OREGON HISTORICAL MARKER
PRE-APPLICATION FORM

I. GENERAL INFORMATION
A. Name of event, person, place or geologic feature to be commemorated:
   Site of the gold discovery that started the Oregon gold rush of 1851
   This might be regarded as Oregon’s equivalent of the Sutter Mill
gold discovery that launched the 1849 California gold rush.

B. Sponsoring Group or Individual __________ Roger Brandt
   Address __________ PO 2350
   City, State, Zip __________ Cave Junction, OR 97523

C. Contact Person __________ Roger Brandt
   Address __________ PO 2350, Cave Junction, OR 97523
   Telephone __________ 541 592-4316
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II. PROPOSED LOCATION
A. Proposed location on state highway right-of-way or other public land: Lat/long: 42.244609,-123.682803
   The site is located in the Wild and Scenic Illinois River corridor on Forest Service Road 4201
   (paved) about two miles from Highway 199. Road 4201 is also known as the TJ Howell Botanical
   Drive and is the main access route to the Kalmiopsis wilderness.

B. County: __________ Josephine

C. Current use of land and current landowner:
   The site is within the Wild and Scenic Illinois River corridor and is flanked by the Eight Dollar
   Mountain Botanical Area. Primary use of the area is for recreation. The land is managed by the
   Forest Service.

D. Explanation of why the proposed site is appropriate:
   The gold discovery at this site in 1851 started the Oregon gold rush.

Background
The search for gold in Oregon reaches back to the first immigrants coming into this state in the 1840s.
These searches were all small scale panning at places where gold prospecting looked promising to
people traveling through the country. Gold was discovered during those years but not in large enough
quantity to yield an economic return that was worth more than the work to get it (2, 8, 9). None of
these gold discoveries sparked a large-scale and rapid movement of prospectors into Oregon. This
would change with a discovery of gold on Josephine Creek in 1851.

The Josephine Creek discovery was made at a time when news only traveled as fast as a person could
walk or ride on a horse to the nearest settlement. There were no newspapers in the immediate region.
to chronicle discovery events as they happened and most who heard about the strike didn’t take time to write about it, likely because they were too busy packing and traveling to stake a claim and make their fortune. Most of what is known about Josephine Creek and its importance in Oregon history comes from memoirs written by the people who were directly involved.

One of the memoirs that mentions the Josephine Creek discovery was by A.G. Walling who had built one of the first structures in Illinois Valley in 1852 (6), which became known as the Walling Ranch and was a supply point for miners coming into the Illinois Valley after the discovery of gold was announced:

In 1851, several prospectors came north from the Klamath River, and passing over the divide into the valley of the Illinois, found gold to the west of that stream, in the sands of a creek which flows into the Illinois a few miles below Kirbyville [Josephine Creek is five miles downstream from Kerby]. The news of their discovery was immediately communicated to the numerous and populous mining camps of Northern California, and people began to move toward the new diggings in considerable numbers. This was the first mining locality discovered or worked in Oregon, and therefore a historic spot. (6)

In 1902, one of the four prospectors who was with the group that discovered the gold in Josephine Creek had his story published in the Oregonian. According to his account, he was a member of 4-5 individuals who traveled north from the gold fields at Yreka, California and followed the Rogue River down to Applegate Creek near present-day Grants Pass. They then followed Applegate Creek to its headwaters and continued over to the Klamath River where they worked a couple of weeks and, not being satisfied with the meager findings, headed back to Oregon. This brought them to the Illinois Valley where they followed the Illinois River to where it entered a canyon. Luther Hasbrouck described what happened next:

We camped on the north side of the Illinois River and crossed to the south side where we went down river until we came to a small stream, which was afterward named Josephine Creek, after a daughter of a prospector who came in that same summer of 1850 [sic]. Josephine Creek was found to be very rich, paying on to two ounces per day. Luther Hasbrouck washed the first pan of dirt on this creek and it averaged 50 cents to the pan. He washed 16 pans. This was in July of 1850 [sic] and was the first discovery of gold in Josephine County. (2)

