

CHAPTER 2. HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

LANDSCAPE CHANGES THROUGH HISTORY

On my arrival in the Bly Valley on November 3, 1879, my first impression was very unfavorable. There were no fences, and no houses in sight. The grass grew so high that the low log cabins were hidden from view until one was within a few yards of them. I wondered what made people stay in such a desolate looking place. Little did I think that I would make my home there and raise a family and be happy and contented for thirty years . . .

Mrs. Addie Walker (Helfrich 1974)

Mrs. Walker was not the first white person to settle in the Upper Sprague watershed, but she was close. By most accounts, the first settler was William H. Gearhart, who drove a herd of cattle from Humboldt County, California to Bly around 1874. The tall grass that Addie Walker thought looked “desolate” looked like opportunity to Mr. Gearhart, and Addie’s arrival was part of the first wave of settlers who had learned how suited the Upper Sprague was to stock-raising.

But of course, there had been people in the Upper Sprague and Sycan watersheds before the Walkers and the Gearharts arrived. For centuries the area had been a seasonal home to Yahooskin band of the Northern Paiute. Most of the Northern Paiute territory was to the south and east, down through Goose Lake and all the way into central Nevada. But the northern Yahooskins traveled into the Upper Sprague and Sycan each year to harvest and hunt the native flora and fauna. The tribes lower down the river – the Klamaths and Modocs – also visited the Upper Sprague and Sycan on a seasonal basis, but the area was primarily Yahooskin territory, at least at the time of white settlement. It is generally believed that the name of the town of Bly came from the native word “plai,” meaning “high country.” The native name for the Sprague River is “Plaikni Koke,” meaning “river from the high country” (Helfrich 1974).

Despite Addie Walker’s description of the place as “desolate,” the Upper Sprague watershed appears to have been a very rich and productive landscape when she arrived. Native Americans traveled long distances to hunt and gather here, and very likely competed with each other for access to this bounty. Cattle producers, too, immediately recognized the business potential of both the bottom ground and the uplands. Even Addie herself, after she had been around a while, started to see things differently:

Cattle and horses from the range, which was covered with bunch grass two or three feet high, were rolling fat when gathered for

market. . . . In addition to this there was an abundance of wild game for sport and profit; our men hunted bear, panther, and coyotes. For a change of diet they brought home wild ducks, geese, and sage chickens, and when one was lucky enough to bag a brood of young mallards just before they were able to fly, or a brood of young sage chickens following their mother, let me tell you we had delicacies unknown to any but pioneers. Fish – small speckled trout – were almost at our doors; Sprague River ran through our meadow not half a mile from our home, and our little boys could run down and catch a string of these speckled beauties any time in summer. In winter the Indians brought us the large salmon trout from springs along the river. (Helfrich 1974)

There were many early instances of friendliness and cooperation among the people – white and Indian alike -- who lived along the Upper Sprague and Sycan Rivers. J.O. Hamaker, who passed through the area in 1879 on his way to see his brother in Klamath Falls, said it was like “the whole country were [sic] one large Fraternal Family, and the ‘Law of Universal Brotherhood’ prevailed the country over” (Helfrich 1974). And Addie Walker told of how

all were ready and willing to help each other as the need arose – sitting long nights through, giving medicine and nursing in the back room of Bill Smith’s store at Bly. Once we lined, covered and trimmed the diamond shaped coffin. There was no beautiful hearse filled with flowers – only a handful of neighbors. . . . All stood ready to rejoice with those that did rejoice, and weep with those that wept. (Helfrich 1974)

GETTING THE LINES CROSSED

But there was also conflict from the very beginning. The same violent encounters that occurred in other parts of the Klamath Basin also happened here. And like other areas, the drawing of a reservation boundary in 1864 did not necessarily make the problems go away. In fact, in the Upper Sprague and Sycan there was particular confusion caused by the fact that no one could agree about where the boundary actually fell. This is a primary reason why white settlement began in this area somewhat later than in other parts of the basin.

