

# BLM hears concerns regarding potential Provoit Seed Orchard recreational area



Photos by TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

The 294-acre Provoit Seed Orchard has numerous dying trees, but the Bureau of Land Management is seeking opinions from area residents about developing a recreation management plan for the land.

By Jason McMillen  
of the Daily Courier

**PROVOLT** — The plan for the fallow Provoit Seed Orchard doesn't exist — not yet, anyway.

After a meeting with neighbors Saturday, the Bureau of Land Management has heard enough to at least get started on what to do with what constitutes nearly 300 acres of prime riverfront property in the Applegate Valley.

"We're trying to get as much community input as possible — we really want to know what community members think," Outdoor Recreation Planner Sarah Mathews said, encouraging the public to contact local BLM staff if they have thoughts or concerns over the future of the recreation area.

Located about 15 miles south of Grants Pass, the Provoit Seed Orchard produces cedar seeds for over three decades after the BLM purchased it from a dairy.

Having outlived its usefulness due to a lack of demand for seeds, primarily because of a decline in timber harvests, the orchard was designated a Special Recreation Management Area by the BLM in 2016.



Allen Bollschweiler, a Bureau of Land Management field manager, tells a small crowd at a public meeting Saturday that the department wants their opinion on what to do with the Provoit Seed Orchard.

There is very little public river access on the Applegate River between Fish Hatchery Park downstream of Murphy, and the old orchard, which looked a bit like an overgrown Christmas tree farm, borders the river for about a mile.

In the short term, the primary concern

of the nearly 20 community members who showed up to Saturday's forum was law enforcement.

The area, some say, is frequented by



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Sarah Mathews, Bureau of Land Management recreation planner, tells a small crowd that the department wants their opinion on what to do with the Provoit Seed Orchard at a public meeting Saturday.

## Orchard From 1A

inconsiderate squatters who make a habit of trespassing on neighboring properties, leaving behind garbage and committing acts of vandalism, as well as theft.

"They'll just be on our land ... stealing food out of our orchard and in our gardens," said Lori Castle, a frustrated farmer and 10-year neighbor of the orchard. "They've even broken into one of our worker's RVs. It's ridiculous. We've had five incidents from August to now. We've got gates, we've got fences. What are we to do?"

Castle said that the frequency in which trespassers encroach on her land has been greatly exacerbated since the orchard was more or less abandoned. Josephine County's undermanned Sheriff's Office isn't much help unless it already has deputies in the area, she said.

Three other neighbors of the orchard expressed the need for additional law enforcement, but they declined to be identified by the Daily Courier.

"More than anything, we would have a camp host on site," the BLM's Mathews said, referring to at least a temporary measure. "That's what we used to have when it was a seed orchard. We used to have someone here all the time."

As far as her vision for the park, Castle said that she would like to see outdoor educational opportunities for children, since the location is rich with a diversity of interesting plants and wildlife.

"If it is going to have a campground, promote it to be an educational resource center of some sort," Castle said.

Kathryn Prive, founder of a new nonprofit named The Understory Initiative, concerned herself with habitat restoration.

"I think there's huge potential for

restoration grassland and low-elevation, riverside locations," Prive said. "Those habitats are almost nonexistent because everything has been developed in the Rogue Valley."

The plan she submitted to the BLM outlines areas that could be used for the production of native plant species that could be used to restore the rest of the park, providing habitat for pollinators in the process.

An Understory Initiative board member, Lilian Letsch, punctuated another desire voiced by several at the gathering — access to the Applegate River.

"Really good river access would be amazing, but I think we need to be very careful about erosion of the bank into the river," Letsch said. "River access sites need to be developed really thoughtfully to try to mitigate potential human impacts on those sites."

Over the next several years, the trees of the Provoit Seed Orchard will continue to wither and die due to many years of being stressed into producing seeds, BLM Field Manager Allen Bollschweiler said.

Bollschweiler added that the BLM is eager to hear what sort of landscape the community would like to see replace it.

The plan's scope will be presented to the public for another round of public commentary around this time next year.

After the scope's public comment period is concluded, the plan will go under an environmental assessment.

At the conclusion of the environmental assessment, the plan will undergo yet another period of public commentary.

Although the future of the park is up in the air, a few things are set in stone. Camping outside of an established campground, the usage of off-highway vehicles and shooting is not allowed.

"Those are three things we can't change unless we do a resource management plan amendment, which is a very, very long process," Mathews said.