



A Letter from the President



IN THIS ISSUE of our newsletter we spotlight the TID ditch trail. This trail has played a big part in my life, as it is why I live where I do, as well as one of the

reasons I joined the AWTA. My wife and I first discovered the ditch trail when we were determining where to live in Ashland, and we knew we wanted to be close to it. Once we had found some land that the trail actually runs through, we worked with the city to create easier access to the trail for its users.

About this same time, not far from our section of the ditch trail, another property owner put up a fence across the trail where there had never been one before – thereby preventing residents from using a section of the trail. After a few phone calls I found out that a rather unfortunate series of events had resulted in the closure. Even more shocking was the news that this closure could be repeated at any number of locations. This was one of the reasons for the creation of the AWTA.

During the past few years, the AWTA has made the ditch trail a priority by seeking public easements from property owners along the trail. Besides fostering the high-profile easement grants that were recently in the paper, we have also documented many easements that were in fact granted but never recognized. In fact, most of the ditch trail from Grandview to Ashland Creek Estates is now legal to access. Many areas between Terrace and Park streets are also legal.

However, much work still needs to be done and we invite all AWTA members and supporters to help. If you would like to help make more of the ditch trail legal or you know a property owner who might grant an easement, please call me at 482-4392. Together, we can make this happen.

TID Ditch Trail – a way of life in Ashland

by Torsten Heycke



IMAGINE HIKING ALONG YOUR FAVORITE TRAIL and suddenly finding it blocked off by a fence and a discouraging sign. This is what happened a few years ago along the Talent Irrigation District (TID) canal trail near Lithia Creek Estates.irate hikers, runners, and other trail users gathered in public meetings to protest what clearly seemed to be a legal violation. Some suggested a lawsuit.

After all, this was a public, decades-old trail and no developer or property owner should be able to close it – right? Well, actually, not quite.

It turns out the property owners were well within their rights to close the trail. The fence and the sign remain to this day – as thorns in the sides of many daily trail users. Moreover, as many of us soon discovered, this same kind of closure could happen at any number of different places along the (TID) ditch trail in Ashland – a trail that many of us had taken for granted was suddenly vulnerable.

That trail closing event and others like it served as a wake-up call to many trail users in our community, and the Ashland Woodlands & Trails Association (AWTA) was created largely in response. This reaction evolved into a more proactive vision for a connected and protected trail system for Ashland.

To understand the TID ditch trail situation, it helps to know a bit of the history behind it. After the discovery of gold near Jacksonville in 1850, Oregonian pioneers settled in the Rogue Valley and quickly took advantage of the agricultural potential in the region. By 1860, several small orchards existed, and the first commercial fruit orchard began in 1885. By 1891, fruit such as apples, peaches, and pears were being delivered all over the country. According to the TID website, “almost every variety of fruit produced outside of the tropics was grown here.” In 1893, Ashland fruit won prizes at the Chicago World’s Fair.

The largest obstacle facing Rogue Valley agriculture during this tremendous growth period was a reliable source of water. In 1916, a United States Reclamation Service study suggested possible “reclamation” of various creeks, lakes, and streams in the area. That same year, a group of citizens eager to improve the water supply situation around Ashland and Talent organized the Talent Irrigation

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TID Ditch Trail

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District. Their ambitious plan included construction of many irrigation canals, including what we now call the TID ditch. The road and trails along the TID ditch, which we use for hiking and walking, were originally created for canal “riders” who managed the ditch and for their equipment.

According to TID manager Jim Pendleton, most of the District’s canal easements are owned by the federal government through the Bureau of Reclamation. However, the section of the canal north of Roca and Elkader streets, he says, is managed by the City of Ashland because of a 1923 contract between the city and TID.

This 1923 contract turns out to be quite fortunate for TID ditch trail users in Ashland because the rest of the ditch is mostly off-limits to the public. Jim Pendleton says:

The District does not recommend or allow pedestrian or private use of the canal access roads. Liability issues and operation and maintenance issues are a concern to the District when the general public is allowed onto the canals. The property is still owned by the underlying land owner and anyone on these properties could be subject to trespassing charges or other civil penalties.

Hiking along the TID outside the Ashland-managed section may be illegal.

While the City of Ashland allows hiking along the sections it owns, most of the land along the Ashland ditch does not belong to the city. It belongs to private property owners who do not have to extend a pedestrian easement.



A big part of being a trail user in our community means to be an advocate for all trail users and to respect the rights of property owners. Support others in understanding what it takes to keep a trail system open for everybody. (Photo by Torsten Heycke)

The city is trying to work with property owners to obtain pedestrian easements where possible, and many property owners have been exceedingly generous in granting them. Developers and owners of property along the ditch who seek construction permits often find a pedestrian easement is a condition or strong recommendation by the city. Over the years, this has resulted in an almost continuous stretch of pedestrian easements along the ditch road and trail from Grandview up to Lithia Creek Estates, where the trail remains closed. Several years ago the city had tried to obtain a pedestrian easement from the developers of Lithia Creek Estates, but due to an oversight, nothing was put in writing. So the city has no legal grounds to force an easement.

Part of the AWTA’s role has been to help the city obtain pedestrian easements from amicable property owners and to make sure that existing easements are acknowledged and maintained. Additionally, the AWTA works with a number of realtors to be alert to changes of property ownership or other transitions that might afford the city an opportunity to procure easements. Finally, the AWTA stays abreast of changes that might affect the TID trails. For example, the WISE project (www.wiseproject.org) proposes to examine alternatives such as covering sections of the ditch with plastic or piping water underground to limit leakage and evaporation loss. This may affect future TID trail use, especially in those areas that are not under easement protection.

