

Behind the Scenes

June 2023



Dear Friend,

Why is your Behind the Scenes Bulletin a little later than usual? Well, the reason is that there is so much going on behind the scenes at the LWC right now! On the next page, you will read about a Cultural Fire Presentation that the LWC is helping to organize, and which is focused on re-establishing a long-term relationship between local Tribes and a part of the landscape that has been disconnected from traditional stewardship practices for hundreds of years. We look forward to collaborating with Tribal partners, Polk Soil & Water Conservation District and OSU Extension in this initial step towards restoring the role of indigenous fire science to the management of Willamette Valley ecosystems. Although this particular event will not be open to the general public, we are working with Tribal photographers and videographers to record this experience, and we anticipate more cultural fire-focused events in the future that will be open to all!

I am happy to announce that we do have an exciting pollinator event coming up on July 1, which is now open to early registration for Friends of the LWC. Have a wonderful official start to summer this month, and happy reading!

--Suzanne Teller (contact me at Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org or 503-837-0237)



Upcoming Events:

Juneteenth



When: Monday, June 19 @ 4pm - 7pm, Corvallis Community Center

Celebrate freedom and community with the Linn-Benton NAACP at their Juneteenth Celebration. Festivities include a Black-Owned Business Expo, showcasing the talents and products of local entrepreneurs, Meet the NAACP Committees, a Community Fair of local resources, arts and crafts activities for all ages, Build Your Own Library book giveaway, free food from Black-Owned Restaurants, Music by DJ Kirkwood and much more! <https://linnbentonnaacp.com/Events>

Pollinators & Plants: A Walk and Talk at Illahe Vineyards



When: Saturday, July 1 @ 10am - 12pm, Illahe Vineyards

Join us at Illahe Vineyards as we celebrate pollinators and plants! We'll start by listening to OSU's post-grad students Jen Hayes and Nicole Bell as they give an overview on bees and discuss what species you may find in your home garden and how to support biodiversity in your own backyard! We'll also walk the vineyard grounds and hear from the owner of Illahe about their work to support pollinators. Jen and Nicole will help us catch bees, and guests will learn how to ID species and better understand the relationship between the plants and pollinators. There will be plenty of resources to take home, including free native seed packets. Feel free to linger after the event is over and purchase a wine tasting, glass or share a bottle!

Early-bird RSVP* is open now! Register at <https://www.luckiamutelwc.org/pollinators.html>



A big THANK YOU goes to Roundhouse Foundation for awarding the LWC a \$2,500 grant in support of our Cultural Fire Presentation! The funds will go towards event planning and organization, honorariums for participating Tribal members, and the production of a video that will be posted on [our YouTube channel](#).

Your Land. Your Rivers. Your Community. Your Watershed.

Watershed Notes

Re-Kindling a Relationship with Fire

By Suzanne Teller, LWC Outreach Coordinator



This 1845 painting, *Valley of the Willamette River*, by Henry Warre, depicts an iconic Willamette Valley landscape maintained by Kalapuya burning practices. Photo: Oregon History Project (www.oregonhistoryproject.org)

Humans and fire have a complicated relationship. For thousands of years before Euro-American settlement, fire was regarded by the inhabitants of the Willamette Valley as an important spiritual and ecological component of the surrounding landscape. Fire was an integral part of the seasonal land management practices of the Kalapuyan people, and was necessary to maintain the vast oak savannahs, grasslands and prairies that are such an iconic part of the Valley. When settlers first encountered these lands, they seemed either unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge the active role of the Kalapuya in maintaining these landscapes, calling this place “an earthly paradise” and “the land at Eden’s gate” – which contributed to a wave of immigration to this region. As the Kalapuyan people succumbed to introduced diseases and the surviving inhabitants were forcibly removed from their homelands, Euro-American preferred food species and land management practices replaced the traditional ones and the use of fire gradually diminished.

Today, the relationship between fire and humans is often strained. Due to a wide range of factors, including fuel build-up, changes in vegetation, population growth, and forest encroachment, fire is perceived more as an existential threat than an ecological component, and evokes a fear response in many Willamette Valley residents. Yet, similar to human relationships with wildlife that evoke fear or can cause property damage – such as cougars and beavers – this relationship can and should be re-examined and repaired for the benefit of all who love the Willamette Valley and wish to maintain its iconic landscapes.

On June 29, members and staff from the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians (CTSI) and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR) will meet at Polk Soil & Water Conservation District’s Smithfield Oaks Conservation Easement for an exploration of the cultural and ecological significance of fire in the Willamette Valley. Since time immemorial, fire has been an integral part of this area. The seasonal burning practices of the Tribes have shaped and nurtured not only the unique plant and animal communities that characterize the local landscape, but also the human communities that continue to live with and steward this land. At this presentation, CTSI Tribal member Joe Scott will share his understanding of indigenous fire science, including how fire is used as a tool in traditional land management, and as a sacred foundation of Tribal communities. Tribal members from the CTSI and CTGR Fire Crews will be participating in this event and contributing their knowledge and expertise. Interns in the Tribal Ecological Inquiry Program (TEIP) will be conducting guided research projects and participating in setting and extinguishing the fire, in order to advance their training in cultural burning techniques. The LWC and Polk SWCD are assisting with the organization and planning of this event, and OSU Extension Fire Specialists and the SW Polk Fire District will be on hand to assist and support Tribal members during the event.



Smithfield Oaks, a Polk SWCD conservation easement, is located near Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge. Its hillsides are covered with nearly pure oak stands of varying density and upland prairie openings, which host a large and growing population of federally endangered Fender’s blue butterfly and its host plant, Kincaid’s lupine.



Siletz Tribal member, Joe Scott examines a camas plant during a Smithfield Oaks site walk. Both camas and acorns are important First Foods species for local Tribes.

The vision and goals of this presentation are to introduce the ecological and cultural role of fire in the landscape and the Tribes’ past and present relationship with fire. The presentation would involve very small-scale pile burning in a small area that surrounds four legacy oak trees. This event is also meant to be an initial step to re-kindling a long-term relationship among local Tribes with this particular site, and to think ahead to future access by Tribal members for fire trainings and First Foods harvest opportunities. The burn will take place in the evening as the sun begins to set, which will consume the acorn weevils as they emerge from their pupal stage. This type of burning is a regular part of ensuring a plentiful and viable harvest of acorns during the fall harvest.

For this event, the audience will be strictly limited to Tribal members and their families. But due to the importance of casting fire in a new light for *all* Willamette Valley residents, Tribal photographers and a videographer will be present to document the event and produce a video for public release at a later date. This Cultural Fire Presentation represents an initial step towards a long-term partnership, and we look forward to more opportunities for indigenous fire science and First Foods harvesting at Smithfield Oaks and other sites in the future, where we will be able to invite broader participation from the public.

If you would like to learn more about the Kalapuya of the Willamette Valley, visit Dr. David Lewis’s website and journal at <https://ndnhistoryresearch.com/tribal-regions/kalapuyan-ethnohistory/>