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Tree removal: Bob Joliffe of Integrated Resource Management of Philomath moves a tree with a Lightfoot tree feller buncher on the Oerding Reserve at Popcorn Swale Tuesday morning. The tree removal is part of an effort to restore the habitat of the rough popcorn flower on land owned by the Nature Conservancy near Wilbur.

Habitat protection efforts for endangered county flower are well under way

By **DIANE HUBER**
The News-Review

WILBUR — The rough popcorn flower just loves Douglas County.

So do trees, like pear and ash, that threaten its existence.

That's why the Nature Conservancy is in charge of making sure the endangered plant, which is found only in Douglas County, keeps on popping up.

On Tuesday, the agency assigned 10 Wolf Creek Job Corps students to pull out trees and shrubs on an 8-acre area of popcorn flower habitat north of Wilbur. Florescent-pink tape designated patches of the flower, and piles of felled trees sat in an open portion of the field.

Next to the open area, a dense forest of ash trees are being left alone. It's

what some of the cleared field looked like before restoration began, said Molly Sullivan, the Nature Conservancy's stewardship coordinator for southwest Oregon.

"Since the trees have been cut down, (the flowers are) getting all the sunlight they love and deserve," she said.

The area historically was a wetland but has become overgrown due to agricultural development, which brought in non-native species like the pear tree. Fire suppression has compounded the

problem by preventing forests from naturally clearing out trees and shrubs, such as the native ash, Sullivan said.

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Molly Sullivan
Nature Conservancy

said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service gave a \$30,000 grant to the conservation agency to restore habitat for the flower on 30 acres north of Wilbur that

the conservation agency owns.

Originally discovered in Sutherlin in 1887, the flower was rediscovered in 1983 after intensive field surveys. It was listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2000 and grows only in the Umpqua River watershed, in just 17 known patches between Wilbur and Yoncalla.

The project is part of a restoration plan developed by the Fish and Wildlife Service that includes protecting areas where the flower grows and maintaining 5,000 plants in each of three reserves, said Sam Friedman, a botanist with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The project has been successful so far, Sullivan said. In June, the agency

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