

Plant Communities

Slope, along with seasonal availability of light, water, temperature and nutrients are all ingredients influencing what type of plants grow where. Plants that thrive in similar conditions form “plant communities” on the landscape.

Learn about plant communities along the one mile interpretive trail. In that short distance you will see riparian, Douglas-fir forest, and chaparral plant communities.

Little Creek

In 2018, large amounts of water from a winter storm plugged up a culvert near the Little Darby Trailhead. This sent water and sediment down the trail and into Little Creek, a tributary to the Eel River.

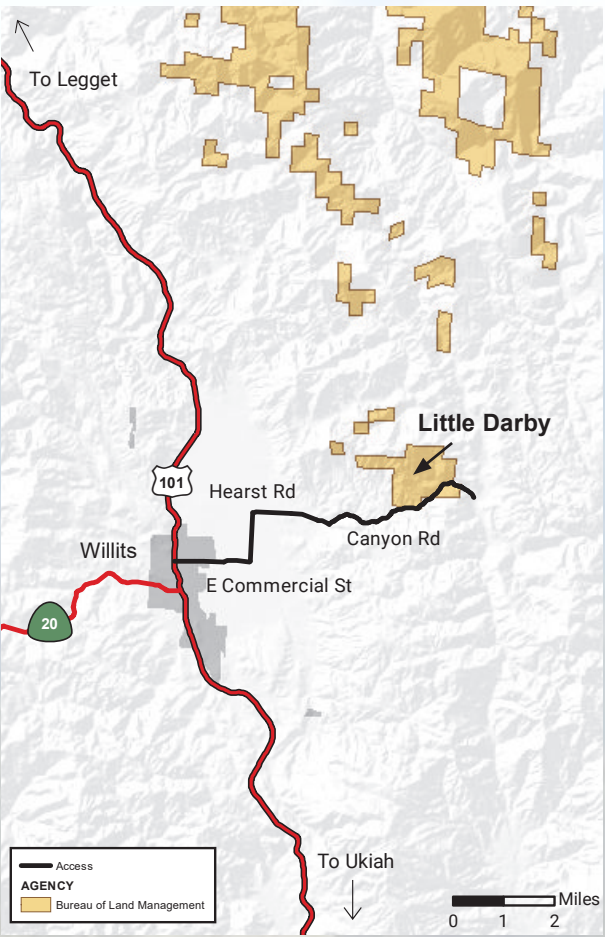
The trail was reconstructed to reduce the risk of more storm debris and soil sediment from entering the Eel River, the third largest watershed in the state.

The Eel River provides clean water and breeding habitat for fish including Coho and Chinook salmon. Watershed health is critical not only for their survival, but ours too, as it provides clean drinking water for people and agricultural purposes.



Getting There

From Willits, drive east on Commercial Street, which becomes Hearst-Willits Road (County Road 306). Continue east on Canyon Road (County Road 308) and the Little Darby parking area will be on your left.



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Little Darby Environmental Education Area



Map & Trail Guide

Community Partners

For many decades, the Little Darby Environmental Education Area has provided a place for the Bureau of Land Management to partner with local organizations that support youth and their connection to outdoor recreation and wildlife.

The Little Darby Trail was originally built in 1978 by the Youth Conservation Corps in Ukiah.

Outdoor Classroom

Youth continue to steward Little Darby today through service learning and community science projects.

Local school groups use the 1,200 acres of public land as an outdoor classroom providing hands-on field experiences, such as citizen science and environmental monitoring projects that connect the next generation to public land.

Interpretive signs created by Willits Charter School and Humboldt State University students offer a peek into the unique natural and cultural history of Little Darby.



Little Darby Interpretive Trail

The Little Darby Interpretive Trail has two loops that lead you through an educational journey of fire and its benefits, traditional food sources, wildlife habitat and learning how to trek lightly.

The shorter loop leads you through the moist riparian and Douglas-fir forest, while the longer loop includes vast mountain views and dry chaparral brushland. The entire trail distance is one mile and is considered moderately difficult.

Chaparral Community

Chaparral is the most common plant community in California.

This community is on the sunny, south-facing slope of the Brushland Loop.

The full sun exposure and location higher on the mountain creates a drier climate where only plants and animals adapted to those conditions can exist. Look for manzanita, wild lilac, ocean spray and chemise.



Manzanita *Arctostaphylos luciana*, Photo by Steve Matson

Douglas-fir Community

When walking in the Douglas-fir community, you will see fir trees that are well over 100 years old and a broad canopy that shades the plant community below. The plants, lichens and moss and other shade tolerant plants all like to grow here.

