Praise the Dead:
The Ecological Role of Dead Trees

George Wuerthner
Author, Ecologist, Photographer, Bend, Oregon

Friday, 21 November 2014, 7:30pm, Room 100
Willamette Hall, UO Campus
Few persons can trace their first job back to a camping disaster. At the age of 19, young George Wuerthner was in Denali National Park when a storm came up and blew his tent apart. His camping trip over, Wuerthner hitchhiked back to Anchorage where, in need of cash, he started asking about jobs. Told that the local Bureau of Land Management (BLM) office might have an opening, he went there and asked if they had a job for him. They said they needed surveyors and asked if he had surveying experience. He said no, but that he had done well in a trigonometry class. That was enough. The next day the new Federal employee was on his way to the Brooks Range.

It turns out the Brooks Range was what had drawn Wuerthner to Alaska in the first place, but to understand why we need to back up to the start. Wuerthner was born in Buffalo Crossing, Pennsylvania, not far from Harrisburg. He was comfortable in the outdoors from infancy – his mom discovered that when her baby got fussy she could calm him down just by putting him outside in his bassinet. He got into bird watching early on, and could identify the local species before he started school. But the experience that set him on his life path was the first time his dad took him fishing. He fell in love, and it was this love that led him to the University of Montana for his undergraduate education. He said the first day he was there he left his dorm room, hiked down to the Clark Fork River, caught three trout, and concluded he had come to the right place.

His roommate at the U of M gave him the Alaska bug by sharing with him Bob Marshall’s Alaska Wilderness: Exploring the Central Brooks Range. (That’s the Bob Marshall who co-founded The Wilderness Society, and after which the wilderness near Kalispell, MT, is named.) Thus smitten, Wuerthner hitchhiked to Alaska after his first year at the U of M, with his ultimate destination being the Brooks Range. And then, because his tent blew up, he had an all-expenses-paid trip to that very place. Talk about having your cake and eating it too.

Wuerthner travelled a lot in the next several years. He would go to Alaska and work from April or May to November, then come back to Missoula and take a few courses. He said he went on the twelve-year plan. He took thirty classes that related in some way to ecology, his central passion gradually evolving from fishing to environmental concerns. In his last year he found he needed only one more botany class for a major in botany and one more class for a major in wildlife/zoology, so he graduated with a dual major.

Wuerthner did graduate work in rangeland management at Montana State University, in Bozeman, in journalism at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and in geography at the University of Oregon. His MS is from UCSC. Besides the BLM job in Alaska Wuerthner also worked as a botanist/biologist for the BLM in Idaho. And while he was in western Montana he sometimes worked as a wilderness guide.

Wuerthner became a freelance writer and photographer. After an initial contact with the Foundation for Deep Ecology because of his and their interest in the topic of livestock on public lands he worked for them in a free-lance capacity for some time. For the past nine years he has held a full-time position with them. Besides his work for FDE he maintains some free-lance efforts such as natural history and photography field trips, the most recent of which was a weeklong trip in Yellowstone National Park last February. Wuerthner has written 37 books, on such topics as the National Parks, wilderness areas, mountain ranges, and conservation and wildlife issues, including titles for the National Park’s Visitors Companion Series on the Rocky Mountains, Oregon’s Wilderness Areas, Yellowstone National Park, Mount Rainier, the Grand Canyon and the Great Smoky Mountains. He is also the author of Thrillcraft: the Environmental Consequences of Motorized Recreation, and has released a number of books of his wilderness photography.

