

Table 2.3. Characteristics of the Jackson Creek Sub-basins.

Subbasin/Stream	Acres	Main Channel Length (ft.)	Minimum Elevation	Maximum Elevation	% land use/type
1. Dean Creek	1862	19,611	1,216	1,900	75% agricultural 25% forest
2. Horn Creek, Lower Jackson Cr.	4417	25,807 23,039	1,251 1,201	2,750 1,333	70% agricultural 29% forest 1% rural residential
3. Walker Creek	3356	18,285	1,400	3,080	30% agriculture 65% forest 5 % rural residential
4. Jacksonville	505	10,870	1,480	1,675	100% urban
5. Upper Jackson	6001	21,370	1,675	4,084	95% forest 5% wooded residential

2.3. History of the Jackson Creek Watershed.¹

The Jackson Creek watershed has been continuously modified by people since its settlement by Indian tribes some 6,000 years ago. There is evidence that Indians and early settlers burned Jackson Creek's forests regularly as a means of clearing underbrush for hunting and promoting the growth of tubers and seeds. Indians cleared the underbrush to ease their travel and to promote new shoot growth and acorn production. The early settlers burned to promote grass for livestock and to keep lands open for mining. Lightning also started many fires each summer, and since there was no means of controlling them, they would burn for months at a time. Journals from early explorers report that the valleys were usually thick with smoke all summer and fall. One account of the fires and their effects comes from The Jacksonville Sentinel, August 21, 1903, courtesy of the Southern Oregon Historical Society (SOHS);

"If the fires could be kept off the hills, in a few years they would be covered with a growth of fir, pine, oak and other trees that would make fuel and in time make logging timber."--- "The farmers and the town people should be equally interested with the timbermen in the preservation of the forests in this section, for tree-clad hills would mean less flooding in the winter and more water in the summer in the streams and the climate would be more equitable and not so dry and hot in the summer."

Early settlers were well aware of the importance of landscape management. In another person's view of the fires;

"One of the greatest pieces of folly is preventing fires to be set in the hills and government reservations until brush and undergrowth become so high and thick that when the inevitable fire comes the whole forest is destroyed. Old settlers and Indians know that the only safe method is to annually burn off the undergrowth, when it is so thin that it would not endanger the big trees. Then the grass can grow and you have a beautiful forest instead of a fire trap."(The Democratic

¹ The history of Jackson Creek was researched and written by Paul Kangas, Jacksonville City Forester, and Susan Cross.

Times, August 31, 1904)

Bare and fragile soils created by fires, miners and loggers were often subjected to high rainfall events and floods. The combination of these conditions created heavy erosion in Jackson Creek and its tributaries. One of these flood events took place in the winter after the 1955 Timber Mountain wildfire. The fire denuded thousands of acres of landscape, leaving little vegetation to hold the soil in place. The flood also caused great damage to the Jacksonville water system located in Jackson Creek.

2.3.1. Early Uses of Jackson Creek's Lower Valleys.

The valleys were developed very early for farming and orchards (see First Federal Township Survey T. 37 S. R. 2 W., December 1854, Courtesy of Jackson County Surveyors Office). Early settlers from eastern states noted that, "*Southern Oregon is pre-eminently a fruit-growing country, and with such is destined to rank second to none in the markets of the world.*"

Irrigation water was used in the Bear Creek valley as early as 1852, and, "*All available stream flow was taken by the early settlers under the donation claims laws*" (from the Mail Tribune, 1/1/1914, SOHS). In 1916, farmers put forward a proposal to form the Rogue River Canal Company to provide 30,000 acre feet of water to irrigate 20,000 acres (The Medford Sun, 12/17/1916, SOHS).

