

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Willamette River, Oreg. "Letter from the Secretary of War transmitting report from the Chief of Engineers on Willamette River, Oreg., covering Navigation, Flood Control, Power Development, and Irrigation." Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932. (Reviewed by Susan Mershon)

This report was submitted to the House of Representatives, who ordered the survey of waterways in the West. It is a detailed survey of the Willamette River and its tributaries. It describes real and potential "improvements" of navigation, commerce, power development, flood control, and irrigation.

The main concern is power development. There were already power plants on the Clackamas River and at Willamette Falls at Oregon City. The report considers potential dam sites, reservoir capacities, and probable markets for power. It also includes the approximate cost and value of power developments.

The survey considers both Corps projects and private projects on the river, and each tributary in turn.

After evaluating these actions, the Chief of Engineers deemed them "favorable" or "unfavorable" to undertake. He recommended increasing the channel depth, and increasing the height of the Oregon City dam. He thought irrigating 500,000 additional acres in the Valley was feasible, by diverting stream flow from the tributaries with gravity, and manipulating total water flow with reservoirs.

There are numerous small charts in the pages of text, and some photographs of the river. There are many fold-out maps and large charts. Among the information is channel depth and river profiles and sections.

Critique

The bibliography is mostly *not* USACE sources. Rather, it contains studies from universities, especially OSU. For me, this makes the report more credible.

The fold-out black-and-white charts are beautiful and would photocopy nicely. Though the book is written in simple language, the information represented on the charts is over the head of a layman like me. I don't know how to read much of the graphical information represented.

I think the report is sincere and reliable, inside its scope: the feasibility of "developments" and "improvements." There is no consideration of wildlife or plant life. Discussion of ecosystem types, such as forest or wetlands, is limited to considering the lands for agriculture. Pollution is not considered. I find this strange because we know the river was extremely polluted in the 1930s.

I see this report representing the river as a resource to be actively used by the people of the Valley to make money. The framework doesn't allow for conserving the river as a beautiful resource essential to life. It is striking to compare this report with the *Willamette River Basin Planning Atlas* (2002). Both reports give a thorough assessment of the watershed, in order to better plan human actions in the

watershed, but the questions they ask are very different.

[return to info sources page](#)

[return to home page](#)