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POLK COUNTY COMMUNITY
LEADERS UPDATING WILDFIRE
PROTECTION PLAN | PG. 1

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CONTENTS

POLK COUNTY COMMUNITY LEADERS UPDATING WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN	1
MANAGING AGRICULTURAL DRAINAGE CHANNELS: <i>BALANCING AGRICULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL NEEDS</i>	3
HORSE FAIR: <i>A GREAT PROBLEM TO HAVE – A COMMUNITY SOLUTION</i>	6
4-H SUMMER WRAP-UP: <i>FUN, LEARNING, AND FAIR MEMORIES</i>	6
INVASIVE INSECT UPDATE: <i>MONITORING FOR EMERALD ASH BORER AND A NEW THREAT TO OREGON OAKS</i>	7
MID-WILLAMETTE PRESCRIBED ASSOCIATION: <i>GROWING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE ONE BURN AT A TIME</i>	8
JOIN THE FUN, FIND YOUR SPARK IN 4-H	11

SEPTEMBER 12, 2025

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

*Go to extension.oregonstate.edu/events to see and register for OSU Extension events and polkswcd.com for event details

SEPTEMBER

21 - Fall Bird Walk at Cornerstone, Polk SWCD

29 - OCT 1 - OSU Extension Polk County Office CLOSED for Extension Annual Conference

OCTOBER

7 - Polk County 4-H Open House, 6:00pm – 7:30pm, Polk County Fairgrounds

9 - Board of Directors Meeting at 9am, Polk SWCD

10 & 11 - Native Plant Sale, Hamblin's Nursery, Polk SWCD

13 - Polk SWCD office closed for Indigenous Peoples Day

13 - 4-H Open Art Studio, 4pm – 5pm, Polk County Extension

16 - Dry farm Field Day at OSU Vegetable Research Farm, 5pm – 7pm, Corvallis, OR

18 - Basic Forestry Shortcourse – Intro to Woodland Management, Registration Required, Polk County Extension

18 - Volunteer Pollinator Garden, Dallas Barnard Park, Polk SWCD

27 - Free Well Water Nitrate Screening @ Independence Farmers Market, 9am – 2pm

NOVEMBER

10 - 4-H Open Art Studio, 4pm – 5pm, Polk County Extension

11 - Both OSU Extension & Polk SWCD Office CLOSED in honor of Veteran's Day

13 - Strategic Planning meeting, 9am, Polk SWCD

27-28 - OSU Extension CLOSED for Thanksgiving Holiday

DECEMBER

8 - 4-H Open Art Studio, 4pm – 5pm, Polk County Extension

13 - Board of Directors Meeting, 9am, Polk SWCD

24-26 - OSU Extension CLOSED for Christmas Holiday

CULTIVATING is a quarterly publication of Oregon State University Polk County Extension Service and Polk Soil and Water Conservation District. Included in these pages, readers can find practical information on farm and forest management, on home and lifestyle choices, and on the many programs and services available through the Service and the District.

WHO WE ARE



Oregon State University
Extension Service
Polk County

The Polk County Office of the Oregon State University Extension Service provides research-based educational information and programs in Agriculture, Forestry, 4-H/Youth and Family and Community Development for the citizens of Polk County.

OSU Extension's mission is to convey research-based knowledge in a way that is useful for people to improve their lives, their homes, and their communities.

OFFICE LOCATION & HOURS

289 E ELLENDALE, SUITE 301
DALLAS OR 97338 | 503.623.8395
EXTENSION.OREGONSTATE.EDU/POLK
MON-FRI 9AM-12PM, 1PM-5PM

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WHO WE ARE



OUR MISSION: To conserve and enhance the quantity and quality of soils, water, and wildlife habitat in Polk County.

OUR VISION: To deliver education and technical assistance programs that measurably improve the soil, water, and wildlife habitat in agricultural and forest lands, and instill conservation and stewardship ethics in landowners, land managers and the public.

WE VALUE:

- being a committed and invested partner in conservation.
- being inclusive, equitable, and cooperative in all we do.
- partnering with tribal nations and assisting underserved communities.
- providing enjoyable, rewarding activities and events.
- being innovative, using best practices, delivering climate smart solutions, and providing long-term sustainable results.
- good stewardship of the land, and encouraging it through voluntary, non-regulatory participation.

OFFICE LOCATION & HOURS

580 MAIN STREET, SUITE A
DALLAS OR 97338 | 503.623.9680
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KAYLA BORDELON

Fire officials conduct an assessment of structure ignition potential in an urban-wildland interface and provide recommendations for reducing risks. Home assessments like these can help homeowners minimize the risk to structures from wildfires.

