

**WHERE LIVING WATERS FLOW: AN OVERVIEW OF
ASHLAND'S WATER SOURCE**

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INTRODUCTION

The major water source for native peoples and later for settlers, Ashland Creek has sustained life in the upper Bear Creek Valley for thousands of years. Its generous flow determined Indian habitation sites and eventually the location of Ashland. From the stream they called Mill Creek, the first Euro-American settlers took water for drinking and cooking, powered a sawmill and a flour mill, and irrigated crops. Residents drew water from the creek in buckets, from wells, or received it through ditches that ran through town.

As the population grew, water pollution, drought, and fires increased. By the turn of the century, competing demands on Ashland Creek for water for domestic uses, fire protection, electric power generation, commerce, industry and agriculture frequently brought bitter conflict. Several times in the late nineteenth century, residents watched floodwaters cut through their fields taking barns and fences down its course. By the mid-1920s, consistent seasonal water shortages frayed citizen nerves and plagued City officials. For a few years following construction of a dam and reservoir in Ashland canyon the city had enough water. Later in the 20th century, distribution, water quality, water shortages and environmental concerns again challenged municipal leaders. In more recent years watershed management has grown more complex with the joint involvement of several agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service (Rogue River National Forest), and the State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Oregon State Department of Forestry.

Ashland citizens have always wanted plenty of clean water but often disagreed on how to obtain and pay for it. Changes came slowly as officials and residents wrestled to solve immediate needs and prepare for the future. The use and protection of its primary water source have always been critically important to Ashland. Most of the issues facing us now are not new. Cycles of debate over water quantity, quality, distribution, and disposal have repeated continually over the past 150 years.

Where Living Waters Flow: An Overview of Ashland's Water Source traces the watershed, weather, water shortages, other sources, distribution and water rights, as well as residents' and City government's roles in water resource management. A review of the past can help us make decisions about Ashland Creek, assess environmental issues, and understand how our decisions affect people's lives.

The continuity of water usage on Ashland Creek is a long one. In this hospitable place people have sustained life over thousands of years. During the last century, experience and technology have offered us a distinct perspective on the past – a view unavailable to those who came before us. Unlike people of previous centuries we have both the opportunity to review past human interaction with the watershed and to plan thoughtful choices for the future.

THE EARLY YEARS, 1852-1884

The explorers and trappers who passed through southern Oregon between 1825 and 1850, camped along the streams but moved on. In the winter of 1851-1852 miners discovered gold on Jackson Creek near the present site of Jacksonville and newcomers flooded into the area. At the same time, the Donation Land Claim Act, passed by Congress in 1850, encouraged settlers to head west in search of free, farmable land. In late 1851 a few cabins stood at scattered locations in the Bear Creek valley.

During the first week of 1852, Abel Helman and Eber Emery, miners-turned-settlers, crossed the Siskiyou Divide and stopped on the banks of what they soon called Mill Creek, now Ashland Creek. Here they built a sawmill, flour mill, boarding house and simple frame houses. The Oregon-California Trail passed near the little settlement and each year more wagons lurched over the ruts. Soon the north-south route made a permanent loop in front of the flour mill. By 1855 the small community of Ashland Mills had a post office, hotel, store, cabinet shop, livery, blacksmith shop and several homes. By 1864 Ashland Mills had fifty residents. In 1867 investors built the Ashland Woolen Mill on Ashland Creek and used waterpower to produce woolen underwear, shawls and blankets. A local resident's description of Ashland suggests a prosperous small community:

Ashland ... has a nice waterpower with one grist mill, one woolen factory, one planing mill, furniture factory, three sawing mills, one foundry, a soap and candle factory, one paper, three stores, three blacksmith shops, two shoe-makers, two tailors, two doctors, one hotel, one hardware store, but not a lawyer. ...¹

The water harnessed for power to run the mills also provided the main source of water for domestic and irrigation use. Ditches diverted water from Ashland Creek and carried it to different areas of town. The West Ashland Ditch served several properties. The Hargadine Ditch (constructed in 1854), the Million Ditch (1856), the Helman Ditch (1858) and the Smith-Myer-Roper Ditch (1864) also took Ashland Creek water for domestic and agricultural uses. The farmers who used these ditches held some of the earliest water rights on Ashland Creek. The fair use of these rights and perceived injustices often created intense discord among residents.

In December 1861, all Ashland residents as well as other Bear Creek Valley folk suddenly received more water than they needed. In mid-December 1861, the ground was saturated from heavy rainfall and as more rain fell, the snow pack melted and severe flooding began.