Douglas fir seeds provide food for small mammals, including chipmunks, mice, shrews, and Douglas squirrels. Many songbirds eat the seeds right out of the cone, and raptors, including northern spotted owls, rely on old-growth Douglas-fir trees for cover.



Douglas-fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii* Photo by Chuck Kozak

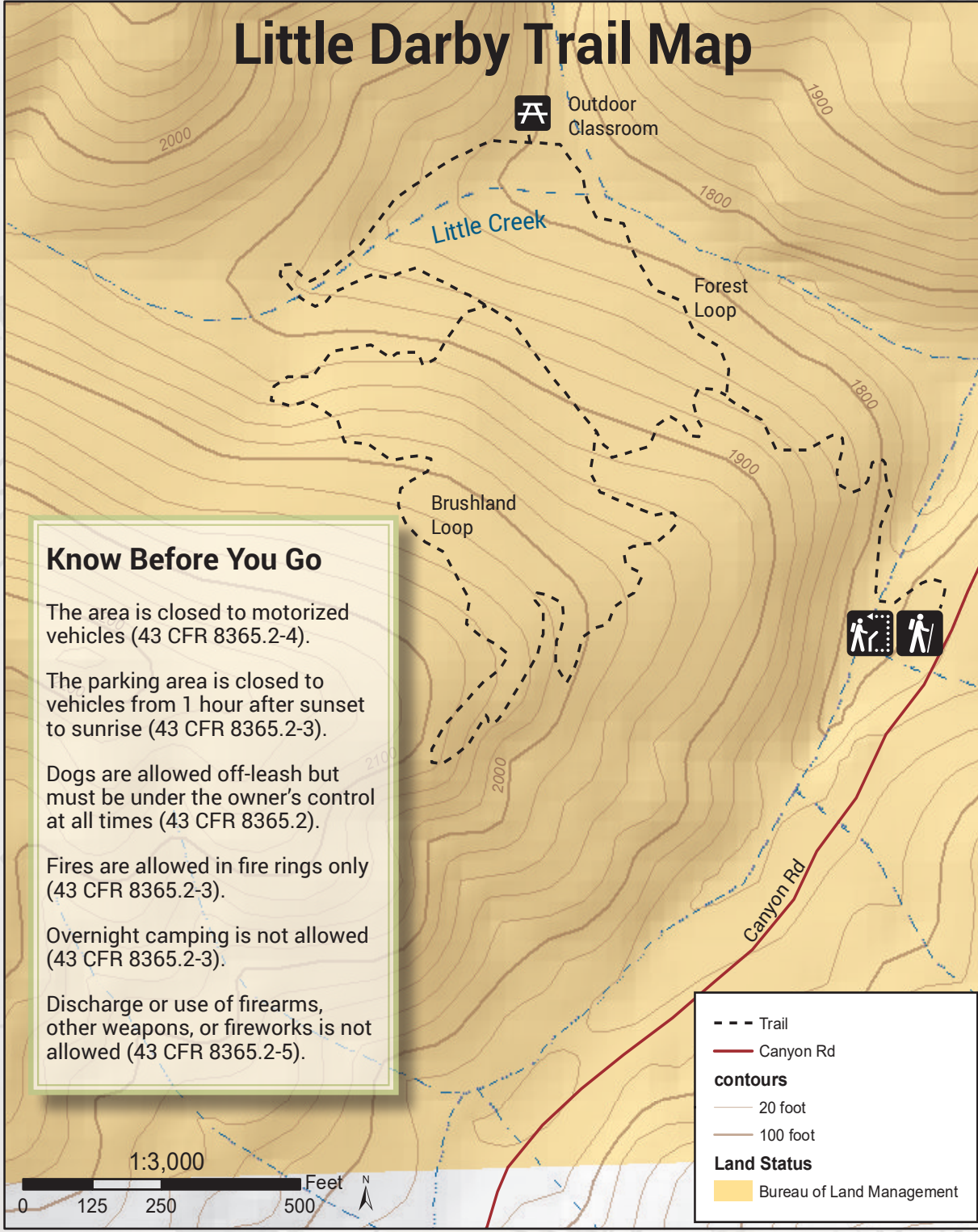
Riparian Community

Little Creek is a riparian area, which is a plant community growing next to a river or stream. You will notice trees include big leaf maple and California bay laurel.



Big leaf maple, *Acer macrophyllum* Photo by Christopher Brown

These trees need large amounts of water to survive. Riparian corridors improve water quality, increase groundwater recharge, provide flood protection, enhance wildlife and aquatic habitat, and support the recovery of salmon, steelhead and other endangered species.



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