Luther Hasbrouck went on to explain how their discovery triggered a gold rush to Josephine Creek:

The Illinois Valley Indians at that time being troublesome, it was necessary to build a fort for protection, and consequently a fort was built of logs on Josephine Creek and called Fort Gidney. It was so named after one of the miners in the group, Nat Giles, whose nickname was Gidney. As soon as the fort was completed, it was necessary to go out for provisions. It was agreed that lots should be drawn to see who should make the trip. It fell to the lots of Luther Hasbrouck, Mose Dusenberry, Henry Lawrence and Captain Jennings. They went north [probably following the same route as Highway 199] until they found a trail from Oregon to California, which they followed to Shasta City. There they purchased supplies and returned in twenty-one days. The party supposed they had independent ‘diggings’ on Josephine Creek, but on their return, they found a mining town of tents. Probably 2000 people were in Illinois Valley. The prospectors had been followed to their new camp and as soon as the discovery had been made, news was sent to California of the new Eldorado. This caused a great rush to Oregon and for this time on, Southern Oregon was alive with busy placer miners (2).

Four of the prospectors who discovered gold on Josephine Creek were from Illinois and were the ones who named the Illinois Valley and Illinois River.

The date of the discovery cited in historic accounts varies from early May to early August of 1851 (5, 7). The date often cited in recent literature is May 2, 1851.

Prospectors began a rapid rush into southern Oregon and new discoveries of gold were made. One of these that gained significant notoriety, at least from a gold rush perspective, was the discovery of gold on Jackson Creek in December 1851. The Jackson Creek discovery has been identified in recent literature as the place where the Oregon gold rush began but it needs to be taken into account that there was no
reliable documentation of how many prospectors were coming into the region and where they were going. This was a time of confusion caused by increasing conflicts with local Native Americans and the influx of newcomers with little knowledge of the area who were traveling to the gold rush that was already underway in Illinois Valley and changed their destination to Jackson Creek when they heard about the discovery.

In June 1851, conflicts between Native Americans and settlers traveling through the Rogue Valley escalated (13). A military unit of 30 soldiers was traveling through the area heading toward California and their commander, Major Kearney, dispatched a subordinate to Illinois Valley to ask prospectors to help as volunteer militia to retaliate against the Native Americans. As a result of this request “…quite a large proportion of the Josephine creek miners responded to the call and proceeded to Bear creek (6),” which was located at present-day Medford. The number of prospectors who may have responded to this conflict is found in an 1851 Portland newspaper publication:

We have received intelligence that an encounter was had with the Rogue River Indians by a detachment of 30 U.S. troops, on the 18th of June, in Rogue River Valley, near Table Rock. It is said that there are more than 1000 warriors there who are hostile. Five hundred volunteers are expected from the mines to fight them (12).

In June of 1851, the only mines in southern Oregon were on Josephine Creek so this is the most likely place that miners would have come from although Yreka is another possibility.

This conflict between Native Americans and local settlers contributed to the fact that very little prospecting was done in southern Oregon that year “… except on Josephine Creek and its tributary Canyon Creek…” (6)

Prospectors continued to go Josephine and Canyon creeks in the fall of 1851, which included “…a number of Willamette valley farmers and others who tried their fortunes on the two creeks, but with indifferent success, owing mainly to their lack of skill and almost total lack of mining tools (6).” This is likely when Josephine Rollins came to Illinois Valley with her parents.

When the Jackson Creek discovery was made it would be logical that the majority of prospectors coming into the region would head to Jacksonville because it was a new strike and offered a greater opportunity for newcomers to get a good claim. This may have given the impression to people who were not aware of the mining already underway in Illinois Valley that the gold rush was started by the Jackson Creek discovery.