Wuerthner’s deep interest in the effects of wildfires and dead trees on forest ecosystems was kindled by his observations of Yellowstone National Park after the 1988 inferno. Residing in Livingston, Montana, at the time, Wuerthner witnessed the Park immediately after the fire and then its recovery. Far from being devastated for decades, as was initially predicted in several quarters, much of the Park is in better
condition now, 26 years on, than before the fire. The Yellowstone fire and its aftermath have altered many scientists’ thinking about causes of wildfires and their effects on forests and forest ecosystems. No longer is there universal agreement that increased fuel loads inevitably lead to huge fires that permanently debilitate the forests. A growing body of evidence supports the idea that climate, not fuel load, is the prime mover for wildfires. Hot, dry, windy summers provide the setting for big fires. Dead wood not only is not a major contributor to wildfires, in fact it contributes to the overall health of a forested ecosystem in several ways. In his talk Wuerthner will discuss how these new insights into forest ecology are changing the definition of forest health. He will make the case that dead trees are critical to the long-term health of forest ecosystems and that since large, episodic disturbances like wildfire and beetle kill are major sources of dead-tree recruitment into ecosystems, large wildfires and beetle infestations have a positive effect on long-term forest health. Finally, Wuerthner will talk about new research that calls into question whether fuel reductions (read salvage logging) are effective since large wildfires are driven by climatic conditions, not fuels. Wuerthner’s presentation promises to be stimulating. Please come to 100 Willamette Hall on Friday, 21 November, at 7:30pm to hear his talk “Praise the Dead: The Ecological Role of Dead Trees.” See you there. John Carter

In Memoriam

The Eugene Natural History Society has lost one of its most stalwart, beloved members. Evelyn McConnaughey died on 12 October 2014. She was a valued member of the greater Eugene community, and one would be hard pressed to name a person more valuable to our Society throughout its history. Three friends and colleagues of Eve’s have written short reminiscences, which appear below.

Tom Titus, President of ENHS:
Evelyn was president of the Eugene Natural History Society when I first joined. What impressed me was her unique combination of personality traits; she was intelligent, funny, forthright, friendly, and wise, made great berry cobblers, and carried all of these wonderful attributes with such humility. A great mystery to me is how Evelyn could be so keenly aware of the many environmental and social travesties in the world, injustices that she was committed to correcting, and be so darned cheerful all of the time.

My favorite memory of Evelyn is from the ENHS field trip to southeastern Oregon in 2011. Her body was no longer cooperating, but she badly wanted to go, and we assured her that she could still have a great trip while staying close to the car. The second full day was a 200-mile driving excursion around Steens Mountain. Our little caravan was traveling south on the Fields-Denio Road when we drove up on a four-foot Pacific gopher snake stretched out in the gravel. Now I am an absolute fool for a big beautiful gopher snake, so of course we stopped to pick it up and hand it around to any and all willing to have a large snake handed to them. The afternoon was warm, and Evelyn was worn out, so she waited patiently in Rebecca’s van with her door open. I took that very substantial snake over to her for a better look. She smiled broadly, then reached out with both arms to gather it all in. That will be the memory I hold of Evelyn—smiling and reaching out to gather it all in. Even the snakes.

David Wagner, Immediate Past President of ENHS:
I first met Eve, or Evelyn, as she was known then, almost exactly thirty-eight years ago, most certainly through the Eugene Natural History Society. Eve was one of the most stalwart practitioners of biophilia (Edward O. Wilson, who coined the term, defines it as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life"). I was taken by her forthright and cheerful willingness to be engaged in the cause of nature. She served ENHS with unflagging devotion. I’d guess she was as consistent an attendee of natural history activities as she was at church and music events.

She was on my first moss walk up Fall Creek, helped with some of the first ever ivy pulls in Alton Baker Park, steamed determinedly up the Gwynn Creek trail to hunt chanterelles some twenty years later, and faithfully tended the ENHS booth at Arboretum festivals. I watched in amazement as she clambered over wet rocks at Cape Arago
with a skill derived from long practice. She came on our 2011 Malheur Field Station outing even though she could not walk far from the vans. Her inspiration and impact on those of us who shared her love of nature will be a permanent part of our souls.

Reida Kimmel, Not-so-Immediate Past President of ENHS:
I knew Eve’s husband Bayard from work. His odiferous microbiology lab was across from the old electron microscopy lab where I worked, and I always admired his politics. I did not really get to know Eve until Chas and I were dragged onto the ENHS board by Jim Kezer in 1989 and immediately turned into presidents. After us, Dave was president again for a year or several years, and then Eve for a few years before Nathan Tublitz.

As president, Eve was political, as we had been, wanting to address forest issues and the environment. I remember going to one, probably two, Oregon Natural Resources Council (now Oregon Wild) conferences that were really inspiring. Without her gentle influence, we never would have considered going.

