Rogue, the bill also permanently protects portions of the neighboring Wild and Scenic Illinois River from threats of toxic mining.

A few weeks later, I had the pleasure of rafting the North Fork Smith with a handful of conservation partners. I have paddled more than a dozen rivers in the western U.S., but there is nothing quite like the North Fork Smith with its emerald waters and flourishing *Darlingtonia* fens. At the end of the day, a fellow rafter had counted more than 100 waterfalls! It was a special trip with important decision-makers as KS Wild and partners at the Smith River Alliance continue to seek protection expansions for the watershed. Senate Bill 162 designates 75 miles of tributaries in Oregon's North Fork Smith watershed as Wild & Scenic while establishing National Recreation Area status to more than 55,000 acres. The Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act would ultimately bring the entire watershed—spanning both Oregon and California—under one management directive with a heavy focus on conservation, recreation, and restoration.

As a fan of wild rivers and native fish, nothing excites me more than the restoration work being done on the upper Klamath River. My trip this year on the upper Klamath was especially unique as it was the last time I'd see the river in its current state before the completion of the dam removals! With the last 3 dams slated to come down next year, a friend and I are making regular trips to the area to film and document the condition of tributaries like Scotch, Jenny, and Spencer Creeks. Over time, there's hope that salmon and steelhead will return to their home waters for the first time in over a half-decade.

Whether it's the mighty Klamath River or just a little Lewis Creek, I have a deep and abiding love for my home waters and hope to be a life-long advocate for all the wild places, no matter how big or small.

*Michael Dotson, Executive Director*

# FALLING IN LOVE IN THE ILLINOIS VALLEY

After almost five years of exploring the Klamath-Siskiyou, one memory always stands out: the first time I hiked the Babyfoot Lake trail into the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. This was the first time I had seen Siskiyou Lewisia, one of my favorite Klamath-Siskiyou plants, and azalea bushes exploding with blooms. On our drive to the trailhead, I even spotted the endemic California Pitcher plant! As a plant enthusiast, my mind was blown. I felt so lucky to end up in such a biodiverse and beautiful landscape.



Charred snags from the 2002 Biscuit Fire tower over new growth along Babyfoot Lake trail. Photo by A. Lovechio.

This was also the first time I had experienced a post-fire landscape as the Babyfoot Lake trail is located within the Biscuit and Chetco Bar wildfire footprints. Shortly after starting the hike, huge tree stumps appeared on either side of the trail creating a vast, exposed landscape, and I remember feeling scorched by the sun. I later learned that the Forest Service was responsible for the logging despite significant community and environmentalist resistance. After the 2002 Biscuit Fire, the Forest Service's Fiddler timber sale targeted old-growth trees in the Babyfoot Lake Botanical Area. This post-fire salvage sale left this unique landscape devastated. I couldn't help but think about what this trail looked like previous to the logging. I imagine the massive old-growth trees provided shade for hikers and habitat for wildlife.

Despite the logging destruction, the landscape was a testament to nature's resilience. Continuing down the trail, I entered into a beautiful snag forest with young trees covering the landscape. The forest was naturally regenerating after the fire. I heard woodpeckers knocking on the standing dead trees and saw young manzanita shrubs sprouting out of the charred ground. It was beautiful and such a stark difference from the clearcut area I just hiked through.

This hike was a turning point for me. I realized the critical importance of advocating such unique places in the Klamath-Siskiyou. I learned that I have a role to play in safeguarding these ecosystems and that they are worth fighting for. The Klamath-Siskiyou, with its diverse plant life and resilient landscapes, became my source of inspiration and dedication to environmental advocacy.

*Alexi Lovechio, Climate Program Manager*



# THE DAY I BECAME AN ACTIVIST

In 2005, the Kalmiopsis Wilderness became the first wild place I fell in love with. It was pure and real—like the kind of love that you feel for a family member or a child. Now, as a new parent, I feel more connected to the Earth than ever before and safeguarding wild places for future generations means so much more to me.

I will never forget the day that I learned the power of activism. On that day in 2005, I watched brave protesters use their bodies to block a road into the Kalmiopsis Wilderness to save old-growth trees from being logged. The passion of the group left me with a sense of purpose that I had never felt before. That experience became my inspiration to work with KS Wild and become the environmental activist that I am today.

Over the years, activism has evolved from frontline protests to grassroots organizing. What I've learned since the Kalmiopsis protest is that, whether we're on the frontlines or supporting grassroots efforts, there is power in numbers. We are living proof of this as we continue to build on the five years of stewardship at Eight Dollar Mountain; armored with the support of our community, we urged decision-makers to install a gate to keep

vehicles out of a botanical area to retain the restoration work being done. This was a huge feat we should all be proud of.



