



Oregon Paleo Lands Institute

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OREGON PALEO LANDS CENTER



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Our Mission Statement

The Oregon Paleo Lands Institute works with the Gateway Communities of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument to build social and economic vitality through efforts:

To conserve and promote the region's ancient and living landscapes, including the Earth's most complete record of the Age of Mammals (past 65 million years).

To develop and connect, with partners, the region's visitor services, recreational services, and natural history education, that support Eastern Oregon's top destination.

To welcome visitors and area residents at the Oregon Paleo Lands Center.

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Tourism Kiosks Installed with Travel Oregon Grant Funds

A grant from Travel Oregon (the Oregon State Tourism Commission) matched funds from the John Day River Territory tourism group to install tourist information kiosks in Arlington, Prairie City, Wasco and Mitchell to welcome visitors entering the four-county region of Sherman, Gilliam, Grant and Wheeler Counties. The four counties representing the JDRT group jointly applied for and received a \$5000 Oregon Travel Commission Rural Tourism Studio grant matched with \$5000 in kind contributions. When complete, the total expenditure was \$10,740. A JDRT committee (including an OPLI representative) worked tirelessly to coordinate the effort, decide on designs and content, hire a contractor, and see that the project was done following quality standards. Though the kiosks were intended to be installed within a year of being approved, they were completed by March 2018.

The kiosks highlight the regions attractions and great places to stop and visit throughout the four county John Day River Territory and also identify annual events. Based on the success of the kiosk project, the city of Condon plans to apply for another grant to place a kiosk in their city park.

Want to Volunteer?

The Paleo Lands Center invites you, to meet the public and school groups at our educational hub of the John Day Basin.

Volunteers can serve as Board Members, Advisers, Center helpers and docents and help share exciting natural history exhibits, brochures, and books with visitors and schools.

Please Contact the Center at 541-763-4480 or paleolands@gmail.com for details and to schedule your times.

WHY THE JOHN DAY HAS NO DAMS: PART 2

Dams and massive floods on the John Day
By Lee Bouchard

The story of the dams that were and were not built on the John Day River cannot be told without telling the story of floods as well. The Columbia River basin has seen massive flooding for thousands of years. Typically, average spring river flow at The Dalles is 191,400 cubic feet per second (CFS). On June 6 and 7, 1894, the river was measured at 1,240,000 cfs. fed by many of the tributaries to the Columbia River above the city of The Dalles, Oregon. The John Day being one of those major tributaries.



PHOTO 1: JOHN DAY FLOOD AT I-84 1964 (USGS)

The first thorough analysis of the power potential of the Columbia River and its many tributaries was done in the 1920's. Congress directed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct many surveys and report back to Congress. In 1935 the Rivers and Harbor Act authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to build two major dams on the Columbia River system. The Bonneville Dam for hydropower and navigation and the Grand Coulee Dam for water storage, hydropower and flood control. The Columbia River flood in 1948 added flood control as another mission for the Bonneville Dam following the devastating Vanport Flood in Portland. Here water broke through a dike on May 29 killing 32 people, seven reported missing and never found. The community of 18,000 was completely destroyed.



PHOTO 2: May 16, 2011 FLOOD AT SERVICE CREEK

Back In the 1930's when the Army Corps of Engineers were surveying the Columbia Basin rivers for their hydroelectric potential they surveyed the John Day River for a dam site. They determined the best location for a hydroelectric dam on the river was at Picture Gorge near Dayville, where the State of Oregon and US Reclamation Service proposed an irrigation dam in 1916. After surveying, plans for the Corps dam were drawn and submitted along with a request for funding. The plans and funding for the dam vanished and all monies went to the war effort, on Dec. 7th, 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Today, there are no plans to build another dam on the John Day River.

However, there were two other low dams built on the river some time in the 1930's. Both were for irrigation and water storage. They were constructed with steel reinforced concrete. No one knows for certain who built the two dams and where the money came from for their construction. Pictured are remnants of smaller of the two dams, located at mile post 98 on Hwy. 19 above Spray, Or. Today the dam is completely gone due to a major flood in the late 1930's. Concrete footings where the dam once stood can still be seen today when the river drops and runs low and clear in late summer. Several miles below the dam site you can still find large concrete sections from the dam at the Spray City Park. Still buried in sand, rock and silt this is all that remains of this dam. You can see these remnant's although sections of the blocks are still buried. An engineer estimated these sections may weigh close to 1 ton, testimony to the power of raging flooding waters on the John Day River this far down the river from the dam site.