I treasure my memories of the spectacular field trips during Eve’s tenure as president, which I think she pulled off all by herself. She would rent a bus, and I remember just about filling it for every field trip (Compare that with the pitiful turnout our trips have these days!). Ewart Baldwin, retired UO geologist, was on board for every trip, and as we sailed down I 5 or along Highway 138, or wherever we went, he had fascinating information about the history and geology of the area. Eve led us on a day trip to Charleston, Bastendorf Beach and Cape Arago, to study the rocks and the effects of the sea on sculpting rocks, and then journeyed home along the old coalfields that supplied early Coos Bay with ore. Another year she took us on an overnight to Ashland, to the forensic museum at Southern Oregon University to learn about poaching and animal trafficking. In the evening, plays were optional. The next morning we went to Table Rock, which we all ascended. It was the perfect time for the flowers, and we hit the high point of spring flowering on the way home, detouring through Glide and Azalea. But the most memorable field trip was another day trip, this time in the fall. The scheduled route was over the old McKenzie Highway and there had been a surprise snowstorm the night before. The bus lost traction going up a very steep hill and slowly, gracefully, slid backwards and a bit off the road. We all piled out with Eve, slipping and sliding in our very inappropriate footwear. The guys, Bayard included, helped get the bus unstuck and the driver put on chains. The whole adventure seemed very funny. No one was scared, upset or cranky. We slowly went on uphill to Sisters, where the driver discovered that he had lost one of his sets of chains. So the trip was a loss for him, but we had a great time having a chilly picnic at a park with a spectacular view of Lake Billy Chinook, which I had never even seen before.

Needless to say we came home via the Santiam Pass, enjoying Sahalie Falls in the late afternoon. I remember so much from those trips even now, so long afterwards.

I remember what a great cook Eve was. Just thinking about those rhubarb meringue pies that she brought to potlucks at Jim Kezer’s makes me drool. How many people know that she wrote cookbooks with recipes using the seaweeds that can be collected on the Oregon Coast? The kelp pickles she shared at Board suppers were delicious. I guess she is better known for another book: *Pacific Coast, an Audubon Society Nature Guide*, which she co-authored with Bayard. It is wonderfully informative and beautifully illustrated, a very good read besides being an excellent guide to beaches and tide pools.

What I remember best about Eve is how incredibly smart and funny she was. She was always kind and cheerful, but she sure did have a wildly wicked sense of humor! We are all going to miss her a lot.

**Good Grief**

_Darkness is imminent. I sit in damp needle duff with my back against a straight young fir. Bedtime is imminent for a covey of California Quail. In the dimness I see only their plump diminutive shadows and hear the powerful thrum of wings launching them into limbs directly above. They ignore me, and one walks within arm’s length. They cluck softly, and their gentle jostling sends a shower of dead needles onto my shoulders. If I were their parent I would fly up there and tell them to be quiet and go to sleep. Instead, I mind my own human business and use the drapes of nightfall to close off rooms full of unwanted noise, the incessant residual chatter of a fall that seems far too busy._

_Scattered thoughts coalesce around oncoming winter. During the intense dryness of summer, wet darkness was something of a theoretical construct, kicked around by climatologists, psychologists, economists, astrologists, and other prognosticators. Now the rains have really come. Gardens are put to bed, drab warblers that I no longer recognize have moved south, and ducks I labored to identify in summer eclipse plumage are back to their shiny, distinguished selves._

_I am continually astonished by the ongoing willingness of Earth to provide. Gratitude is easy in this wet green womb we call home. We are graced by_
water. Rains cleanse our sky, sifting through soil, swalling plant roots and fungal mycelia, shedding contaminates, recharging aquifers, and emerging as springs of clear water that grow moss and lady ferns and torrent salamanders. We are graced by sunshine, too. Photons rain down for six months and are processed by plants into food, fiber, fuel, and finally compost for garden beds. I am uncertain whether there is a relationship between a congenial climate and congenial people. We have our problems, but they seem small in comparison to places in the world where life is harder and competition for resources is keen.