With the strength of unity, I am looking forward to extending our stewardship efforts to other threatened public lands in the Klamath-Siskiyou over the next year.

This is my ode to all forest protectors who have fought tirelessly but have never given up, and to the next generation who will come after us. When we unite in our passions, we create impactful change.

Growing into my own activism has instilled a drive within me that I will pass onto my child in hopes of always loving and defending this place we call home.

*Allee Gustafson,  
Events & Volunteer Manager*

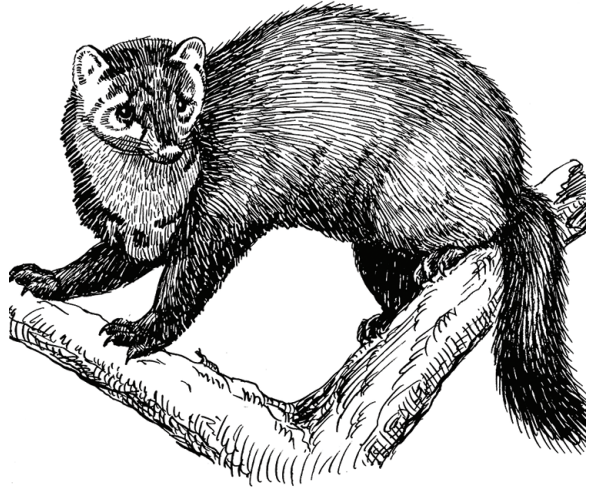
One of my first days in the field volunteering for KS Wild. Photo by A. Gustafson.

# TOUGH DAY... IN THE LIFE OF A PACIFIC FISHER

*Journal Entry, August 2023, Siskiyou Crest Mountain Range  
-Ms. Carnivora Pennanti Fisher*

## **A Long Night**

Good Lord, I am so tired. The kits (Bruce, Eddy and Sheela) were an absolute paw-full last night. Bruce was making a racket like he just can't wait to get munched into barred owl scat. Eddy was up all night chasing shrews. And don't get me started on Sheela; that kit is only 5 months old and is raring to be out on her own. Don't suppose I can blame her, I was a wild one at that age as well. I absolutely should never have hooked up with her father, but I tell ya, it's hard to find a quality mate in these mountains. So here I am, in a log with three kits that don't know their tails from their snouts. I wonder if there are any tasty porcupines in this valley.



Credit: Pearson Scott Foresman

## **Poison in The Pot Patch**

This is just too good to be true! Some sort of weird stinky plants and irrigation all over the forest and looky here—a fat woodrat that's down on his luck, stumbling around kinda funny like and out in the open. This is going to be yummy...

...I don't feel so good. My guts hurt, and I'm really dizzy. Where am I? How am I going to get back to kits at my den log? Something was very wrong with that wood rat...

## **It's too Damn Hot**

Well, I made it back to the log somehow despite the belly ache and brain fog, don't ask me how, and Sheela is just gone! And gosh it's hot, hot, hot. Too damn hot. Sometimes I wish I could take this fur coat off. The last time it was this hot, the Slater Fire got going with that east wind and blasted through that sweet den I had out by Poker Flat. Then those guys came with the chainsaws and took out pretty much every nice snag that I had my eye on for an apartment den. Sometimes I wish I were in the Sierra Mountains. Might have to take Bruce and Eddy on a Sierra migration while they're still young'uns.



## Trapped

We found Sheela. She hadn't run off to find a mate like I thought. Maybe that was projection on my part. No, get this, she's caught in some sort of gizmo they call a "trap." I've heard of these things but always thought they were a rumor, like Bigfoot, to scare kits and get them to behave. But no, traps are real, actual things. And Sheela is caught in one and we gotta get her out! She keeps meowing that she's thirsty. Hang on girl, we're getting you outta there! Good thing my paws are agile and strong.

## On the Move

Ok, that took some doing but we got Sheela out of the stupid trap and we're on the move! But where should we go? There's poisons, logging, heat domes, traps and I, I, ... I don't know where to go. Let's try the Ashland Watershed and see how we fair there. I hope there's still some tasty porcupines to eat and some creeks to drink from... Now to find an oak with a nice hole that the four of us can squeeze into for the night. Gotta show these kits how it's done. Live wild. Live free. But right now I'm just so tired.



**Pacific fishers should be protected by the Endangered Species Act, but they're not.**

For over twenty years, KS Wild has worked to secure federal protections for this critically imperiled carnivore. A history of trapping, habitat loss, and an increase in rodenticide use combined with climate change have fishers on the run. It's time to give them a hand. Be tenacious.

**Help us list the fisher.**

You can help us to get the Pacific fisher added to the Endangered Species list by making a contribution to KS Wild today. Use the remit envelope here or scan the QR code to pledge your support to the Pacific fisher.



