



The Yoncalla Log Pond is home to many birds and other wildlife. Volunteers hope to attract visitors to the area by hosting monthly walking tours.

Yoncalla Log Pond is Center Stage

Tour series centers around history, plant and wildlife of the area

By Craig Reed

Water, wildlife, plants and historic buildings are all features of the Yoncalla community.

On the second Saturday of May, and the following four months, tours will show off these Yoncalla attractions in an effort by organizers to not only show off features of the community to its own residents, but to attract out-of-town visitors.

“We know there’s not a whole lot here, but there are some things and we want to show them off,” says Aileen Palmer, the lead coordinator of the tour. “We want people to come to Yoncalla, and to support some of the businesses while they’re here. I don’t know if the town will ever be a destination,

but hopefully once people are here once, they’ll remember it and want to swing by again in the future.”

The tour series schedule is May 14 Birding Around the Pond; June 11 Plant Identification Around the Pond; July 9 History of the Pond Site; August 13 Wildlife Signs Around the Pond; and September 10 Yoncalla Historic Walking Tour.

The bird tour is 9 a.m. to noon. Start times have not yet been set for the other tours.

The featured pond in the first four tours is a 37-acre former log pond. Three sawmills used it more than 40 years ago. It is 1.3 miles around, and visitors can use an old road/trail to walk around the water. Nearby are three smaller ponds, one 4 acres



Aileen Palmer leads the charge to bring visitors to the Yoncalla area with tours that include historic buildings.

and the others 2 acres each.

The four ponds sit on 80 acres of land donated in 2012 by Don Wooley of Eagle View Management to North Douglas Betterment, a nonprofit organization of volunteers interested in contributing to the quality of life in North Douglas County.

“We think the pond is a very nice asset for the community,” says Kent Smith, chairman of North Douglas Betterment. “We have been working and trying to figure out the best use of that area for our community. It’s been kind of challenging.”

It was Aileen who came up with the monthly tour idea following discussions about the pond and on how to advertise the features of Yoncalla.

Aileen, a six-year resident of Yoncalla, moved to be closer to family after retiring from a 32-year career as a forester and wildlife biologist with the U.S. Forest Service in the Yosemite Park area of California.

“The community has had some struggles and I just want to see the city get turned in the other direction,” she says.

In addition to the community project, Aileen is also the president of the Yoncalla Historical Society and is a library advocate.

“We are lucky to have Aileen in our community,” says Kathy Finley, Yoncalla’s city administrator and a North Douglas Betterment board member. “She’s got a lot of ideas, she’s a great resource and she loves to get things done. She has lots of energy.”

Kathy says she likes the idea of the monthly tours.

“We’ve been looking to develop that area into an attraction that would pull people off the freeway and into town,” she says.

Aileen came up with the tour ideas, secured

guides and set the dates. Mikeal Jones will lead the bird tour. He is a hydrologist who retired from the Umpqua National Forest in 2011. A resident of Roseburg since 1979, he began watching birds in the 1980s while participating in the Umpqua Valley Audubon Society’s annual Christmas bird count. He is a member of the Oregon Birding Association.

Wendy Stevens will lead the plant identification tour. The Rice Hill resident has a bachelor’s degree in botany, a master’s in landscape architect and has worked in the botany field for many years. She conducted a vegetation inventory at the Yoncalla Pond in 2014.

Members of the Yoncalla Historic Society will lead the pond history and the Yoncalla historic walking tours. Some people who used to work at the sawmills will participate in the pond history tour. The walking tour will visit several buildings that are more than 100 years old.

Aileen will lead the wildlife sign tour.

She says she is doing most of the organizing for the tours because she has the time and does not want others to spend a lot of time on something that is not yet proven.

“I’m not sure how it is going to work, but the people who have heard about it are excited about it,” she says. “The response has been positive.”

Kent says some local residents walk around the pond almost every day.

“These tours will introduce people to different aspects of the pond and its diversity,” Kent says. “People who go over there regularly tell me about the birds they see. Some eagles have shown up there, some swans, and a pelican has been seen there.”

Some bird groups already have toured the area on numerous occasions in past years.

Other permitted activities include using canoes, kayaks and rafts on the pond. Anglers can catch bass and crappie in the pond, although once the warmer summer months begin, the water shield plant grows on most of the water’s surface and makes fishing more difficult.

Along the shore line, wild blackberry bushes grow ripe for picking in summer.

During the school year, the pond area is a field trip destination by grade school and high school classes.

“We’re just trying to figure out the best way to use the area and to attract visitors,” Kent says. “We hope the tours do that. We’ll just have to wait and see.” ■