The dispute arose when, in 1870, a surveyor from Corvallis was hired by the government to survey the boundary agreed to in the Treaty of 1864. When the surveyor submitted the map to the tribal leadership, they claimed that he had cut off from the reservation “a portion of the Sycan valley and the whole upper portion of the Sprague River Valley.” The treaty language provided that from a point near the head of the Klamath Marsh the boundary should run to “the point where the Sprague river is intersected by ‘Ash-Tish’ Creek” (Helfrich 1974; this stream is now called Ish-Tish Creek, and runs through

the U.S. Forest Service's Sprague River Picnic Area about four miles east of Bly).

The problem was that back then Ish-Tish Creek, "after emerging from its upper and mountainous course, spreads out somewhat after the fashion of Lost River over a wide, nearly level, marshy plain," (Helfrich 1974) which is fed by several other streams, including Fish Hole, Fritz, Deming, Paradise, the South Fork Sprague, and others. The surveyor did not consider this vast marsh, which stretched unbroken over much of Bly Valley, to be the Sprague River. In fact he was not able to find a discernible "intersection" until the point where (what is now know as) the North and South Forks of the Sprague meet, "about one mile west of the Old Ivory Pine Road." The surveyor called this the "intersection of the Ash-Tish and the Sprague," and surveyed the reservation boundary to that point. The tribal leadership objected, but the government approved the survey and settlers began moving in almost immediately. Eventually – fifty years later -- the matter was settled with a sizable cash payment agreed to by both parties.

During the 1950s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers initiated a program of channelization of flows within this area. It has been difficult to obtain any details about the how these structures were built, or what the main justifications were. But Fish Hole Creek was bermed, and the South Fork Sprague was straightened and diked from a point Northeast of Bly downstream almost to Ivory Pine Road. This channelization, along with some incision of these channels that has taken place over the years, has reduced or, in some areas, eliminated the annual period during which these floodplains are inundated.

There are local citizens who were involved with the construction, who have indicated that the activities occurred at a time when flood control modifications were taking place throughout out the western states. This wave of flood control construction stemmed from passage of a National Flood Control Act in 1936, which authorized and funded the Corps of Engineers to implement such projects. Actual implementation was delayed due to World War II. But after that war was over there two major flood events in the southern Oregon region, one in 1950 and the other in 1964. With funding, personnel and equipment, as well as a strong interest in preventing further flood damage like that which was recently experienced, the Corps of Engineers made major modifications in relatively little time. Officials at the Corps of Engineers have indicated that the structures were likely built under an "emergency authorization," which would mean that little or no planning or documentation of construction activities would be required. (Corps of Engineers, Jennifer Sowell, pers. comm.)

THE FIRST DIVERSION

When Major John Green, commander of the First Cavalry at Fort Klamath, passed through the Upper Sprague valley on his way back from Warner

Valley in October of 1872, he made a sketch of the valley that shows only three habitations: William Gearhart's, James Polk's (Gearhart's business partner), and the cabin of a third early settler, Jacob Fritz Munz, who settled on what would later become the BK Ranch. Munz first appears in the historical record right around the time the Modoc War started in 1872, when he led a drunken vigilante party on a failed attempt to avenge the death of Munz' friend, Wendelin Nus, who was killed on the first day of the war. A year or so later, an Indian had been harassing Munz because he had established his large herd of cattle in the middle of that tract of Bly valley land that was still being disputed by the tribes and the U.S. government. Munz, who was known as a terrible shot, got out his .44 and took a potshot to try and scare the man away. To Munz' amazement he shot the man straight through the jugular vein. Munz was arrested, and reportedly paid a bail of around \$9,000 which he jumped, never to be seen again. The only sign of him now is Fritz Creek, which runs through the BK Ranch. (Helfrich 1974)