Hundreds of residents enjoy walking, running, and hiking along the TID. We value this special trail corridor for many reasons: as a place for physical and spiritual renewal and as a setting for passive, non-motorized recreation. However, we are all now quite aware that the use of the ditch trail is by no means guaranteed. If a property owner is offended by our actions – such as loud noises, smoking, leaving trash, not picking up after pets, or inappropriate behavior – we could find another section of the ditch closed.

A big part of being a trail user in our community is being an advocate for all trail users and respecting the rights of property owners. Support others in understanding what it takes to keep a trail system open for everyone, and do your part to set a good example. While we are all becoming more aware of the issues and doing our part to maintain good trail etiquette, the AWTA is finding more property owners who are willing to grant easements. In fact, the AWTA helped to orchestrate five new easements along the TID this past summer. If you know a property owner who might be interested in granting a trail easement, let us know. If we work together, it won't be long before Ashland has a connected trail system that benefits the entire community. 🍃

Grandview section of the TID trail

by Emily Zook



A REALLY NICE PIECE of the ditch trail is located up Grandview Street. If you follow Scenic to Grandview and then park about 1/3 mile up Grandview, you can access the ditch trail along a dirt road on your left. Follow the trail until you reach trail markers that lead you up to the top of Strawberry Knoll,

which affords stunning 360-degree views of the Rogue Valley area, or stay on the trail and when you reach Strawberry Lane, cross the street and access the TID on the other side. If you're feeling adventurous, watch for the point where the TID takes a

90-degree turn to the left. At this point, look across the water and you will see a trail that takes you onto city-owned land leading to incredible rock formations and eventually connects you with Strawberry Lane again. Enjoy your hike!

GUEST COLUMN

David Chapman

Ashland City Council



AWTA - TID

ALMOST EVERYONE in Ashland realizes that the ditch trail is a very special asset to the community. Susan and I discovered the ditch trail soon after our arrival in Ashland a few years ago, and have enjoyed its beauty and urban solitude ever since.

For many people, this flat trail grants easy access to the edge of the neighborhoods where they meet the wilderness. Portions of the trail open up, presenting you with commanding views of the valley, while other portions surround you with the forest's plants and animals. Many residents have told me that this trail is a convenient route between neighborhoods to parks and open spaces and an alternative to driving.

In 1916, the Talent Irrigation District was established in Jackson County. The Ashland Canal was built in the mid-20s, and from that time its maintenance path has been used by locals for recreation. Most of the canal passes through private land, and

public access to the trail is "at the pleasure" of each landowner. It is a true indicator of the closeness of the Ashland community that the vast majority of the landowners feel it is important to maintain the tradition of a continuous community trail. A few owners have exercised their right to close access the trail, which has resulted in some discontinuities in the pathway. As a community, we certainly respect the rights of landowners to close a trail that crosses their property, but we also lament the loss of a tradition that has been a part of this community for more than eighty years.

Many of the owners of private property that the TID ditch trail passes through are beginning to see the value of granting trail easements. An AWTA initiative has begun to identify some caring neighbors who feel it is important enough to protect our community asset that they will grant a public easement on their property. In fact, five property owners granted trail easements this past summer. These folks are pioneers and I greatly appreciate their efforts and commitment to the residents of Ashland. Thank you.

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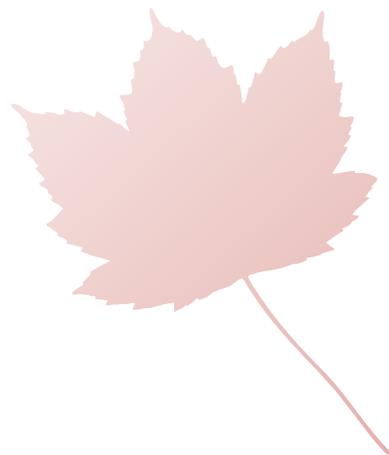
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Ashland Woodlands & Trails Association

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*Preserving Ashland's Unique
Beauty for Future Generations*

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Saturday, November 12, 2005

Trail project in Ashland - more details to follow.

Sunday, November 20, 2005

Trail hike on TID and Granite Street stairs (meet at base of stairs at 8:30 AM).

Sunday, January 29, 2006

Trail hike - more details to follow.

Saturday, February 11, 2006

Trail event - more details to follow.

AWTA Board Member Opening

THERE IS AN OPEN POSITION on the AWTA board. If you are interested in becoming an AWTA board member and helping us create a connected trail system for Ashland, please call board president Rob Cain at 482-4392.

AWTA Adopts Section of Pacific Crest Trail

by John Price

AUGUST 27, 2005 marked the beginning of what the AWTA hopes will be a long and successful relationship between our group and the Pacific Crest Trail Association. Over 20 volunteers spent a beautiful day in the mountains working on the PCT east of Pilot Rock, removing overgrown brush and downed trees, and improving trail tread. The AWTA has agreed to adopt the section of the PCT running from the Greensprings summit west to Mt. Ashland. PCT regional representative Ian Nelson noted that this represents the first major trail adoption in his region, which runs from Northern California up to Crater Lake. In the future we hope to have more events to maintain Ashland's section of the 2,600-mile PCT. With federal funding for trail maintenance becoming scarce, adoptions like ours will become very

important in maintaining major trails for future generations.

If you'd like to help with our on-going PCT trail maintenance projects, visit our website (www.ashlandtrails.org) or call John Price at 482-7562.