Yet even here, in the easy-living abundance of our locale, the limits of our biosphere are being breached. At this point the people who cannot see this are choosing to ignore it. The only serious remaining discussion is whether or not anthropocentric damage has set off an irreversible chain of events that endangers the future of humans and some large fraction of our fellow multicellular beings. Last summer the local record for days over 90 degrees was obliterated. Salmon runs are fluctuating wildly from year to year. A hive of honeybees is hard to keep alive these days. Despite the bad news, most of us find ourselves living in this beautiful corner of North America well watered, well fed, and well cared for.

Still, anger abounds. I know activists, environmental and social, who will die angry over the ongoing insults to the Earth and her people. Many of us have felt this. I certainly have. I’m not a fan of anger, but with regard to environmentalism it is usually selfless, rather than selfish, and stems from a healthy response against unhealthy human tendencies toward greed, self-indulgence, shortsightedness, and I’m only warming up!

If we swim upstream a bit in search of the source of this anger, we find that it springs from an aquifer of deep grief for the disappearance of things we cherish: primal forests, calypso orchids, monarch butterflies, spawning salmon, and Band-tailed Pigeons; we feel the loss of our own health and safety and any comfort in thinking we will leave our children a hospitable world, and we feel helpless trying to right the injustices. Any psychologist worth her salt would say that our good long-term mental health depends upon recognizing and processing this grief, rather than paving it over with therapeutic smiles. At some point we must dive in and embrace our loss. And even though we can’t simultaneously hold the grief and gratitude in our minds, even though one is a so-called positive emotion and the other negative, the two seem conjoined. Here lies the crux of my ongoing conundrum: we experience deep grief precisely because we are so deeply grateful for things that we have lost. Oh my. Words. Now where?

Every autumn I noodle on this Gordian Knot and can’t put my hands on a sword. This fall I am giving up. Perhaps that is the solution—recognizing that gratitude and grieving are inextricable parts of our complex human experience, two symbiotic feelings that have evolved within our emotional ecosystem and are forever joined in mutual interdependence. I have no credentials for telling people how they should think or feel, no degree in psychology or counseling or human development. Intuition is my only ally. To give thanks is to lower our guard, because gratitude makes us vulnerable to grief. Yet maybe in this season of shrinking daylight, swelling streams, falling color, and emerging fungi we could choose to live dangerously. We could make ourselves vulnerable. We could open our arms in gratitude for all that still surrounds us. We could even give thanks that we grieve.

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**Beautiful Cedar**

by Reida Kimmel

If I had lived three centuries ago I’d probably have been hanged as a witch. I walk with my familiar, a black cat. He’s really only good for about a mile, so I try to sneak away without him. But today, Halloween, he insisted, so we made a short excursion uphill past our broken incense cedar tree, once our second tallest tree and still our stoutest. Almost double trunked, it had lost half its top a few years ago. The rest of the top fell in last February’s ice storm. Alive, growing, but no longer lovely, it is an impressive snag. The books tell me that incense cedar, *Calocedrus decurrens*, “beautiful cedar”, is only found in the Cascade Range from Oregon through California and into northern Baja California. But it is also very common on the east side of the Coast Range where I live. After logging, if the land is not replanted, madrone and incense cedar are the pioneer species colonizing clearcuts. Incense cedars will grow on the hottest driest sites in the Cascades, and though they are less fire resistant than ponderosa pine or Douglas fir, their tolerance of drought may allow them to thrive and out compete other conifers in our warmer, drier world.

Indeed, incense cedars are very beautiful. Their branches, covered with scale-like leaves arranged in seemingly irregular fluffy patterns, are soft green. When their tiny pollen cones mature, the trees appear almost golden in the sunlight. In the fall, the woody seed cones open and drop to the ground. Tripartite like tiny lilies, the cones contain four small, bitterly
resinous, winged seeds. When the cones are fresh they are lovely soft shades of pearly lavender and pinkish tan. Soon the cones dry to shades of brown. Some woodland species must find the seeds palatable, but many seeds are dispersed and sprout. The woods are full of seedlings that will grow, very slowly, into other generations of lovely cedars. …Incense cedar lacks the glamour of Western red cedar, *Thuja plicata*, whose wood and bark filled so many needs in the lives of the First Peoples in the Pacific Northwest. Both cedars are rot resistant, but incense cedar does not split so well into planking. Red cedar’s straight-grained wood is prized for lumber. Incense cedar is prone to dry-rot shelf fungus, which leaves the lumber marked with little holes, making it mostly suitable for decorative paneling. The humble incense cedar is known best for being the wood used for pencils. It is sometimes called “pencil cedar”. Because of its intense fragrance, incense cedar wood is the most potent natural moth repellent available, a fact that I, spinner, knitter, and wool collector, deeply appreciate. …I can never resist picking up a few more of those lovely cones. I’ve never found a decorative use for them, but I hope that I can get seeds to sprout in our abandoned driveway pasture. As I pick up yet another pocketful of cones and gather tired kitty in my arms, I have high hopes.

