

Vernal Pool Information Network
October 28, 2014
Site Visit Summary

Attendees: Juddson Parsons, landowner; Bill Roper, Wildland's Inc.; Cam Patterson, consultant; Kyle Straus, consultant; Steve Wille, citizen; Phil Scoles, consultant; Jim Thrailkill, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); Greg Swenson, consultant; Sam Friedman, USFWS; Craig Tuss, Rogue Valley Council of Governments (RVCOG); Kim Adams, RVCOG; Craig Harper, Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC); Kristi Mergenthaler, SOLC; Marilyn Rice, landowner; Darren Borgias, The Nature Conservancy (TNC); Paul Benton, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT); Lori Tella, Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD); Paul Dimaggio, SWCD.

We met at the “Wood House” at 1 pm. The “Wood House” is located on the east side of Highway 62, north of Eagle Point, Oregon (see Photo 1.).

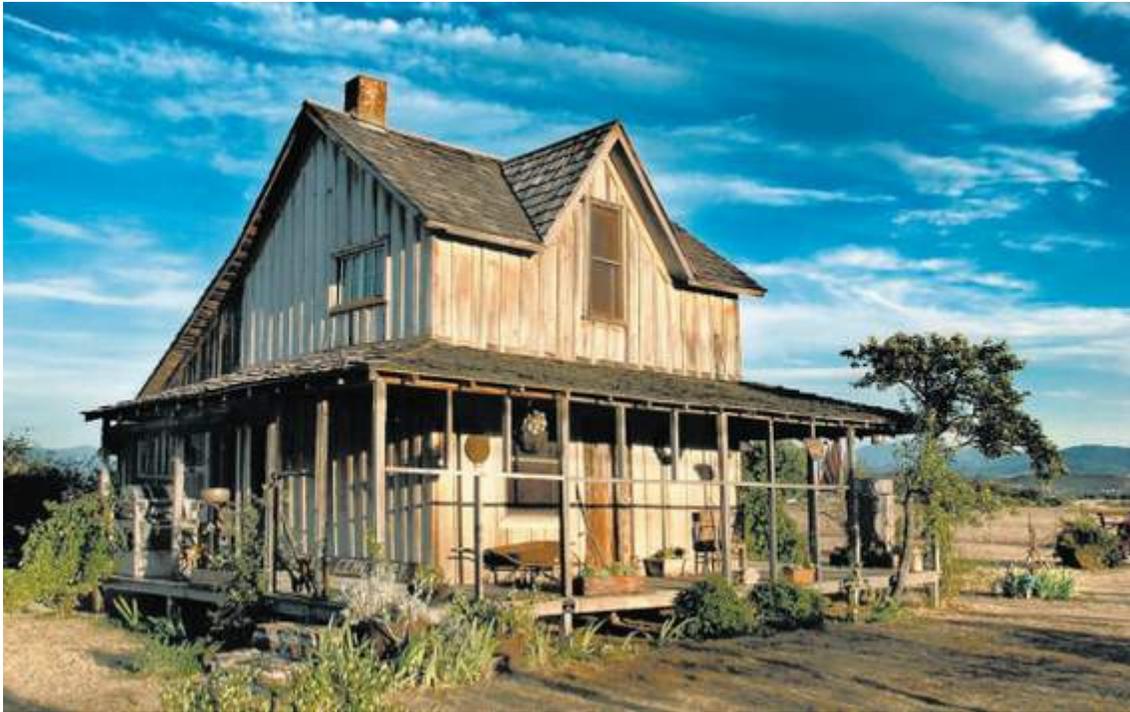


Photo 1. “Wood House”. Photo courtesy of Woodhouse Preservation Group

Tour Objective: to see and talk with the owners/managers of two adjacent areas that are being managed for vernal pool habitat conservation. We heard about implementation of management actions such as grazing and about issues such as irrigation runoff from adjacent land parcels.

“Wood House” Parcel



Photo 2. Jud Parsons (center of photo with blue coat and walking stick) provides some background of “Wood House” parcel and the current management actions being undertaken.

Background: The parcel was purchased by Jud and his wife, Diane Gardiner, in 2006. They have an agreement with the Southern Oregon Historical Society regarding the “Wood” house and they have been managing the 38 acres for vernal pools and other actions since 2007. In 2008 they entered into a conservation easement with the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC). The area also has a small vineyard in the southwest corner.

