

History of a Place Timeline Camp Polk Meadow Preserve

Oregon Events

1843 The Organic Act

Oregon's first constitution, written by the pioneers, offers free land to attract more settlers and encourage farmers to spread out across the territory. Every adult can claim 320 acres; couples get 640 acres (1 square mile). Claims must be filed in Oregon City -- so that's where all wagon trains head.

1850 Oregon Donation Land Act

Congress passes a new Oregon land law. New settlers are allowed only half as much free land as earlier homesteaders. A census lists just 11,873 Oregonians.

1859 Oregon becomes the 33rd state

Camp Polk Events

Pre-history

Soils wash down from the eastern Cascades overlaying a volcanic base. Over time, a stream and surrounding meadow form. Meanders and oxbows create ideal spawning habitat for steelhead (a trout that lives in the ocean, but returns to freshwater spawning grounds). Around 8,000 BC, Native people of the mid-Columbia begin seasonal use of the meadow.

1843 First recorded visit

Lt. John C. Fremont and famed frontiersman Kit Carson travel through the meadow during a reconnaissance expedition. But the Oregon Trail is 50 miles to the north and settlers bypass the area en route to the fertile Willamette Valley.

1861 Opening central Oregon

Construction begins on the Santiam Wagon Road, forerunner of the Santiam Highway. The road will take

settlers, cattle and sheep from the Willamette Valley, back across the Cascades, to the open spaces of central Oregon where land is less expensive and better for grazing.

1865 Camp Polk established

Volunteer infantrymen establish Camp Polk on the bank of Squaw Creek (federal troops are busy fighting the Civil War). The troops are meant to protect workers on the Wagon Road from Indian attacks. But no attacks occur and the soldiers abandon camp in 1866.

1870 Hindman homesteads

Under the Homestead Act, Samuel Hindman claims the old Army site, taking advantage of the cleared land, natural springs and abandoned camp buildings. The Hindmans operate a road station at the site, offering shelter to travelers and livestock. Hindman also builds a barn to shelter animals and feed. The barn is used for 90 years. The old timber frame still stands in the meadow, 123 years after construction.

1870 Township is surveyed

General description of the area from the original survey map:

"The land in this township is nearly all level or gently rolling and covered with a fine growth of excellent bunch grass and scattering yellow pine timber of large size suitable for lumber. The[re] is considerable hay land yielding from two to four tons per acre, lying along small streams running through. There are 5 or 6 spell out these numbers unless they aren't spelled out in original document settlements made in this township all on or near the Willamette Valley and Cascade Mountain road. The township is valuable mainly for grazing purposes and for pine timber."

1891 America's first land trust is founded

1904 Water flows in Pilot Butte Canal

It takes three years to build the Pilot Butte Canal. Investors gladly fund construction because the Carey Act of 1894 offers free land to anyone willing to irrigate. Central Oregon becomes a major agricultural center and over 700 miles of canals are built to carry water to area farms. Nearly a century later, the Pilot Butte Canal remains in use.

1916 Deschutes County created from part of Crook County

1920s The timber industry rules

Large lumber companies are decimating the region's forests. One company alone can cut 200 million board feet a year. The industry provides jobs for loggers and sawyers resulting in a boom, quickly doubling, and even tripling, local populations. It takes two generations to cut down the forests, but in 1963 the last mill in Sisters shuts down.

1938 Bonneville Dam completed

1938 Native fish runs threatened

The completion of Bonneville Dam makes it hard for fish to reach upstream tributaries like Squaw Creek. Adult steelhead (ocean-going trout) must navigate the dam's fish ladders to reach the meadow's spawning habitat. It's an era when society cares less about fish and more about flood control, power generation and irrigation. By the 1970s, over 400 dams stand in the Columbia basin.

1940 Hindman family sells the old homestead

Martha Cobb, widow of Samuel Hindman's oldest son Charlie, dies with no heirs and owing a mortgage of \$2,200 on the meadow. Her estate is forced to sell the property for cash. The property is purchased for \$4,200 by Gussie and Doc Foley, who use the meadow to run sheep.

1964 Christmas floods kill 7, cost \$157 million

1965 Removing the flood plain

The Corps of Engineers is ordered to "correct" the Camp Polk flood plain to prevent future flooding. So the Corps cuts straight, deep channels to move creek water quickly downstream. The original stream banks and soil quickly dry out. Soon the entire meadow loses the ability to hold life-sustaining water during long, hot summers.

1973 Oregon Land Use Act

Oregon is one of the first states to deal with land-use planning and urban growth. SB 100 requires all cities and counties to adopt comprehensive land-use plans and regulations.

1978 Oregon's first land trust is created

1995 Deschutes Basin Land Trust

The population of Deschutes County is growing more than twice as fast as the rest of Oregon. Suburbs and housing developments are encroaching on open spaces.

Land use regulations aren't designed to protect small areas -- no matter how important. As a result, a small group of residents forms the land trust to provide alternative approaches to land conservation.

1997 Negotiations begin

The trust approaches the Anderson family, owners of the Camp Polk property, to talk about acquisition of the meadow -- a critical piece of the trust's plan to restore Squaw Creek as a steelhead spawning habitat.

2000 Oregon population up 20% in 10 years

2000 Camp Polk Meadow Preserve

In November, 145 acres of land and three acres of conservation easement are transferred to the trust. In 2001, the Corps of Engineers returns and begins to study methods for restoring the meadow's riparian habitat.