The BK got its name in 1890, when three brothers -- Henry, Ed and George Bloomingkamp -- bought the 1,240 acre property for \$7,000. Sometime in the early 1890s, Henry Bloomingkamp was digging an irrigation ditch from the North Fork Sprague over into the BK's flat pastures. Henry was blasting through a stretch of rocky ground. On one blast, he was hiding 300 yards away under a tree when it went off. But a rock "about the size of a turkey egg" sailed all that way, hit him square in the head, and killed him instantly. Despite this setback, the other two Bloomingkamps finished the ditch, which was almost certainly the first diversion for irrigation purposes built in the Upper Sprague and Sycan. This ditch is still in use today. (Helfrich 1974)

LIVESTOCK & FORAGE

By the time the Bloomingkamps named the BK in 1890, there were an ever increasing number of settlers in the Upper Sprague. The 1890 Census (in which the U.S. government officially announced the "closing of the frontier") counted 119 people in the Postal District. In 1905 the History of Central Oregon said that the town of Bly had "two general merchandise stores, two hotels, a saloon, and a livery barn." It also documented that 150 votes were cast in the last election, which would indicate an actual population of quite a bit more than that.

These early settlers appeared to be hard at work. Documents of the time give an indication of how much this area was already producing:

The products of this valley consist of horses, cattle, mules and sheep, although the latter are few in number. At least 1,000 head of cattle, 100 head of horses and a like number of mules are sold annually from this valley. The soil products are oats, red clover, alsike clover, Timothy and natural meadow hay. At least 4,000 tons of hay are cut annually (Stern 1965).

Some of the pressure for this level of production stems from the fact that this area was right next to the Klamath Indian Reservation, where at this time the raising of livestock of various sorts – but especially beef cattle – was being strongly encouraged at all levels. Initially, government officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other agencies sought to establish an economy for native people based on the raising of vegetable and grain crops, but because of the climate this failed rather miserably. However, it soon became clear that the reservation lands were ideal for livestock. As early as 1886, Indian Agents reported that there were 1,485 head of cattle, 3,640 head of horses, 340 mules, 195 hogs, and an uncounted number of sheep (Stern 1965). Many Indians became involved in the livestock trade, and many were very successful (Stern 1965).

In the late 19th century, as a result of the passing of a federal law known as the Dawes Act, many of the restrictions on non-Indian use of reservation grazing lands were relaxed or eliminated. When the reservation was first created only Indians could graze on the Indian land, but as the 19th century came to a close, more and more non-Indians were leasing allotments on the reservation. And because much of the reservation was unfenced, there was almost no control over how many animals were brought in. This resulted in somewhat of a boom in livestock numbers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which meant that the range immediately adjacent to the reservation, including almost all of the territory covered by this watershed assessment, experienced very heavy grazing pressure on practically a year-round basis. This particularly true of the Upper Sprague Valley, which was considered an ideal location for wintering.

It is often assumed that current livestock husbandry practices by deeded property owners are the cause of degraded ecological conditions in riparian or upland areas. But the most intense grazing pressure the Upper Sprague and Sycan watersheds have experienced took place from eighty to one hundred and twenty years ago. When the Fremont Forest Reserve (which included almost all of the non-reservation forested uplands in the assessment area) was established around the turn of the century, the new Forest Supervisor, Guy Ingram, identified overgrazing as one of his most serious problems:

In 1907, the ranges were overstocked and overgrazed. One of the most difficult problems was to reduce the numbers of stock on the forest. The first thing was to eliminate from the national forest all stock of owners who did not own ranch property, and limit the number of stock allowed each permittee. Ownership of ranch property was the vital subject for consideration in making a 50 percent reduction in the numbers of stock allowed on the forest. . . . In the early days it was difficult to determine which of the many grazing applicants should be given permits. When several applicants for the same range each claimed that they had been using the

range for the last twenty years, it was difficult to determine which were the best qualified. (Bach 1954)

This quote describes a situation in which large livestock interests from out of the area were turning out livestock on the same range as local producers. In addition, local producers themselves were turning out on the forest without any effective control over which animals went where, and without any knowledge of total livestock numbers. The result was a degraded range with a reduced capacity to produce forage for livestock. This is something that many local property owners recognized, which is why some of the strongest supporters of laws like the 1930 Taylor Grazing Act were local ranch owners, who were losing their summer forage base to large-scale livestock speculators.

THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

The pace of growth in the Upper Sprague and Sycan watersheds was fairly modest from the time William Gearhart arrived in 1872, through around 1928. This the year the Oregon, California and Eastern (OC&E) Railroad reached the town of Sprague River, and began its extension toward the town of Bly.

The logging industry had been in full swing in the Upper Klamath Basin since the railroad first arrived in Klamath Falls in 1909. From there, extensions of the line were built in all directions – first to the north toward the big stands of yellow pine around Upper Klamath Lake and Klamath Marsh, and then later toward the east. Timber interests had been aware of the massive stands in the region since the 1850s, but had been prevented from exploiting the stands because there was no way to get the lumber to market. This meant that when the railroads finally made it to an area, everyone was chomping at the bit to get things going.

The OC&E announced that they would build to Bly on May 5, 1928, and began work on June 20th. Just six days later the Pelican Bay Lumber Company announced that it would move their operation from northeast of Crater Lake to about twelve miles south of Bly, where they would establish a large logging camp, and build a logging railroad to meet up with the OC&E. A month later the Ewauna Box Company announced that it would buy the 37,000 acre Booth-Kelly Tract just east of Bly, and began buying right of way for its own logging line to meet up with the OC&E. The OC&E arrived in Bly in the winter of 1928-29, and in early spring of 1929 the first shipment of logs was made by Pelican Bay (Bowden 2003). In almost no time, the Upper Sprague and Sycan watersheds went from a quiet ranching community to a full-scale industrial timber economy.

In addition to Pelican Bay and Ewauna Box, Crane Mills built a mill right in the town of Bly, and in 1934 a man named Ed Ivory built a mill about ten miles northwest of Bly, on what is now known as Ivory Pine Road. The

Ivory Pine Company operated until 1948, and when the last log went through the mill had cut 250,000,000 feet of lumber.

The Pelican Bay Company Camp was located about eleven miles south of Bly, up the Fish Hole Creek drainage. In 1929 the *Klamath Herald* reported that the camp was “one of the largest logging camps in Oregon.”

With nearly 200 men employed and several locomotives, many “cats” and jammers in action, the virgin wilds have been transformed into life and activity little dreamed of before. . . . The Pelican Bay outfit is celebrated throughout the west for having the champion log loading crew. In May they broke the record by loading 71 cars ready for the mill in one day, a jump of nearly 20 cars over their own previous championship record. (Bowden 2003)

The Ewauna Box Company’s camp was set up near the pass at Quartz Mountain, and included a sizable community of temporary residences, a water system, a service station, and eventually its own post office. When the camp began operations it employed 28 sets of fallers, and was shipping 30 to 40 carloads of logs to Klamath Falls every day.

It should be mentioned that some of the drive to get out this level of cut stemmed not just from the profit motive, but from issues of forest health. In every account of the logging industry of that time, the problem of western bark beetle infestation is highlighted. During the years 1923 through 1928, a survey was conducted by the Forest Insect Laboratory of Stanford University, covering most of the forested upland in the northwest portion of the assessment area. Investigators determined that during this period a total of 450,000,000 board feet had been killed, the maximum loss occurring during 1926, when 120,000,000 board feet were killed. This loss was estimated to be approximately 10% of the total stand in this area. This report was released at almost exactly the time that the OC&E railroad reached Bly, which meant that private, tribal and public forestry managers were highly motivated to cut as much vulnerable timber as possible, just when it became physically possible to get the timber to market (Kinney 1950).