Early maps show that stream channels in the Jackson Creek watershed have been modified extensively through the years (1854 Surveyors map of T. 37 S. R.2 W. and other documents). John Black, a long-time resident living in the Forest Creek area stated that historically, large volumes of sediment were washed down many of the creeks as a result of hydraulic mining, causing streambeds in the valley to rise and streams to change direction. Along with those changes, the lower streams were greatly altered by irrigation activity. An 1854 map discloses where a portion of lower Griffin Creek, in sections 15 and 22, was likely re-routed to parallel Jackson Creek, rather than join it. Griffin Creek was then re-connected to a minor stream which enters Bear Creek upstream from the Jackson Creek- Bear Creek confluence. The early maps also show that Daisy Creek now flows into Griffin Creek, which now flows directly into Bear Creek. If these creeks were currently tributary to Jackson Creek, the watershed area of Jackson Creek would be more than double its present size. These stream changes may not be historically significant because they may have naturally changed course over time.

2.3.2. Mining Practices and Effects.

The impacts of early mining are apparent across the upper watershed. A considerable portion of the landscape for several miles around Jacksonville was heavily impacted (some say *churned*) by mining activity. Mineshafts, tailings, residence sites and water ditches remain from mining activity in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Surveyor's notes from 1854 stated that the North Fork of Jackson Creek, on the west boundary of section 31, had, "*extensive gold diggings which extend for some distance above and down to Jacksonville.*" The surveyors noted that, "*the surface of all the ravines in this mile have been dug over by miners in search of gold.*" (Jacksonville City. Survey, 37S- 2W, p.13; from the 1993 Historic and Cultural Resource

Inventory for the City of Jacksonville, prepared by George Kramer M.S., HP, Historic Preservation Consultant.) The digging occurred not only in the hills and valleys surrounding Jacksonville but also within the town and in tunnels beneath it. Evidence of mining can be found throughout the city and uplands, including numerous holes in the ground, shafts, tailings and several miles of contouring water ditches. Evidence of two water ditches can be found; one begins in the head of Miller Gulch in a natural wet area, "just below an old homestead site." It follows the south-facing slope of the drainage and once moved water eastward toward the mines to the west of Jacksonville. Another water ditch started at a "concrete dam" near the headwaters of Norling Gulch Creek and moved water eastward along the north facing slope and probably terminated near the historic Opp mine. (information on the Opp mine can be found at the SOHS.)

Two stamp mills, used to crush ore, were built on each fork of Jackson Creek. The one on the south fork was soon converted to a sawmill. The stamp mills were powered by steam, and the stamp mill on the west fork was used to process ore from the Opp mine. The Brickworks was located near the junction of the forks of Jackson Creek." The impact of these early activities on forest vegetation is reflected in the current landscape of the area today.

2.3.3. Logging and Sawmilling.

Logging and saw milling activity occurred simultaneously with the start of mining and community development in Jacksonville. An 1858 survey document indicates a sawmill was located at the confluence of the west and south forks of Jackson Creek. As described by John Black, another sawmill called the Iowa Lumber Company operated in later years in the Lily Prairie area. The sawmills of that era were powered by steam or water and the head-rig (main saw) was either circular or sash saws. Early logging was done with oxen and later by horses, followed by steam operated traction engines and crawler tractors. Early loggers were also farmers because they needed to provide feed for their draft animals.

An early resident reports, *"The old road up the west fork of Jackson Creek was near the creek, as was a sawmill. The road continued near, and usually in, the creek all the way up Norling Gulch Creek. When Model T's and Model A's were used for hauling logs, they often had to be eased down the steep roads with cables and chains. The railroad line followed close to the creek through the present-day Britt woods and climbed the south-facing slope of the west fork of Jackson Creek. The grade needed several switchbacks to arrive several hundred feet higher at its terminal point near the granite quarry on Cantrall Gulch Creek."* Evidence of the railroad grade can be found today. The railroad was used mainly for logging, and most of the black oak in the watershed was removed for fuelwood and for the steam engine at the stamp mill). The railroad stopped operating after an engine derailed, causing a fatality. Logging was well underway prior to World War I but subsided, along with mining during that period, as the labor force moved to support the Army."

