

“Crisis: Water. An examination of water quality conditions, programs and needs in Oregon's Willamette Valley, with special reference to the upper valley and the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area.” Central Lane Planning Council: Eugene, OR, 1968. (Reviewed by Elizabeth Parsons)

This report from the late 1960s covers the history of settlers in the Willamette Valley, the uses of the Willamette River, and the historical pollution and remediation attempts, as well as the (then) present-day conditions. They list the criteria for water pollution: 1) low levels of dissolved oxygen, 2) bacteriological quality, 3) temperature, and 4) suspended solids.

The authors point out that although some of the costs (of cleaning up the river, for example) can be calculated, others cannot (such as the cost of no longer being able to use a body of water for recreation, of the medical bills for health problems linked to the polluted water). Many swimmers avoid Fern Ridge Reservoir because of its murky appearance, but the authors point out that the water there is actually safer than at the McKenzie River at Hendricks Bridge, which many swimmers prefer.

The least polluted waters are those furthest away from human development, and the most polluted are the Willamette, the Mohawk, the Long Tom, Amazon Creek, the Coast Fork, and part of the McKenzie. These waters are polluted because of human contact, and they are also the waters most frequently used by humans. They list four main sources of pollution (which haven't changed much since then): municipal sewage, industrial wastes, individual on-site waste disposal, and improper land management and utilization.

In the section on current remediation efforts, they write that “although the upper Willamette Valley's water quality isn't as good as it should be, pollution is relatively well-controlled at this time thanks to the programs of federal, state, and local governments and private enterprise” (p. 41). In everything I've read, this is the first mention of the situation being well-controlled. It reflects the effective legislation established by Governor Tom McCall.

The report concludes with a list of recommendations, including financial incentives for low-polluting businesses, public education, and what sounds like the prototype of the Total Maximum Daily Load program. The report has an optimistic feel to it, in part because we know now that the Willamette River was able to be cleaned up, and can be so again in the future.

Critique

The report, although it includes technical information, is mostly written in layman's terminology. It provides a good overview of many different aspects of the river pollution (history, science, social impacts, and recommendations). It does not focus on human health effects, but mentions it in several sections. It is an interesting document to read (for the historical perspective) and relatively informative. However, the information is mostly irrelevant to the present situation, so I wouldn't recommend it to

someone looking for an up-to-date report. The Central Lane Planning Council sounds official but not particularly scientific, and lists its members as representatives of different districts within Lane County, not as specialists in the field or experts.

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