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Two entities often at odds work together to protect meadow at historic Wrangle Camp

TALENT — Deep in the recesses of the Siskiyou Mountains lies a unique place where a bunch of twenty-somethings are keeping a piece of the present from degrading a relic of the past.

A Northwest Youth Corps crew this past week turned a cache of juniper logs into a rustic-looking fence to keep illegal off-road vehicle drivers from further trashing a small meadow at the historic Wrangle Camp along the forested slopes of Big Red Mountain west of Talent.

The fence is structured to fit the small campground's ambiance, which has remained relatively unchanged and intact since the warming station and small snow surveyor's hut were first built in the 1930s, yet still keep backwoods riffraff from trashing an alpine meadow that's home to corn lilies and butterflies.

"We're actually creating something that helps keep people from destroying habitat," says Katie Brodrick, a 21-year-old Portlander on the NYC crew at Wrangle.

"It's not just a simple fence," Brodrick says. "It took all of our brains together to do it."

The project is also a fence-mender of sorts for the two entities that brought the youth crew to Southern Oregon for this project.

The Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center joined forces with one of its better-known nemeses — the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest — to make this project happen.

KS Wild staffers who discovered the degradation in the meadow last winter secured \$30,000 in grants for the project, while the forest chipped in with the materials and delivered them to the camp along Forest Service Road 20 off Wagner Creek Road out of Talent.

The two sides, often at odds over forest protection, at least for now are finding common ground at this campground.

"Sure, we like to make sure they follow the law," says Jeanine Moy, KS Wild's outreach coordinator working with the youth corps on the project. "We also like to help and fill in the gaps to make projects like this happen.

"I think more of this needs to happen," Moy says.

Not a lot has happened at Wrangle Camp in the 80 years since the Civilian Conservation Corps built the large warming station and massive cooking fireplace near where the U.S. Soil Conservation Service built a small hut for those doing occasional snow surveys there until the surveys went automated in the 1970s.

Since then, the camp has been a haven for cross-country skiers and snowmobilers as well as a respite for long-distance hikers plying the Pacific Crest Trail that snakes nearby at close to 6,500 feet above sea level.

A fence long ago was torn down for illegal off-road entry into the meadow, which is protected as habitat for myriad animals under the Northwest Forest Plan, forest spokeswoman Chamise Kramer says.

"There was a long history of documented off-highway vehicle trespass in this meadow," Kramer says.

Unable to rebuild the fence alone, the forest was more than willing to join forces with KS Wild, Kramer says.

KS Wild secured approximately \$25,000 in grants from the National Forest Foundation, Northwest Youth Corps and the Medford-based Carpenter Foundation to make last week's work a reality.

Between the hardened tire ruts from illegal off-roading through this unique serpentine soil sprout Siskiyou willowherb, velvet lupine and woodland beardtongue, surrounded by rare Jeffrey pine and Shasta red fir, a rare red-noble fir cross.

Moy hopes the new fence makes for good neighbors again at Wrangle Camp.

"This is involving the public and making people aware of this special place in their backyard," Moy says.

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Portland resident Bianca Signorni, with the Northwest Youth Corps, works on a fence at Wrangle Camp in the Siskiyou Mountains on Tuesday. Mail Tribune / Jamie Lusch