POLK COUNTY COMMUNITY LEADERS UPDATING WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN

BY MITCH LIES
Lead Writer

After 16 years, Polk County community leaders are going back to the drawing board and updating the county's Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

"Some of (the old plan) is out of date, technology has changed, GIS mapping has changed," said Southwest Polk Fire Chief Fred Hertel. "It's not necessarily that the issue has changed, but how it's identified and how it's addressed has changed. And as a society, we continue to build into the urban interface."

With support from a grant from the Oregon State Fire Marshal, community leaders launched the planning process in May when they gathered for a day-long session. They have continued working on the plan

through the summer and hope to have it finalized by year's end.

In its essence, a Community Wildfire Protection Plan identifies and seeks ways to mitigate wildfire hazards to people and infrastructure. These plans typically include recommendations for reducing hazardous fuels on public and private lands, increasing the resistance of buildings and other infrastructure to wildfire, and improving a county's capacity to respond safely and effectively to wildfires. Plans also typically provide information on resources that can help landowners meet planning goals.

Polk County is working with SWCA Environmental Consultants, a company based in Colorado with a history of developing these plans. "They've done a couple of these plans in Oregon, and we've looked at their end products and it is pretty

impressive," Hertel said.

Among resources SWCA brings to the table are expertise from consultants with federal agency and fire protection backgrounds, said Matt Cook, an SWCA consultant who is working on the Polk County plan.

In some respects, Polk County is getting out ahead of the issue in updating its Community Wildfire Protection Plan this year, given that in the recent past, even in the fire year of 2020, Polk County has been able to avert largescale wildfire damage. In another respect, waiting any longer could be risky, according to Dean Bender, emergency manager for the county.

"Luckily, Polk County hasn't had a whole lot of impact from wildfires," Bender said. "I mean, back in 2020, when everything seemed to be burn-

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ing, it was like everything was burning around Polk County. Now, does that mean Polk County was doing something different than everybody else? No. It's just that we got lucky. But that could change. Mother Nature is going to do what she wants to do.

"What we are trying to do with this plan is mitigate that to have the least impact from what she does," Bender said.

Bender said he is hoping to see improved roadway access to some of the county's more isolated areas, access that could be crucial in an evacuation scenario and help fire crews reach isolated areas. And he would like to see homeowners create defensible space around structures in high fire-risk areas.

"A big piece of this plan is to educate the public of what they can do to build a defensible space," he said.

Hertel agreed, noting that in most cases, it is up to a landowner to clear underbrush and do other tasks that can mitigate the risks of wildfire. "Managing that urban interface has to boil down to the property owner having responsibility for that," Hertel said.

Kayla Bordelon, Oregon State University Extension regional fire specialist for Polk County, who has been involved in crafting five Community Wildfire Protection Plans and is helping on updating the Polk County plan, said it is also important for communities to work together to reduce hazardous fuels and coordinate strategies.

"One of the main values of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan is that it allows us to address our fuels management issues on a landscape scale," Bordelon said. "We can look at maps together, look at risks together and then make strategic decisions about where we place our treatments in terms of fuels reduction. We can be really strategic with our resources,



MORGAN NEIL

A Wildfire Ready event organized by Polk SWCD included presentations to the public by OSU Extension, SW Polk Fire and the Oregon Small Woodlands Association.

and we can think beyond property lines and have a more holistic approach.

"Otherwise, if every land manager is addressing the fuels issue individually, what we get on the landscape looks a little bit like Swiss cheese, where we have areas that are prepared for wildfire but also a lot of areas around them that aren't," Bordelon said.

Stephanie Stafford, fire risk reduction specialist with the Oregon State Fire Marshal, said that having an updated Community Wildfire Protection Plan also helps local agencies secure funding for mitigation projects. "State and federal grantors will prioritize projects that have a current CWPP," Stafford said.

Hertel said he is encouraged that community leaders and fire officials have taken the impetus to update the plan this year. Most Community Wildfire Protection Plans have a shelf life of about 10 years, he said, and the Polk County Fire Defense Board has been talking about updating the county's plan for the past few years. But it has been difficult to find the time to do so.

