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The Understory Initiative: New Southern Oregon nonprofit working to restore understory habitats.

A new nonprofit has emerged in Southern Oregon, to promote ecological restoration of native herbs and grasses through seed production, education and community partnerships. The Understory Initiative is working toward developing a cooperatively managed native seed farm that will produce seed that is often hard to come by - the small native plants underfoot that frequently get overlooked in the ecological restoration process, but are crucial to developing resilient habitats.

While working at the coordinator for the Rogue Native Plant Partnership to develop ecological restoration community partnerships in Southern Oregon, Kathryn Prive (a graduate of both OSU and UO, with a M.S. in Population Genetics and Ecological Restoration and a B.S in Environmental Science) frequently noticed a demand for native understory plant seeds that can not be fulfilled. This unmet need for understory plants (an essential component in restoring native grasslands, meadows, wetlands, and oak woodlands) propelled her to develop The Understory Initiative.

“Although there is a lot of great restoration work going on in Southern Oregon, many projects are native seed-limited. This results in less resilient restored habitats with inadequate nectar resources for pollinators and forage for wildlife. This is a problem we can fix by developing a cooperatively run native seed farm here in Southern Oregon. We at The Understory Initiative would like to take on that challenge.”

While a native seed farm is one of the main project undertakings for The Understory Initiative team, the organization also plans on developing youth and community education programs, and working with other organizations, government agencies and private landowners to create and implement understory-focused ecological restoration plans.

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