# THE ENDURING SALMON

Every fall, it is a regular occurrence to find me crouching alongside a stream, feet damp from dipping into the water's edge, peering into the water to look for spawning Chinook salmon.

The streams across southern Oregon, while often built upon or grazed to the very edges, are critical to the native fish who live here. While most residents of the region think it is unlikely or preposterous that a huge, almost mythic fish could be found alongside human-built features like shopping malls and freeway interchanges, these fish know what they are looking for and are still able to find a shred of it here, even in some of the unexpected habitats that appear worse for human wear.

The fish continue to return.

When finding spawning salmon in the smaller tributaries that feed the Rogue, the water is shallower and it's easier to see the fish, finning up a channel, splashing as they dig out their redd where they will deposit their eggs. The movements often break the surface of the water.



Once salmon have returned to their home waters and laid eggs, they have reached the end of their lifecycle. Their decaying bodies return essential nutrients to waters and soils. Photo by F. Oyung.

It is knowing that these fish can and will continue to return to the home waters we share as long as they can that drives me to do the work that I do, to help them as much as I can, and to somehow allow the stream to remain habitable for them.

It has taken a few decades of humans changing this landscape to make the streams so difficult for fish, but if we take the steps to protect, reclaim, restore, and re-establish these habitats, they may still have a chance to hold on throughout this basin for future decades.



*Frances Oyung, Rogue Riverkeeper Program Director*



# A CASCADE RANGE ADVENTURE

“Let’s go for a hike,” they said. “It’ll be fun,” they said. My hiking companions were at the destination when we all heard and watched the torso-sized volcanic boulder tumble down the steep slope of broken rocks between us. It came to rest, and we let out a sigh of relief.

I didn’t grow up near tall mountains. After moving to Oregon I was on a day hike in sport sandals and shorts with a group heading towards a mountain with an elevation of 8,000 feet. We laughed and talked as we bounded up the trail in the dappled sunlight of the forest. The beauty and grandeur of the trees, cliffs, snow fields, and overarching blue sky took my breath away. As we got closer, I became more unsure and disoriented as I followed the others across snowfields, up to the last bit of trail crossing a steep slope of small, broken-up rocks just below steep, jagged cliff peaks.



View of Diamond Lake from a Cascade mountain.

Photo by H. Christiansen

The enormous sky and sheer size and angles of the monolithic peak awed and terrified me. I was in over my head! How did I get here? Where is the group?! OK, they weren’t far away, on a group of boulders. How did they cross this? I heard someone call out, “What’s wrong?”

I realized I wasn’t sure why I was glued to the side of the trail. It was during this moment we all watched the boulder fall. I had an idea. I cupped my hands over my mouth, made a sound like static, “Ksht!” and shouted in my best radio-call voice “Um, yeah, we’re going to need a helicopter rescue for a hiker on the east slope. Ksht!” The group looked at each other, worried. My fear lifted. I took a cautious step forward, then another, and felt the deep layer of gravel, small pieces of the monolith ground down before me, supported and cushioned my steps. I walked over and joined the group. Later, I had fun ‘skiing’ in sandals with them down snow drifts on our way back.

I hold these moments of awe and laughter close to inspire the monumental work we accomplish together for these places.

*Holly Christiansen, Administrative Director*



## A JOURNEY INTO DISTURBANCE

My family and I landed in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument by strange circumstances in February of 2020. A few fateful weeks later, the lockdown began, followed by 3 quiet years of living in paradise. Public lands in every direction—cross country skiing, gravel biking, and hiking without a soul in sight. But what really grabbed me were the morels (*Morchella elata*). Elata, Latin for reaching high, exalted. This is an appropriate description because every spring, the forest became my temple, and I'd spend every waking moment out with my dog looking for them.

Morels can be fickle to find. In my patch, they seemed to like disturbed, loamy soils, which often meant traversing animal paths. These paths were an interstate freeway system that traverses our entire bio-region navigated by scent, season, and sustenance through country too rough for most humans.

I often marveled at the strange relationship that I had with the morels; how I was lured to places in the woods in search of this small, stinky thing. I believe there is some intelligence to this relationship though.

So my theory is this: the mushrooms want to be found, and they want us out in strange corners of the woods looking for them. Why is this? My belief is that, by thriving in disturbance and in being so exceptionally tasty, the morels are trying to lure us to parts of the forest that need witness and healing—like burn zones and old timber plantations. While I certainly found them in beautiful old-growth, my best find was nearby a shoddy maintenance road below a visually obnoxious powerline. I have to wonder if the morels were asking me to think more critically about the human impact on the forest lands. What's certain is that my journey for these culinary delights has led me to powerfully question the relationship between the human and more-than-human worlds.

