Resetting the conversation between BLM and the **Applegate community**

BY KRISTI MASTROFINI

Southwest Oregon residents and stakeholders place a wide variety of values on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This range of values can lead to conflict among community members and between the community and BLM. That is why BLM's Ashland Field Office has been working with local stakeholders to reset the conversation regarding public land management in the Applegate Valley. Over the past few years, relationships with the community have been challenged as a result of trying to work through collaborative efforts on contentious projects, such as Nedsbar, without the proper skill sets that could help us to be more successful.

With the rollout of BLM's new Resource Management Plan (RMP), public lands in the Applegate Watershed previously designated as the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA) were not carried forward. The Applegate AMA was incorporated in BLM's 1995 RMP as an area to develop and test new approaches to forest management that

integrated ecological, economic, and social objectives reflecting the needs of the land and communities. Applegate residents who valued the AMA designation are now concerned that BLM no longer values a collaborative process that was a hallmark to agency and community interaction under the AMA.

Collaborative action

The Ashland Field Office sought support from BLM's Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution (CADR) Program to assist us in rebuilding trust with the community and to help move our engagement with the community in a more positive direction. In 2016, we began working with Kevin Preister, of the Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy, as a subcontractor of Kerns and West, Inc. Kevin, along with his staff, conducted listening sessions throughout the community, asking residents four key questions:

- 1. How do you use public lands?
- 2. What's important about these lands for you?

- 3. What's working well and not working well about the management of public
- 4. What ideas do you have for making things better?

Kevin's work led to a series of neighborhood meetings as BLM began to conduct outreach for the upcoming Middle Applegate Vegetation Management Project. Kevin's work generated good information about the concerns and ideas of those who live and work in the Applegate community and identified opportunities for the BLM to foster more positive community relations and collaboration.

In autumn of 2017, the BLM began working with Diane Groves of Whole System Performance, also a subcontractor of Kerns and West, Inc., to begin preparing for a consensus-based workshop. Diane engaged approximately 55 diverse stakeholders in a series of conversations; most were face-to-face and some by phone. BLM staff were present as listeners for many of the conversations.

Two-day workshop

Information gathered from these conversations was used to customize a two-day consensus-based workshop. The workshop that convened in November 2017 was valuable in beginning to reset the conversation between the Ashland Field Office staff and public land stakeholders. We learned a variety of tools to help

build more cooperative and collaborative relationships. One of the most helpful tools we learned at this workshop was the Grounding Circle, which allows everyone a chance to speak uninterrupted while others listen with respect. The value of learning these tools and processes together with our stakeholders will be to help build capacity in collaborative process both within the agency and within the community. Conflict will likely always be present to some degree; however, through learning and building capacity, we hope to become more self-sufficient and effective in our conflict resolution.

As we continue outreach for the Middle Applegate Project, we hope all participants will utilize lessons learned from this important workshop to improve our relationships in working together more collaboratively throughout all aspects of project development and planning. We welcome anyone interested to join us in learning more about this work.

If you are interested in being on the notification list for upcoming meetings and field trips or would like to receive Ashland update letters, please contact Brian Lawatch at 541-618-2316 or blawatch@blm.gov.

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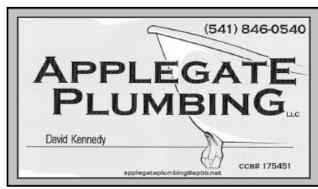
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