On the night of Friday, [the 6th] a heavy rain set in and continued to pour down heavily without interruption until Sunday evening... and in consequence [high water] spread over a considerable portion of the valley... the farmers along Bear Creek have suffered. One

gentleman who owns a farm on that stream tells us that, on Sunday he stood by and watched his property, in fences, float off at the rate of about one hundred dollars per hour....²

In 1874 however, despite it's beautiful setting and growing prosperity, Ashland had serious problems. Poor sanitation, frequent fires, muddy, rutted streets and water shortages plagued the town's 300 residents. Fires burned everywhere. Faced with a pressing need for public services, Ashland applied for incorporation and on October 13, 1874 the Oregon State Legislature granted the town a charter.

Water and sanitation problems continued. Stock ran loose, garbage lay everywhere, and outhouses were steeped in filth. Storm run-off drained directly into the creek. Contaminated streams, polluted wells and stagnant drainage water posed critical health dangers. On one occasion the newspaper warned that the water running down Main Street spread pestilence. The town board expressed concern over the broad prevalence of "fevers" in town. Officials' attempts to clean-up Ashland were largely unsuccessful.³ At one point the news editor stated that a "beautiful frog pond now adorns the public square, and the plaintive piping of the frogs at eventide accords harmoniously with the wail of the city Fathers, that "they can't help it."⁴ An exchange of letters in the local newspaper in 1876 indicates residents' divided opinions concerning pollution of Ashland Creek. One worried citizen wrote:

A great many children live near the ditch... [and] have a desire to play... in the water. In they go, hands, or head, or feet... If the hands and feet were all, I could stand that; but, well, I'll not say anymore for the children... Some "respectable" persons even indulge in emptying soap-suds not two rods above the stream knowing it cannot avoid going direct to the ditch. Some have a notion that near the ditch is a good place for the progressive development of young "canines"... Beef bones, chicken bones, bad bread, dish rags, and even old dirty pot-rags have been found lodged in the water, and you know not how long you have been drinking the nourishing qualities of such things. It is high time the people of Ashland were looking after the common beverage of this city.⁵

A resident responded:

The idea of nice running water being made dirty by children playing in it! He does not seem to know that flowing water purifies itself. With the fall the water ditch has, though two dozen boys were soaking in it at any given point by the time it had plunged and tumbled over two rocks it would be as pure and clean and when it first ran from the mountain's brow... We want our children to play in the water, because it's healthy for them and play in it they shall.

I saw [a man] washing his nose in the water... talk about filth after that! And was it not a man who put a dead dog to soak in the ditch? And is it not the men who delight to build their stables, pig pens, and other out-house close--jam upon the ditch? And is it not the men, who kill the fish, that get stinking, and have to be thrown in the water-ditch to get rid of them?⁶

Civic improvements were painfully slow. Money was scarce and many residents refused to support services they believed yielded no personal benefit. The lack of a municipal system limited the water supply for domestic use and hampered sanitation and fire protection efforts. In 1876, three Ashland homes burned while neighbors tried to quell the flames with water from Ashland Creek and the West Ashland Ditch.⁷

Citizens continued to depend on wells or water from creeks and ditches. The few wooden pipes installed in 1875 to bring water into the center of town were narrow and they leaked.⁸ Most summers the water supply ran out. Leading citizens suggested building a reservoir and piping system, but a lack of money and labor delayed action. Several residents dug wells to provide a good supply of necessary water. Some residents dug wells to provide necessary drinking water:

A large number of wells for drinking water have been made in Ashland this season. The water is generally good, and in very hot weather is much better for drinking than that carried a long distance through ditches in the hot sun.⁹

At 4:00 a.m. on March 11, 1879 disaster struck Ashland when a fire that began in the blacksmith's shop roared through the business district. Within an hour all the wooden buildings on the west side of the plaza were gone. In the week following the fire, the newspaper editor laid the blame squarely on Ashland's town board and citizens:

There is no town in the country where nature has done so much toward furnishing water works for such purposes, and where the people have done less... When affairs were in a prosperous condition, the light tax necessary to secure the much-needed protection, would not have been felt by those upon whom it would have fallen ... It behooves our citizens to move in the matter as soon as they shall have recovered from the blow which their past negligence has brought upon them.¹⁰