*Isaak Oliansky, Development Officer*



# A MOMENT FOR OUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED BUSINESS

In this newsletter, we've chosen to take a step back from our regularly-scheduled campaign updates to share stories about the parts of this beautiful, wild region that ignite our passions and fuel our work. That is not to say we're not working as hard as ever to protect and defend the wild places we all love. Our program staff have been busy. Here's a quick highlight reel:



**ForestWatch:** We continue to wrestle with the Medford District BLM's old-growth logging program. Recently, we located some of the oldest trees in the district that the BLM intends to log to facilitate timber sale road construction. The wildlife trees marked for retention will instead be felled to reduce timber yarding costs and increase timber profits.

**Climate:** We are requesting the Biden Administration implement a moratorium on all mature and old-growth logging until the Forest Service and BLM implement new policies on how to protect these forests in response to President Biden's 2022 Executive Order.

**Rogue Riverkeeper:** Urban development and commercial jet boats continue to threaten the Rogue basin. We are advocating for a holistic review of new development projects on and near critical cold water sources across the basin, and we are working with a coalition to request state restrictions on commercial jet boat use on the Rogue as well as allowing for public input on that decision.

**Stewardship:** We remain steadfast in our efforts to restore and protect the endemic plants in the Eight Dollar Mountain and Days Gulch Botanical Areas by connecting our community with the USFS to halt illegal off-road vehicle use. Due to the success we've seen in these two locations in the past five years, we are excited to introduce the next phase in this program: our volunteer monitoring program.

Our work defending ancient trees, clean water, and rare plants is powerless without you. The work that we can fulfill today shapes the world of tomorrow, and in a world facing new challenges daily, we are always looking for ways to create a better tomorrow. Your support is not just a donation; it's an investment in a healthier, more resilient Klamath-Siskiyou. Pledge your support to the wild by making a donation today either with the envelope included in this publication or at [www.kswild.org/newsletter](http://www.kswild.org/newsletter).



Save the Date!

KS Wild's

*Annual Dinner*

is back at the Historic Ashland Armory

October 19, 2024

## Upcoming First Fridays

Since our office renovation two years ago, we have enjoyed opening our doors and welcoming in our friends and neighbors. We believe our A St. office space should be a hub to build community, reconnect with loved ones, and feel at home. In addition to a variety of events we offer throughout the year, we're proud to continue our partnership with local Rogue Valley artists as part of our First Friday Art Show Series. Join us on a Friday in 2024 for art, music, refreshments, and community.

**January 5: Betty LaDuke and friends**

**February 2: Peter Van Fleet**

**March 1: TBD**

**April 5: Willow McCloud**



Betty LaDuke, Sunrise, 2003. (Rwanda).



Join us this spring! Sign up for an event online to receive details including carpooling and what to bring. For more events and to sign up: [www.kswild.org/events](http://www.kswild.org/events).

**2nd Annual Seed & Plant Swap: Saturday, January 27**

We're excited to host our 2nd annual Seed & Plant Swap celebrating National Seed Swap Day! Get excited for your spring garden planning with native seeds provided by Pollinator Project Rogue Valley and spruce up your home with a new houseplant from Bestow. Bring seeds or plant propagations to share if you have them.

**Forest & Fire Preparedness Fair: Saturday, March 9  
Applegate Valley Fire Station #9 in Ruch, 11-3pm**

Join KS Wild, A Greater Applegate, and partners for a community event featuring a dynamic mix of presentations and interactive demonstrations focused on wildfire and community preparedness. Don't miss this chance to connect with experts, community leaders, and neighbors!

**Rogue River Preserve Hike with SOLC: Saturday, March 23**

Join us and Southern Oregon Land Conservancy for a walk through the Rogue River Preserve near Eagle Point. The preserve features two miles of river-front, an enormous floodplain forest, oak woodland, chaparral, and vernal pool-mounded prairie and is home to 37 special status (rare and declining) plants and animals.

## Enviro Speaker Series!

January: Harry Fuller, Great Gray Owls

February: KS Wild, Impacts of the Northwest Forest Plan

March: Ridges to Riffles Indigenous Conservation Group, Klamath Dam Removal

## Winter Happy Hour Meet & Greets

January: Coffee at the KS Wild office

February: Art Bop Beer Co. in Talent, OR

March: Area 61 Taphouse in Grants Pass, OR





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## SAVE THE DATE

2024 Wild & Scenic Film Festival **IN PERSON!**

**Friday, April 12, 2024**  
Ashland Armory

**Sunday, April 14, 2024**  
Grants Pass Performing  
Arts Center

Stay tuned for more details at [www.kswild.org/events](http://www.kswild.org/events)

Cover: Mt Shasta at night, Joseph Ballesteros