| If you have had trouble finding parking before our meetings, there is a sparsely used parking lot nearby. Turn north (toward the river) at the intersection of Franklin and Onyx and go across the little bridge. It'll be on your left. |

### Events of Interest in the Community

**Lane County Audubon Society**

**Saturday, 15 November, Third Saturday Bird Walk.** The location will be determined by interesting bird sightings posted to OBOL and other pertinent information available before the day of the walk. If a location is determined before the third Saturday, we will post it on the LCAS Facebook page ([https://www.facebook.com/pages/Lane-County-Audubon-Society/330177413824?ref=hl](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Lane-County-Audubon-Society/330177413824?ref=hl)) and on the website ([www.laneaudubon.org](http://www.laneaudubon.org)).

**Tuesday, 25 November, 7:30pm. New & Endangered Oregon Wilderness Hikes.** Join author William L. Sullivan for a slide show celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. We’ll visit hiking trails in spectacular areas protected during each decade from the 1960s to the present. But more than half of Oregon’s roadless land is still unprotected, so Sullivan will also tell us about interesting hikes in endangered areas—from the desert to the rainforest. Expect tales of history, geology, and wildlife along the way. Eugene Garden Club, 1645 High St.

**Mt. Pisgah Arboretum**

**Sunday, 16 November, 8:30-11am. Late Fall Bird Walk.** Chris Roth and Julia Siporin will lead a bird walk intended for people with all levels of birding experience. We’ll use vocalizations, habitat, and behavior clues for identification of our winter and year-round residents. Come discover the Arboretum’s avian diversity. Please bring binoculars. Option to continue the walk until noon for those who are interested. Meet at the Arboretum Visitor Center. $5, members free.

**Saturday, 29 November, 1-3pm. Forest Ecology Walk.** Explore the plants and animals of the Arboretum and their place in our native ecosystems with ecologist and LCC instructor, Pat Boleyn. From our oak savannah to our conifer and incense cedar forests, the interrelationships are fascinating and complex. Come away with a clearer understanding of the importance of these forests and the organisms that make them their home. Meet at the Arboretum Visitor Center. $5, members free.

**Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah**

**Mondays, 17, 24 November, 1 December, 9am-noon. Morning Regulars.** Monday Morning Regulars work on habitat restoration projects wherever they are most needed each week. Their work includes working in the native plant nursery as well as planting native species and removing invasive species around Buford Park. Contact volunteer@bufordpark.org for more information.

**Tuesdays and Thursdays, all month, 9am-12pm. Nursery Work.** Join us for a morning or full day of planting seedlings, preparing and caring for beds, and otherwise helping out on the many tasks needed to propagate the native plant material we use for restoration projects. The nursery is a fun and beautiful place to relax and to get some fresh air and activity. Meet and work at the Native Plant Nursery at Buford Park. Enter Buford Park from Seavey Loop Road. Turn LEFT after crossing the bridge and drive 1/4 mile to the nursery.

**Nearby Nature** Go to [http://www.nearbynature.org/events](http://www.nearbynature.org/events) for information on NN activities, or call 541-687-9699.