Extensive logging activity occurred from the 1950's, in efforts to salvage burned timber, and continues to the present time. Boise Cascade Corporation did extensive logging in the Johns Peak and Miller Gulch areas in 1993 and re-logged the Johns Peak area in 1999. Most past and present logging activity was done with tractors, creating a rather dense network of skid trails throughout the watershed. Some of the older trails have re-vegetated and recovered. Other trails

have been re-used in recent logging entries and have not fully recovered with respect to soil and vegetation. Many of the logging trails have been used by recreational vehicles (off-highway vehicles) for decades and provide opportunities for re-vegetation and erosion control. Recovery work is particularly needed on granitic soils where disturbance has occurred and has not recovered.

2.3.4. Jacksonville's Water Supply.

The upper Jackson Creek watershed has been a critical source of water supply for over 100 years, and has had many historical impacts upon the region's ecology. An article in the Jacksonville Sentinel dated August 21, 1903 (courtesy SOHS) stated: "Jacksonville is most seriously in need of a better water service, for the present city water supply is so small in quantity that it is practically no service at all so far as fire protection goes and the supplying of the town for household purposes and irrigation." At that time, fire protection was accomplished by a series of cisterns.

The Jackson Creek dam was placed in service in 1912, about 1½ miles up the west fork of Jackson Creek. The new Jacksonville waterworks was claimed to be one of the best in the state and comparable in quality to Portland's system. Over the years that the reservoir supplied water to Jacksonville, the system was apparently plagued with problems such as siltation, water quality and high maintenance expense. The highly eroded condition of hillslopes and frequent flood events in the watershed probably caused many of the sedimentation problems.

Jackson County acquired the watershed property through tax foreclosures in the 1930's, and deeded a good share of the property to the City of Jacksonville. The deeds were probably prompted by the fact that Jacksonville already had built the dam for its waterworks. The Beekman estate later deeded a forty-acre tract at the reservoir to the City. Jacksonville now manages 1800 acres of forestland in the upper watershed and several smaller tracts closer to town, which were acquired through the Jacksonville Woodlands Association.

After several decades of using reservoir water, the City found a better quality water source in a mine to the northwest of the reservoir. A pipeline brought water past the dam and down to the large storage tank in the Britt woods. The reservoir water remained as a ready source in case it was needed for fire. Jacksonville eliminated the need for the reservoir water when it tied into the Medford water system in the 1950's.

The quality of the dam and reservoir (with no maintenance) has been diminishing for decades. The gate tower, which held the crank for opening the valve for the twelve-inch outlet pipe, collapsed into the reservoir. In 1955, a flood covered the outlet pipes (a 20 inch and 6 inch pipe) with trash and apparently jammed the gate valve. In an attempt to free the gate valve of trash, "a dynamite charge was set off near the gate valve"(long time local resident John Black). The charge did not clear the trash and apparently damaged the valve, thus the status of the outlet pipe and valve is unclear. The dam was officially abandoned in the 1960's when the concrete step gates were removed from the concrete spillway. The step gates allowed the reservoir level to be raised or lowered by placing a board or other barrier across the steps. With the steps removed, the reservoir could not raise above the spillway floor level. It was predicted in a

1960's report that "the reservoir would be filled with sediment in a few years."

Almost forty years later, the reservoir is 1.6 acres in size, stores up to 7 acre-feet of water and has a mean depth of 4.4 feet (see survey map of 7/30/98, on file). The City changed its municipal water right to an irrigation right in the 1960's, which was not initiated in a timely manner. The State Water Resources Department reviewed the water right, years later, and canceled all of the City's water rights for the reservoir in 1981. The City of Jacksonville is considering applying for a grant from the Oregon Department of Economic and Community Development to develop a new application for a water right for municipal water use to allow storage in the reservoir at its current capacity. The primary non-consumptive uses would include wildlife, wetlands, recreation, emergency fire, and sediment storage.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.