



BROADS IN THE WILDERNESS

By Sue Stafford

In this era of political correctness, there's one group of Central Oregon women who are proud to be called "broads"—the Central Oregon Bitterbrush Broads, a local chapter of the national organization Great Old Broads for Wilderness.

Despite their name, chapter co-leader Joanne Richter said, "Bros are welcome to join us in our efforts to preserve and protect wilderness and wildlands for this and future generations."

The organization began 30 years ago in Utah and has expanded to 41 chapters nationwide, with four in Oregon and seven throughout the Pacific Northwest. Besides the Central Oregon Bitterbrush chapter, the Oregon groups include Cascade Volcanoes (Portland/Vancouver), Rogue Valley Broads, and Willamette Valley Broads.

The original group in Utah started in response to former Utah Senator Orrin Hatch suggesting that the country doesn't need wilderness areas because old people can't get out into them. That was enough provocation to energize the women from Utah.

Chapters across the country focus on five areas to guide their activities and projects: wildlands protection, climate change, restoring healthy rivers in area watersheds, wildlife issues, and building relationships in rural areas.



Here in Central Oregon, the Bitterbrush Broads have specific projects that address the five focus areas. In wildlands protection, they work on overuse issues in the Three Sisters Wilderness and seek additional protection for the Ochoco National Forest. They brought suit to stop expanded off-highway vehicle (OHV) use in the Ochocos and won the court decision. They hold conferences to teach awareness and the value of public lands and receive input on how to expand their work.

The club addresses wildlife issues by creating habitat for monarch butterflies and pollinators and helping to increase habitat connectivity for all wildlife in Oregon. They work to improve riparian health and water flow in the Deschutes River and beyond to restore healthy waterways.

The broads participate in the Central Oregon Climate Change Coalition and support education and activism for mitigating climate change effects. They also seek to build relationships with people in rural areas of Central and Eastern Oregon.

The pursuits offered by the chapter include outdoor activities, education,



and advocacy, and much of their work is done in partnership with other national, state, and local conservation groups that support wildlands protection and minimization of climate change impacts.

They offer four to six BroadWalks/Hikes a year, fun and educational day hikes and campouts in Central Oregon, from the crest of the Cascades to the John Day River Basin. In May they have an Ochoco history tour and an Ochoco wilderness educational hike.

A regional BroadWalk/campout in Lewiston, Idaho, in June will address the presence of four obsolete dams along the

lower Snake River that are preventing endangered salmon and other fish from reaching their most productive spawning grounds. The women will discover what they can do to aid in the salmon's recovery and decommission the dams.

BroadWorks consist of three to five land stewardship service projects a year that support ecosystem health, including habitat restoration, native plantings, and noxious weed pulls. Working with the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council, they are planting along the banks of Tumalo Creek to improve aquatic conditions.





BroadChats happen at the Environmental Center in Bend every other month. The informal chats on conservation and public lands topics are led by an expert speaker and a Bitterbrush leader. Amy Stuart will address climate change and wildlife on June 11. And there are three to five BroadEducation presentations a year by experts on issues related to wildlands protection and climate change.

Members also take action to support local, regional, and national initiatives that protect wildlands and the environment. Advocacy efforts include writing comments to public agencies, letters to editors and representatives, and organizing public rallies to draw attention to critical issues.

Besides calling for the removal of the Snake River dams, the Broads are opposed to the proposed Jordan Cove Pipeline project, which would establish a liquid natural gas pipeline and terminal in Coos Bay. The annual campout August 15–18 will provide education about the impact of the project and involve stewardship activities on area trails and campsites. The Broads are simultaneously addressing the BLM’s Southeast Oregon Resources Management Plan for the Owyhee area regarding grazing and OHVs.

Along with five other environmental groups, the Great Old Broads have been successful in putting a temporary stop to grazing in the Fremont-Winema National Forest. The national organization provides the funding for litigation and the local chapters put feet on the ground.

The Bitterbrush chapter currently has 500 members

on the rolls, with 20 or 30 at a time participating in various activities. Dues for members are \$35 a year to the national organization, with \$5 returned to the local chapter.

Mary Fleischmann, the other Bitterbrush co-leader, said their group attracts women (and men) who are passionate about preserving wilderness and other conservation issues.

“Being involved with the Great Old Broads has been very educational, but above all has given me much more—the ability to be involved in something that is much bigger than myself,” she said. “We also have a lot of fun!”

For more information, visit greatoldbroads.org. ♦