"We are all so busy, and our call volume keeps increasing and it just consumes more and more of our time, so it's hard to step back and think about what the plan for the future

POLK COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN

[Public Review](#)



[Polkswcd.com/wildfire-ready/](https://polkswcd.com/wildfire-ready/)

Scan the QR code above to review and comment on the Polk Community Wildfire Protection Plan

looks like," Hertel said. "And so, being able to have the funding through the State Fire Marshal's office was probably the only way, frankly, that we could accomplish this. And it has just been very, very good for us."

The Fire Marshal's office provided approximately \$80,000 for Polk County to update its plan, according to Stafford.

A draft of the Polk Community Wildfire Protection Plan is now out for review and open to public comment. People can view the plan and submit comments by going to Polk SWCD's website. Deadline to comment is Sept. 15.

MANAGING AGRICULTURAL DRAINAGE CHANNELS: *BALANCING AGRICULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL NEEDS*

BY BETH THIEL

Resource Conservationist, Polk SWCD

Functioning drainage channels are essential to many farms in the Willamette Valley. Farmers rely on them to handle water flow after the ground becomes saturated, and the rain keeps falling. These drainage channels, sometimes referred to as ditches, are important for maintaining agricultural productivity. They are also a part of the natural stream system, providing habitat and delivery of water resources to streams and rivers. Managing these channels presents challenges, particularly in ensuring that the benefits to agriculture are balanced with water quality concerns, especially when it comes to controlling excess sediment that pollutes nearby rivers and streams.

When a channel is not functioning well, excess sediment or vegetation is clogging delivery of water downstream. This may cause water to overflow the channel and travel overland across farm fields, causing erosion and water pollution.

When drainage is functioning well, water stays within the channel and is delivered downstream without excess sediment. But a well-designed channel possesses more than just capacity to deliver water downstream. A channel's shape can help water continue to flow, and adequately sloped sides that are vegetated help prevent erosion.

A 2:1 or 3:1 sloped channel side is recommended by Oregon Dept of Agriculture (ODA). In a 2:1 slope, for every 2 units horizontal distance there is 1 unit of vertical distance. This is about a 27-degree angle. A 1:1 slope or 45-degree angle is too steep, and more likely to collapse or erode during high flows creating excess sediment delivered downstream.

Sloped sides are also easier to plant to provide vegetative cover. A thick cover of a desirable plant species prevents invasive plants, holds soil in place, and helps filter existing pollutants in the water.

ODA oversees the Agricultural Water Quality Program which ensures compliance with Oregon law. Compliance with regulations help ensure water resources are protected for all. Two state regulations common through the state are:



BRITTANY MILLS
Sloped channel sides allow easier planting and vegetation maintenance while providing flow capacity.

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- Streamside (including drainage channel) vegetation must be allowed to establish and grow.
- Waste (any substance that can cause pollution including excess sediment and manure) must not enter waters of the state.

According to the state rules, farmers should avoid disturbing soil and vegetation when managing their ag channels. The rules have caused concern about the farmer's ability to manage or clean drainage channels effectively without interference. The regulations in place cause farmers to be rightfully cautious.

ODA has an Ag Drainage Channel Maintenance Program to provide temporary exceptions to the water rules and allow landowners to maintain their drainage channels. If

the channel has historically facilitated drainage, during the summer when cleaning must occur, and not designated as essential salmonid habitat, it is likely eligible for an ODA Notice, which is free and good for 5 years.

According to Pryor Garnett of Garnett's Red Prairie Farm, the online notification process is straightforward and ODA staff member Brittany Mills is available to answer questions.

Designing a properly functioning channel is important and complex. Variables like the topography of the site, the type of desirable planted vegetation and the ongoing maintenance expectations will influence the design.

The Polk SWCD Focused Ag Solutions (FAS) project aims to work with growers in the Salt Creek Watershed to address sediment and

erosion challenges. Ag channel management affects erosion and sediment and is a topic that impacts most growers. Ideally, we develop a system of channel management that helps protect water quality, while meeting growers' needs.

For the FAS project, Polk SWCD will host a series of winter meetings to introduce the program, discuss elements of agriculture that impact erosion and sediment, then set goals to help reduce sediment in streams. Funding is available to help growers implement new practices like improved ag channel design or channel vegetation seeding. Head to our website PolkSWCD.com -> What we do -> Agriculture Water Quality Program, to see more information about Ag Drainage Channel Maintenance or contact Beth Thiel at beth.thiel@polkswcd.com.