Management:

- **Grazing:** The area is grazed during the spring and early summer by a local rancher. The herd is composed of 25-30 cows and calves.
- **Yellow Starthistle (YST) control and management:** Jud has been having a licensed herbicide applicator make monthly visits to the area to spray for YST. The treatments use glyphosate or triclopyr in June and mid-July. Prior to herbicide treatments the starthistle was pulled twice or three times per year.
- **Kristi M. (SOLC)** said in the three years she has been monitoring the meadowfoam in the parcel, she has seen a decline in the number of meadowfoam plants.
- **Irrigation canal and associated issues:** southeastern edge of the parcel receives irrigation runoff from the neighboring pasture. This runoff affects the local hydrologic cycle by keeping the vernal pool habitat wet through the normal “dry” cycle time period. This results in the area having blackberry, juncus and other vegetation not typical of vernal pool habitat. Kristi M. (SOLC) mentioned that irrigation runoff and invasives are the biggest issue facing the conservation of this parcel.



Photo 3. Group walking near a vernal pool that is being wetted by irrigation return flow from upgradient neighbors.

Rogue Valley Vernal Pool Conservation Bank

Background: In June 2012, Wildlands announced the final approval of the Rogue Valley Vernal Pool Mitigation and Conservation Bank (Rogue Valley Bank), located in Jackson County, Oregon. The Rogue Valley Bank was approved through an agreement with USFWS, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Oregon Department of State Lands, and in coordination with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and RVCOG to mitigate permitted impacts to vernal pools, wetlands, vernal pool fairy shrimp, and large-flowered woolly meadowfoam. Mitigation credits developed at the Rogue Valley Bank allow public and private developers in the Agate Desert vernal pool region, which includes portions of Jackson, Douglas, Josephine, and Klamath counties, to responsibly meet their mitigation requirements.

Photo 4. Bill Roper (right) of Wildland's Inc., provides some background for Sam Friedman of USFWS (center) and Kristi Mergenthaler of SOLC (left) regarding the Rogue Valley Vernal Pool Conservation Bank.



The 131-acre project represents one of the highest priority private lands identified for conservation in the Rogue Valley. The project will focus on the conservation and management of federally listed threatened and endangered species and their associated wetland habitat. The property is permanently protected with a conservation easement held by the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy and a non-wasting endowment has been established to ensure management of the property in perpetuity.

The Rogue Valley Bank property supports a large, intact expanse of vernal pools and swales with known occurrences of the federally threatened vernal pool fairy shrimp and the federally endangered large-flowered woolly meadowfoam. The Rogue Valley Bank is located within designated critical habitat for vernal pool fairy shrimp.

Management:

- Grazing Strategy: The area receives about 25 cow/calf pairs in November and the cows are allowed to graze the entire bank area (minus the one-acre enclosure) through late spring (May). This grazing schedule allows the cattle to utilize some of the residual vegetation from the preceding growing season, and then graze on the new growth through mid-spring.
- Wildlands will spot spray in March of the year for starthistle, but prefers to use grazing as the tool of choice for controlling invasives.
- Grazing enclosure comparison: The group visited a one-acre enclosure located in the middle of the bank area. The enclosure had much more non-native vegetation cover and thatch than the grazed area. General consensus of the group was that the grazing regime that Wildlands is using is better than a no-grazing scenario.
- Listed species status: In 2008, the bank had an estimated 500 *Limnanthes* plants. In 2014, it is estimated there were 5,000 plants.

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- Wildlands, through a negotiated process with the regulatory agencies, has a different set of upland vegetation performance standards than the ODOT bank. The group discussed whether current vernal pool upland vegetation performance standards can be met with tools that are available to landowners. Some of the participants are of the view that the current upland standards may not be realistic and do not provide the benefits we are seeking for fully functional vernal pool habitat.



Photo 5. The group discusses vegetation management near the Wildland's enclosure.

Outcome of the Day's discussion and follow-up:

1. Craig Tuss will work with the Parsons, JSWCD and USFWS to open a discussion with the adjacent landowner and the Eagle Point Irrigation District (EPID) to see if there is some willingness to discuss reducing the irrigation runoff onto the Parson's parcel and the Wildland's bank.
 - a. Update, On January 12, 2015 a meeting with EPID, Jud Parsons, USFWS, JSWCD, Tom and Carrie Moxon (adjacent landowners) and Craig Tuss was held in the RVCOG office. As a result of this initial meeting a site visit has been scheduled for February 23 at 1 pm to look at opportunities to manage the irrigation runoff.
2. Given some of the concerns expressed re: potentially unattainable upland performance standards, the USFWS said it would explore the possibility of a discussion with DSL and COE on the standards.