PHOTO 3: DAM REMNANTS AT SPRAY

The second dam built across the John Day River was located just below Rock Creek. (north of today's Cottonwood Canyon Park) This steel reinforced concrete dam was considerably larger than the dam built above Spray. Or. Harold Hines and I came across this large dam in 1958 while floating the John Day River (the very first to float the John Day River} in a surplus rubber raft. While rafting the river we saw the river slow and then become a massive lake. We continued to row for a long time until we could hear the roar of rushing water ahead of us. Soon we found ourselves on top a dam looking down on the river below us. It was quite a sight and totally unexpected. Thankfully, the builders had made an overflow spillway and a route for upstream migrating fish. The spillway was built across the face of the dam and down to the river below. We took our raft and rode the raging water down the spillway to the river below. We took in considerable water over the sides as we went.

What a ride it was! Reminiscent of a water slide in one of today's water parks. This dam is no longer evident today. Only where the dam was built in low clear waters in late summer. Like the dam above Spray, only the footings and floor of the dam can be seen today. I, and others rafting the river, have yet to see any remains of this large dam anywhere downstream. Amazingly, it is completely gone!!

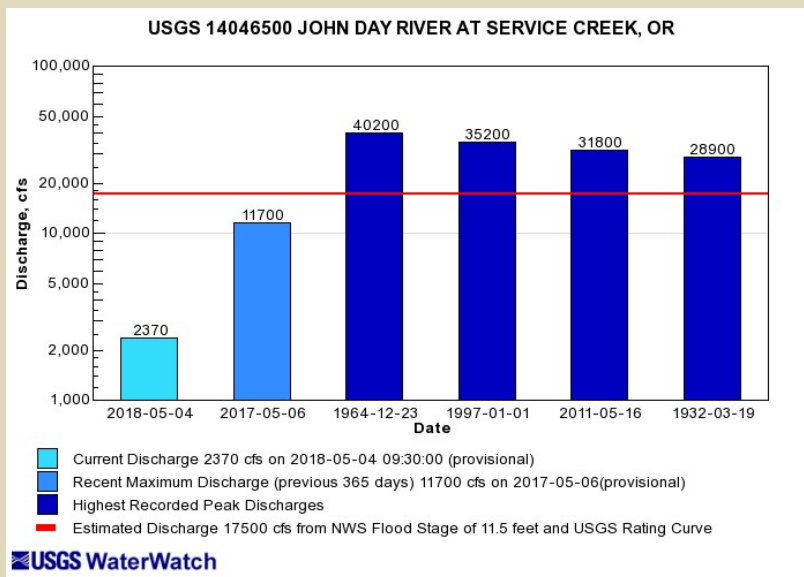


PHOTO /Chart 4: JOHN DAY FLOODS AT SERVICE CREEK (USGS)

We have discussed the issue of flooding for good reason. Floods and rushing river waters are responsible for the Columbia River Gorge and all of its tributaries. The John Day River is no exception. This river has a long history of floods. We often hear about massive 100-year floods. In reality they occur on the John Day about every 40 years. Historically speaking these floods have been observed, witnessed and recorded for well over 150 years. The flood on the John Day River in 1964 is a classic example. In 1996 is another good example. The 1964 flood ran at an estimated 64,000 cfs. at the river's mouth. This flood removed all bridges over the John Day River including the dam below Rock Creek. The bridges at Kimberly, Spray, Twickenham, Clarno, 30 mile and the 1-84 bridge at the mouth of the John Day River severely damaged or washed away altogether.

Waters were a foot deep over highway 19 in Kimberly. Spray Oregon was isolated and cut off completely between Service Creek and Kimberly due to high water over Hwy. 19. Another flood like the 1964 flood would likely wash clean part of the State Park at Cottonwood Canyon. The much smaller 1996 flood took away trees and all the picnic tables at the Service Creek park, boat launch and came over the highway. These two recent floods have altered the course and river bed over the years.

Today we can enjoy the John Day River in its wild and natural state. Free of dams thanks to WW II and floods.

SEE Part 1 Why the John Day Has No Dams June 2018 Newsletter
The 1916 plan for major dams at Picture Gorge, Kimberly,
Twickenham Online at:
<https://www.oregonpaleolandscenter.com/newsletters>

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