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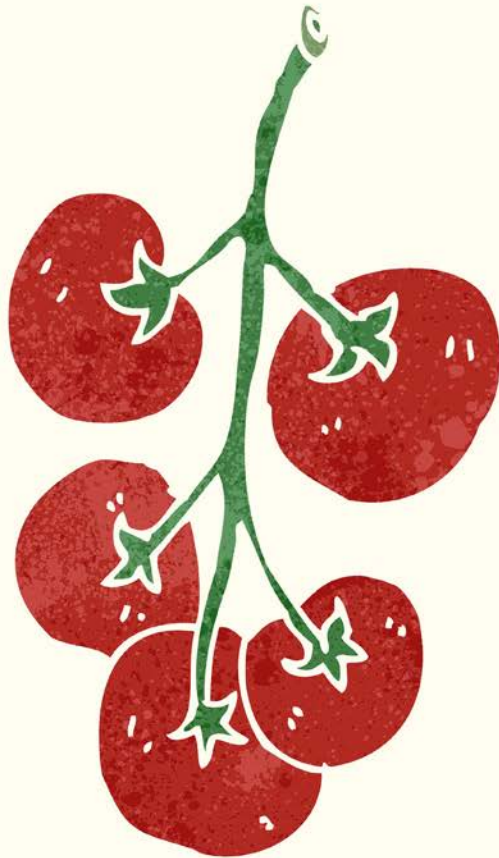
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- What's going on in your forest - forest health & wildlife
- Taking care of your woods - reforestation & forest management
- Getting it done - operations, forest regulations & resources

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HORSE FAIR: *A GREAT PROBLEM TO HAVE – A COMMUNITY SOLUTION*

BY ANDREA HUNTER

4-H Youth Development Coordinator

This summer, the Polk County 4H Horse Program did something different. Due to a huge increase in participation and increasingly strained schedules, the statefair qualifying Horse Fair was held about two weeks before the Polk County Fair.

Over the past two years, the horse program has grown from about 25 members in 2023 to nearly 60 members in 2025. More than half of those youth also participated in other livestock projects, and many took part in 4H static exhibit classes. This made the original Horse Fair schedule both tight and stressful for families and participants.

After much discussion, the decision was made to move the show to two weeks before the county fair. This change allowed youth in the horse program to showcase all their projects without scheduling clash-



PHOTO BY
ANDREA HUNTER
Nearly fifty 4-H youth competed during horse fair, which was held prior to the Polk County Fair.

es—and freed families from having to haul horses or other animals back and forth to the fairgrounds multiple times.

The results were impressive: nearly 50 youth participated in Horse Fair, the schedule was relaxed, and for the first time in three years, there was a full day of fun and games. On the last day, a volunteer/parent showmanship event had 4H'ers acting as judges—giving adults a taste of the pressure

the youth face in the show ring.

The Polk County 4H Horse Advisory also organized camping and hosted group movie nights each evening. The final day wrapped up with a potluck BBQ and awards ceremony. It was an incredibly fun event overall, and next year, plans are already underway to increase community visibility so the public can come out and support the participants.

4-H SUMMER WRAP-UP: *FUN, LEARNING, AND FAIR MEMORIES*

BY RACHEL BRANDON

4-H Youth Development Coordinator

Polk County 4-H had a summer packed with opportunities for youth to learn, grow, and celebrate together. From hands-on learning at Junior Master Gardener Day Camp, to leadership experiences at Summer Conference, to adventures at Wild West Camp One and Two - youth made memories that will last a lifetime. The

season wrapped up with two major highlights: the Polk County Fair and the Oregon State Fair, where our 4-H'ers proudly showcased their hard work.

The centerpiece of the summer was, of course, the Polk County Fair, and this year brought some exciting new additions. Youth and families joined in on the fun with pet rock showmanship, a lighthearted event that had everyone smiling, along with a rodeo-style small animal parent show-

manship contest, giving parents a chance to step into the arena. A lively 4-H and FFA barn dance brought both programs together for an evening of music and community spirit.

The fair also featured all the traditional 4-H favorites such as animal shows, static exhibits, presentations, and contests. From food competitions and flower arranging to the popular monster cookie contest, youth creativ-

CONTINUE ON, PAGE 7



CONTRIBUTED BY POLK COUNTY 4-H

The Polk County 4-H year culminates in the Polk County Fair, where youth demonstrate what they've learned and made throughout the year.

CONTINUES FROM, PAGE 6

ity was on full display. The livestock auction was another major success, showcasing the dedication of our exhibitors while connecting them with community support.

None of these opportunities would be possible without the incredible

support of our community. From volunteers and leaders who give their time, to auction buyers, sponsors, families, and fairgoers who cheer on our youth - it truly takes all of you to make 4-H thrive in Polk County. The sense of community that surrounds our program is what allows our youth to shine, and for that we are deeply

grateful.