By the 1940s the Upper Sprague and Sycan watersheds were host to some of the most intense logging activity in the western United States. This logging took place on private lands, tribal lands, and public lands, but the most accessible records pertain to the Fremont National Forest, which included most of the forested uplands in the area covered by this assessment. In 1943, to give an indication of just how many trees were getting cut, the Fremont National Forest sold more logs than any other National Forest in the Pacific Northwest Region, including the coastal rainforests (Bach 1954). Table 2-1 shows the sales for that year. Please note that not all of these sales are within the area covered by this assessment (Bach 1954). But also keep in mind that this table does not include any harvest on private or tribal lands.

Table 2-1. Fremont National Forest Timber Sales in 1943. (Source: Bach 1954)

Bidder	Location	Board-Feet
Weyerhaeuser	Horseglades	16,000,000
Underwood	Mud Creek	2,500,000
Big Lakes Box	Tea Table	6,500,000
Adams Mill	Newell Creek	142,000
Ivory Pine	Meryl Creek	11,500,000
Lakeview Lumber	Dicks Creek	2,000,000
Anderson Brothers	Augur Creek	3,000,000
Adams Mill	Newell Creek	1,500,000
Crane Creek	McCoin Creek	2,000,000
Lakeview Lumber	Dog Creek	6,000,000
Goose Lake Box	Willow Creek	2,000,000
Big Lakes Box	Tag End	1,000,000
Anderson Brothers	Cougar Peak	6,000,000
Ivory Pine	Buzz Spring	3,000,000
Weyerhaeuser	Packsaddle	700,000
Big Lakes Box	Lost Creek	20,000
Shevlin-Hixon	Fringe	29,000,000
Goose Lake Box	Horseshoe	2,000,000

Further perspective on the logging activity of this period can be gained from Table 2-2, which gives annual sales in Million Board-Feet (MBF) for the seven-year period from 1946 through 1952 (Bach 1954). Again, keep in mind that these numbers do not include harvest on private or tribal lands.

Table 2-2. Fremont National Forest Total Annual Timber Harvest 1946-1952. (Source: Bach 1954)

Year	MBF
1946	73,070
1947	79,574
1948	102,145
1949	38,059
1950	134,524
1951	92,192
1952	85,174

In December of 1948, the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company bought all holdings of the Ewauna Box Company, including the Booth-Kelly Tract, the Quartz Mountain Unit, and the Bly Logging Company. A year later Weyerhaeuser bought the Longbell Tract, which encompassed most of the Long Creek Drainage in the northwest portion of the assessment area. To support these and other purchases, Weyerhaeuser established logging Camp Six on Ivory Pine Road, Camp Nine on the Summer Lake Rim, and later Camps 11 and 14 on the Klamath Falls-Silver Lake Road. Weyerhaeuser continued logging activity through 1970, when it purchased a small mill in the town of Bly from Modoc Lumber Company. They built a larger mill on the site, and there was enough activity that the Bley-Was and Pine Crest subdivisions had to be built to house the employees and their families (Drew 1979). During these years, Weyerhaeuser distinguished itself with the development of an innovative reforestation program, and by taking measures to protect riparian areas within their holdings. The mill in Bly was closed in 1981, and Weyerhaeuser sold the rest of their holdings in the area some ten years later. .

CONCLUSION

The Upper Sprague and Sycan watersheds were, and still are, ecological treasures. The high biological productivity of these areas has made it possible for plant, animal and human communities to thrive here for thousands of years. In more recent years, the area has produced food and fiber to meet the needs of a growing nation.

More recently still, efforts are underway to make sure that this high biological productivity is sustained over the long haul. Many changes have taken place on the land and in the streams over the last 150 years, and like anywhere else changes are made, it has been difficult to predict the long term consequences of those changes. In many cases, the changes led to great benefits. In other cases, the long-term consequences have not been quite what we intended, and today we have the opportunity to make adjustments where we think it makes sense.

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