

## **A Narrative Description of Selected Trail Systems Within the Proposed SCNM**

### **Pacific Crest National Scenic Recreation Trail (PCT):**

Approximately 60 miles of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail traverse the Siskiyou Crest about midway along its 2600-mile route from Mexico to Canada. Called the 'Big Bend Region', this is one of the most unusual, dynamic and interesting sections of this iconic trail the Pacific Crest Trail Association calls "*an internationally significant resource for the enjoyment of hikers and equestrians*".

*Although most people loosely describe the PCT as following the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Ranges, in northern California and southern Oregon the trail makes a 200-mile east-west arc to explore the distinctive Klamath and Siskiyou Mountains. These are ancient ranges (dating back 500 million years- before the time of dinosaurs) and geologically noteworthy. They are the only mountains in North America made up largely of ultramafic rock. This means that the rock beds of the Klamaths and Siskiyou were once molten matter that solidified in the earth's crust before rising to the surface because of collisions between tectonic plates. Because of this history, the Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains exhibit a tangle of complex ridgelines running in multiple directions. Unlike their neighbors the Cascades (which are characterized by comparatively terrain, punctuated by snowy, volcanic peaks), the Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains are known for steeply eroded valleys, high exposed ridgetops, and limited evidence of glaciation.*

*In addition to being geologically and topographically distinctive, these mountains are home to a remarkable confluence of habitat types, supporting flora and fauna of the Great Basin, Cascades, Coastal Range, California's Central Valley, and the Sierra Nevada ecozones. More than 3000 plant species occur in the Klamaths and Siskiyou. But the regions most storied inhabitant is Sasquatch – also called Bigfoot, the abominable snowman, American yeti or omah – who is rumored to hide in the mountains' dark forests and deep canyons.*

-From the USFS Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Map, Cascade Series-Southern Oregon

*This section boasts rugged outcrops, gap views, high cirque meadows, old-growth forest stands, splendid wildflowers, and often lingering snowfields. Mount Ashland, Mount Shasta, Pilot Rock, the Trinity Alps and Marble Mountains, along with the Applegate and Rogue Valleys, create stirring views. The sampling successfully combines convenient access with lonesome stretches.*

-From: 75 Hikes in Oregon's Coast Range & Siskiyou, By Rhonda Ostertag, George Ostertag

### **Siskiyou Boundary National Recreation Trail:**

The Rogue River/Siskiyou National Forest's Boundary Trail offers an epic ridgeline experience in a botanically wondrous roadless area. Unfortunately, this unique backcountry trail is threatened by Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) use and the noise and ecological damage that follow suit.

The 15-mile Boundary Trail connects Tannen Mountain, just west of the Red Buttes Wilderness, to Grayback Mountain, a defining peak of the northern arm of the Siskiyou Crest. The Boundary Trail straddles the Rogue River and Siskiyou National Forests. The trail criss-crosses the ridge between the Illinois and Applegate Valleys, offering spectacular views of the maze of jumbled mountains that define southern Oregon and northern California.

The Boundary Trail is a recreational paradise within the 100,000-acre Kangaroo Roadless Area, which is proposed as an addition to the Red Buttes Wilderness. On the north end are glorious wildflower meadows, an historic cabin and the monumental peak of Grayback. On the south end are the marvels of the Red Buttes Wilderness, with complex geology, and mountain lakes tucked into forested folds. To the west is the Oregon Caves National Monument and the flower-laden Bigelow Lakes. From anywhere on the trail one can discover rare plants and climb peaks that are mostly unseen from any road to soak in expansive views of the Illinois, Applegate and Klamath River drainages.

### **Sterling Mine Ditch Trail:**

This route on the Medford BLM in the Little Applegate Valley is a wonderful, low-elevation trail that follows the decommissioned Sterling Mine Ditch through a diverse array of ecosystems including pine oak savannah, old growth conifer forest, white oak woodland, riparian forest and chaparral. This is a mostly gentle trail with sweeping views of the Little Applegate Valley and the Siskiyou Crest.

The trail tours a remnant from Oregon's colorful prospecting era. Placer gold strikes in the early 1850s led to the founding of Jacksonville, and in 1877, miners fashioned an artificial creek to draw water from the Little Applegate River to blast apart the mineral-rich Siskiyou mountainsides with concentrated hydraulic force. The 26.5-mile-long, 3-foot-deep ditch, completed in 6 months, remained in use until the 1930s. Now, a stream of hikers flows alongside the ditch. The historical route passes through deciduous-evergreen transition forest and across oak-grassland hillsides. This trail stays accessible and snow free nearly all winter, and in the spring, wildflowers abound.

### **Mule Mountain Trail:**

*This rugged trail climbs 2,400 feet in four miles to a 4,200-foot saddle between Baldy Peak and Little Grayback Mountain. The first two miles of the hike are the steepest as your route switchbacks through a woods of fir, pine, black oak and madrone. The climb becomes more gradual along an open ridgeline.*

*The ridgeline is dotted with giant poison oak bushes as well as manzanita. Mother Nature can cut down the limb on a madrone in a moment here, but these trees show the full extent of their adaptability by branching into massive multi-trunked giants. Bear scat commonly shows up on the trail, and views of the Red Buttes eventually open to the south.*

*The trail skirts the southern flank of Mule Mountain before opening up for views of Baldy, a 4,645-foot peak with a steep, grassy southern exposure.*

*The saddle between Baldy Peak and Little Grayback Mountain can be an idyllic spot to rest, but it's also prone to chilly winds. The land drops away to the east in steep, green hillsides, which caused one Massachusetts hiker who found this spot to remark, "It looks like something out of the 'Sound of Music.' "*

*You could turn around at the saddle, but a short scramble, an additional 450 feet of elevation gain and a lot of huffing and puffing take you to the top of Baldy. A couple of tall trees to the north of the peak obstruct views in the Mount Ashland direction, but the sweep of the Siskiyou Crest proves enthralling. The summit of Baldy manages a view along with a welcome, albeit unlikely, wind-free zone.*

**-From the Medford Mail Tribune, April 10, 2008**