As we close out another memorable summer, we want to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped make it possible. We look forward with excitement to a brand-new 4-H year beginning October 1, and can't wait to see what our youth will accomplish next!

INVASIVE INSECT UPDATE: *MONITORING FOR EMERALD ASH BORER AND A NEW THREAT TO OREGON OAKS*

BY MARC BELL

Senior Resource Conservationist, Polk SWCD

Last fall, we shared the concerning news that the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), a destructive invasive beetle, had been confirmed in Marion and Yamhill counties. Since then, Polk Soil and Water Conservation District has been working closely with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and Oregon State University (OSU) Extension to monitor for EAB on our managed property, Cornerstone. We're happy to report that, as of this



CHRISTINE BUHL | ODF
Crown dieback from MOB and associated fungi.

CONTINUE ON, PAGE 8

CONTINUES FROM, PAGE 7

summer, no EAB has been detected on the property since traps were installed.

EAB continues to pose a serious threat to Oregon's native ash trees, especially those in riparian areas. These trees help stabilize streambanks and provide shade for aquatic life. If you have ash trees on your property, keep an eye out for signs of EAB, such as D-shaped exit holes, canopy thinning, and increased woodpecker activity. Early detection is key to slowing the spread. ODF maintains an interactive map for EAB quarantine zones as well as areas at categorized as 'Infected', at risk of expansion, and on alert at: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9f29b1860cb-04d36ad71b122148277f3/page/Page>.

Unfortunately, EAB isn't the only invasive pest we're watching for in Polk County. A new threat has emerged: the Mediterranean Oak Borer (MOB). This tiny beetle, originally from Europe, has been found in Oregon

and is attacking Oregon white oaks. Unlike EAB, MOB doesn't eat wood. MOB carries harmful fungi that clog a tree's water transportation system, causing branches, and eventually whole trees to die.

MOB has been detected in several Oregon counties, including Marion and Washington. It targets both stressed and seemingly healthy oaks. Signs of infestation include red or brown leaves on large branches, crown dieback, and small round holes in the bark. You may also see pale sawdust-like frass around the base of the tree.

There are currently no proven treatments for MOB, but researchers are testing options. The best defense is prevention: keep trees healthy, avoid moving firewood, and report any suspicious symptoms. If you suspect MOB or EAB on your property, contact ODF, OSU Extension, or report it through the Oregon Invasive Species Hotline. Currently, MOB has been identified in traps in Multnomah, Clackamas, Marion, and Washington counties.



<https://oregoninvasiveshotline.org/reports/create>

REPORT AN INVADER! *If you observe signs and symptoms of possible MOB infestation, report it! Describe the location and your observations and submit photos and your contact information.*

We'll continue to monitor both pests at Cornerstone and share updates as we learn more. An interactive map on current MOB detections can be found at: <https://geo.maps.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=a910d326807d-4b28a7978bbdca7ec5cf>. For more information, visit polkswcd.com or check out OSU Extension's forest pest resources.

MID-WILLAMETTE PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATION: *GROWING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE ONE BURN AT A TIME*

**BY LORELLE SHERMAN &
KAYLA BORDELON**

OSU Extension

We're excited to announce the formation of the Mid-Willamette Valley Prescribed Burn Association (MVPBA) — a grassroots network made up of individuals and organizations working together to increase the use of prescribed fire in Benton, Linn, and Polk Counties

Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) have existed since the 1990's in the Great Plains but are rela-

tively new in Oregon. PBAs make prescribed fire more accessible, cost-effective, and safer by sharing equipment, training, and labor—while also creating space to learn together. PBAs can help landowners evaluate whether prescribed fire is the right tool for their land and then walk the landowner through planning and permits. PBAs often have opportunities for trainings and to gain hands-on experience because they include volunteers with considerable professional experience using fire: wildland firefighters, Certified Burn Managers (CBM) and

federally qualified burn bosses, and contractors.

WHY FIRE? WHY NOW?

Prairies, oak savannas, and open woodlands throughout the Willamette Valley evolved with frequent, low-intensity fire. Without it, these ecosystems lose biodiversity, face increasing fuel loads, and become more vulnerable to catastrophic wildfire. Prescribed fire is a proven tool to restore resilience—both eco-

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Why Native?

-  Conserve water & reduce maintenance
-  Restore local biodiversity
-  Create beauty that changes with the seasons

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logical and community-based.