Soon after the Jackson Creek discovery, the attention turned back to Illinois Valley in early 1852 with discoveries of gold at Sailor Diggings and Althouse Creek in Illinois Valley. Althouse Creek had a significant and relatively uniform yield of gold over a span of ten miles and that place quickly assumed an importance equal to that of Jacksonville. The pay dirt on this stream in places was of the richest description and probably surpassed any other locality in the whole of Southern Oregon (6). Althouse Creek is the location where the largest gold nugget in Oregon history was found. The “Sailor Diggings” discovery, also made in early 1852 (14), led to the establishment of the town of Waldo, the first county seat of Josephine County when the county was established in 1856.

By the end of 1852 the multiple discoveries of gold in this region must have attracted a large number of prospectors who depended on supplies brought in on pack trains from the coastal town of Trinidad, California. Unfortunately, an unusually large amount of deep snowfall fell that winter and completely cut off supplies coming into this region (6). There was no documentation on how many prospectors may have perished (5).

The length of time that the Oregon gold rush lasted might be bracketed by two events that resulted in miners leaving the area in noticeable numbers. The first was the out migration caused by the Rogue Indian War:

Josephine is a mining county, and has had all the vicissitudes of such a county. Her citizens leading a roving life, and having little to bind them to the soil mostly left during the Indian war in 1855-1856 (1: p97).
The second was the Frazer River gold discovery in Canada. 

In 1857 and 1858 there took place that remarkable mining craze, the Frazer river excitement, which has become typical of all its kind. It was directly responsible for a great falling off in the population of Josephine county (6).

In the late 1860s, the State Agricultural Society sponsored an expedition to visually survey each of the counties in Oregon. The report was published in 1869 and noted that in Josephine County there were “…between one thousand and two thousand inhabitants, with between five and six thousand acres of land under cultivation… (1).” At that time, the center of Josephine County commerce and the Josephine County Seat were in Illinois Valley and it can be assumed that the majority of the people mentioned in the report were in this part of the county. It appears that by the late 1860s the economy in Illinois Valley, a community that was almost entirely based on mining when it started, was changing to an agricultural economy with mining playing a lesser role. The report on Josephine County concluded with this comment:

Perhaps above all Josephine County has the inherent vice of all mining communities, that for every dollar taken from her mineral deposits she is one dollar poorer. There is no accumulation; there is no heaping up by one generation for the generation which is to follow (1: p98).

Sources
E. Site or Location Plan:
   1. Include plan (sketch) of location of proposed marker(s). Indicate location of buildings, trees, roads, and all existing features.
   2. Attach city or county map enlargement with proposed site(s) noted.
   3. Attach photographs of proposed site(s).

III. MARKER STYLE
   ____ 45” x 60” panel on cedar mount
   X  28” x 36” panel on aluminum pedestal

IV. MARKER THEME (A brief description of the person, event, place or geologic feature to be commemorated, including the historical significance.

   A gold discovery at this site launches the 1851 Oregon gold rush and rapidly changes the culture and landscape of southwest Oregon.

V. SUBMIT THE FORM TO:

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   Oregon Travel Experience
   1500 Liberty St. SE, Ste. 150
   Salem, OR 97302

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   503-373-0864
   1-800-574-9397
Maps showing the location of the proposed historic marker
Site details
The site has an established turnout that offers enough room to park 2-3 average size vehicles. The historic marker would be located about 50 feet from the parking area on a well used two-track road and camping site with a scenic vista of the Josephine/Canyon Creek watershed.

The turnout on the left is large enough for 2-3 average sized vehicles. A two-track road offers a place where the historic marker could be installed and is seen in the middle of the photo climbing up a small rise next to the turnout.

A closer look at the two-track road as seen from the turnout.
The two track road (seen in foreground) ends at a site looking into the Josephine Creek drainage where a gold discovery in 1851 launched the Oregon gold rush. At the foot of Josephine Mountain, Josephine Creek continues to the left and Canyon Creek to the right of the mountain. The end of this two-track road is located on the right edge of the photo.

**Suggested site layout**
Install the historic marker at the end of the two-track road where the view of the Josephine Creek drainage is most dramatic. Create a wheelchair accessible walkway from the turnout to the site.

This example is a minimal installation alternative all of which would be on existing disturbed ground. There is additional room available for installation of other interpretive panels if there is interest in pursuing this.
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