**Monday, 24 November, 10-11:30am. Green Start: Cozy Critters Play Day.** Enjoy pre-school crafts and stories in our yurt plus outside nature play in our Learnscape. Rain or shine! Kids 5 and under only, with an adult. Members free, non-members $5/child plus one adult free. Meet outside our Yurt in Alton Baker Park. Pre-register: 541-687-9699.
Native Plant Society of Oregon, Emerald Chapter  
**Thursday, 20 November, 7 pm (new time!) Willamette Forest Roads Investment Strategy.** Virtually everything that people value in our National Forests touches, at some point, the road system. The Willamette National Forest is working on developing a strategy that will be used to guide road management decisions in the future. **Matt Peterson**, road investment strategy team leader, will describe how the Forest Service is developing the investment strategy and how the public can continue to be involved. Meeting location: Conference Room at Lane County Mental Health. For more information call Jenny at 541-225-6440.

North American Butterfly Association, Eugene–Springfield Chapter  
**Monday, 8 December, Refreshments 7pm, Presentation 7:30pm. Feathered Architects: The Fascinating World of Bird Nests, by Idie Ulsh.** From eagles to hummingbirds, Ulsh will explore with us how and where birds make nests and relate interesting facts about their construction. She has photographed the nests of more than 30 species and done an extensive three-year perusal of bird nest literature. In addition to her own photos she will include photos from many excellent northwest photographers and the University of Puget Sound Slater Museum. At the Eugene Garden Club, 1645 High St. Free.

The University of Oregon’s Museum of Natural and Cultural History  
**Exhibit Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 11 am-5 pm**

**Current Exhibits**
- Explore Oregon: 300 million years of Northwest natural history.
- Site Seeing: Snapshots of Historical Archaeology in Oregon.
- Oregon - Where Past is Present. 15,000 years of Northwest cultural history and 200 million years of geology.
- Highlights of the Jensen Arctic Collection.

**Friday, 14 November, 10:30-11:30am. Little Wonders - Stories and Activities for Preschoolers.** You and your child are invited to learn and play at the museum during our monthly Little Wonders event! This month will be “Backbone Bonanza” with stories and fun activities about animals with spines. Learn about humans and other animals that have backbones, and how to spot them. Admission is $5 per family (up to 2 adults and 2 children). Admission is free for MNCH members.

**Monday, 17 November, 11am-5pm, Road Trip! The Roadside Geology of Oregon.** Tour the state’s colorful landscapes through photographs and maps from the new edition of *The Roadside Geology of Oregon*, written by UO Senior Instructor of Geological Sciences, Marli Miller.

WREN (Willamette Resources and Educational Network)  
Go to [http://wwwwild.blogspot.com](http://wwwwild.blogspot.com) for November and early December events.

ENHS welcomes new members! To join, fill out the form below. Membership payments allow us to give modest honoraria to our speakers, as well as to pay for the publication and mailing of *Nature Trails*. Our web address: [http://biology.uoregon.edu/enhs](http://biology.uoregon.edu/enhs)

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**MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Name________________________________________  
Address________________________________________  
City___________________________State & Zip___________________Phone___________________  
E-mail (if you want to receive announcements)________________________________________  
I (we) prefer electronic copies of NT rather than paper copies. ___Yes ___No  
If yes, email address (if different from the one above):________________________________________  

**ANNUAL DUES:**

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Make checks payable to: The Eugene Natural History Society  
P.O. Box 5494, Eugene OR 97405

The following information is voluntary, but appreciated:  
Would you like to: ___lead field trips ___teach informal classes ___work on committees ___  
What would you like to hear a talk on? __________________________________________

Annual dues for renewing members are payable in September. Memberships run from September to September. Generosity is encouraged and appreciated.
Do you have special experience in natural history: _____________________________________

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Nature Trails: Editor, John Carter, jvernoncarter@comcast.net; Support Staff: Ruth BreMiller and Reida Kimmel.

ENHS Schedule of Speakers and Topics for 2013-2014 and for 2014-2015
21 Nov. 2014 – George Wuerthner – Praise the Dead: the Ecological Role of Dead Trees
20 Feb. 2015 – Shelly Miller – Native Freshwater Mussels in the Pacific Northwest
20 Mar. 2015 – Paul Engelmeyer – Conservation Strategies: Seabirds and Forage Fish
17 April 2015 – Marli Miller – Roadside Geology of Oregon: Some Highlights

Yosemite fire, September 2014. Photo by Stuart Palley.