This work honors the long legacy of Indigenous fire stewardship, which has shaped and sustained the Valley for thousands of years.

SAFE, COLLABORATIVE FIRE

Between 2019 and 2024, PBAs across Oregon, Washington, and California conducted 475 prescribed burns with no escapes or damage. Thousands of people have been introduced to fire through these community-led efforts, gaining confidence, skills, and a deeper connection to the land.

The MWVPBA is proud to join this growing movement. In 2025, the MVPBA will focus on learning together and growing the skill and capacity amongst landowners and organizations to implement prescribed fire. To date, we have organized several coordination meetings and an Oak Prescribed Fire and Restoration tour at the Oak Creek Conservancy on Corvallis. Stay tuned for additional educational programming opportunities in the fall.

LEARN MORE & GET INVOLVED

- Explore PBAs in Oregon: extension.oregonstate.edu/fire-program/prescribed-burn-associations
- Prescribed Fire Basics Series: extension.oregonstate.edu/collection/prescribed-fire-basics
- New Resource: Landowners' Options for Prescribed Burning
- Interested in volunteering with the Mid-Valley PBA? Fill out the interest form here: <https://forms.gle/8miruAgHqS8mfl9z7>



KAYLA BORDELON | OSU EXTENSION FIRE PROGRAM

Community members and wildfire professionals discuss site preparation for prescribed burning at the Oak Creek Conservancy.



KAYLA BORDELON | OSU EXTENSION FIRE PROGRAM

Community members and wildfire professionals discuss site preparation for prescribed burning at the Oak Creek Conservancy.

JOIN THE FUN, FIND YOUR SPARK IN 4-H

BY RACHEL BRANDON

4-H Youth Development Coordinator

Polk County 4-H is growing, and this fall brings more opportunities than ever for youth ages 5–18 to explore their interests, discover new skills, and build friendships. With clubs, workshops, and community partnerships across the county, 4-H truly has something for everyone.

This year, new clubs like Outdoor Survival, Baking, and Cat Club are joining long-standing favorites. Youth can take part in blacksmithing classes, monthly horticulture and art meetings, and shooting sports, which include air rifle, air pistol, and archery. And of course, our animal clubs remain strong, offering projects with horses, dogs, cats, guinea pigs, rabbits, chickens, turkeys, cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs.

But 4-H is more than clubs. Each year we host special workshops and series' that are open not only to enrolled members but also to any interested youth in the community. This winter will feature a Wilderness First Aid course, along with creative options like resin art, decoupage, needle felting, and art upcycling. These short-term opportunities give kids a chance to try something new without a year-long commitment.

For our youngest members, ages 5–8, the Cloverbud Club offers monthly gatherings designed especially for them, with plenty of arts, crafts, and hands-on fun. Cloverbuds can also join activities like our Open Art Studio and other appropriate age projects, giving them a place to grow and feel included.

AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE

One of the biggest strengths of Polk County 4-H is that it's affordable for



PHOTO BY CALEB FREEMAN | OSU EXTENSION

4-H Coordinator, Rachel Brandon, leads a lego activity day for 4-H Cloverbuds, which are youth ages 5-9.

families. Thanks to a generous local donor, all first-time members receive a full scholarship for their first year. Returning members pay just \$45 for the entire year if they enroll before January 15.

That small fee opens the door to countless experiences - whether it's raising and selling a market animal at the county fair, selling crafts and baked goods at the Holiday Fair in November, or attending seasonal camps and leadership clubs. For many youth, these activities are also a first step into entrepreneurship and leadership, giving them skills that carry into adulthood.

ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

4-H thrives because of the support of local partners and volunteers. Businesses like Vonhelmick Knife Company, Crandall Forge, Imagination Station Arts & Crafts, and the Brunk Farmstead offer space, instruction, or discounted classes that make programs possible. Additional partners like the Monmouth Library, Dream Center in West Salem, and Dal-

las Community School help bring 4-H opportunities to even more families.

We are always looking to add new volunteers and community partners. If you have a skill, talent, or interest you'd like to share with local youth, we would love to hear from you.

JOIN US!

If your family is curious about 4-H, we encourage you to fill out our Interest Form on our website <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/4h/polk/join-4-h-become-member>.

And don't miss our Polk County 4-H Open House - the perfect way to explore everything we offer in one fun evening!

October 7, 2025

6–7:30 p.m.

Building C,

Polk County Fairgrounds

Come meet our clubs, pet some animals, enjoy food, and maybe even win a prize. We'd love for you to discover what 4-H is all about and find the place where your child can thrive.



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