The lack of adequate fire protection sparked the initial effort to pipe water into the central part of town. In early August 1884, after a citizen committee report stressed the community's desperate need, the town board recommended that pipes be laid to various areas of town, and that hydrants be placed at strategic locations. The Ashland Tidings noted that "The Town Board seems to have been aroused, at last, to the necessity of some protection for the town against fire."¹¹

In 1884 a new ditch was constructed to provide water to residents in the southerly Ashland environs. The newspaper reported:

The water ditch on the east side of the creek; which is to take the water from the waste flume of the Messenger saw mill and run it across the ridge above the Hargadine estate, is now being made, and will prove of great value to the people on the hillside in the southern part of town.¹²

Ashland looked forward to the railroad's arrival. The line had reached Roseburg in 1872 before financial problems halted construction. By the early 1880's construction resumed and the rails pushed northward. In early 1884 Ashland's first big burst of growth was underway. Surveyors completed work on the new railroad addition that more than doubled Ashland's size almost overnight. The rails finally reached Ashland on April 16, 1884. Businesses reported that total sales had doubled. Eighty-nine new houses and twenty-two other buildings had been constructed by the end of the year.

This rapid growth intensified the difficulties that Ashland already faced -- no water system, no fire protection, chronically poor streets and sidewalks, and serious sanitation problems. Residents grew impatient with the town board's slow response to community needs. The board's responsibilities however, had increased dramatically during the decade. In December 1884, a committee drafted a new charter for incorporation as a city, with a mayor and city council to replace the town government.¹³ Ashland's need for a new form of government lay both in size and in changes to its population. Ashland citizens wanted leadership that would recognize different interests and allow them a more direct voice in their government.

At the end of 1884, Ashland was over thirty years old. Incorporated as a town for ten years, the community had grown substantially, but it lacked a water system, fire protection, and sanitation. With the railroad's arrival, Ashland residents faced tremendous additional pressures on their municipal water system.

CITY BEGINNINGS, 1885-1899

During the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century, the City of Ashland developed many critically important facilities. The water- piping system for fire protection was completed in 1887, the waterworks constructed in 1889-1890, and the electric power plant built in 1889. City government and the local newspaper generally supported these advances. Citizens' attitudes seemed often divided, as "progressive," supporters of public projects faced fellow residents who continually raised concerns about cost. Debates were often heated and progress was slow. This period also saw continued problems with sanitation and disease, increasing water shortages and a growing concern about future water availability. In 1893 the Ashland Creek Watershed was proclaimed a federal reserve.

On December 17, 1887 the rails from the north and south joined at Ashland and the town became the division point and working station for all passenger and freight trains through the area. Ten new additions to Ashland were platted in 1888. Thirty-four new dwellings were constructed in 1889. By 1890 lodging houses, saloons, restaurants, shops and warehouses formed a commercial district in the Railroad Addition where passengers, railroad crews and residents could trade without walking to the plaza. Ashland's population, which had numbered 841 in 1880, reached 1784 by 1890 – an 111 per cent gain in ten years.

As this period opened, the rapidly increasing number of residents put pressure on the city's water supply. Additional problems surfaced in 1885 when a hydraulic mining operation began work on the creek above town. In disgust, the newspaper editor wrote:

The mining in Ashland creek above the town makes the water unfit for drinking purposes, but of course the people of Ashland won't grumble. It is too much trouble to attend to the matter and the three hundred families in town will go on drinking mud for the benefit of two or three miners.¹⁴

When two months had passed with problem still unresolved, the editor wrote again:

The pollution of the water supply of Ashland by the trifling mining operations up the creek is an outrage which the citizens of the town should not tolerate [for] an instant. For nearly thirty years this pure mountain stream has furnished the people of Ashland with most of the water used by them for all purposes. It has given the town its location, its life, its character, and is today its main prop and its chief attraction....

Ashland has the right to demand that this stream be kept pure and to see it deliberately turned into the muddy tailrace of a mining claim

is exasperating enough to rouse a less sluggish people than ours to an immediate resentment...

The water is rendered wholly unfit for drinking, and most of the time, also, for any domestic uses, while people of experience in such matters declare that it is injured even for irrigating purposes. Already the damage done is more than temporary. If the mining were to be stopped finally today, it would be months before the stream would run again as clear as before the mining was begun...

... The town authorities should see that the nuisance is abated at once. [The miners] have recklessly damaged the water supply of the town to a degree which will compel the citizens to put an end to the mining sooner than might have been done had the miners been content to throw only a moderate quantity of mud down our throats.¹⁵

Although city officials repeatedly warned the miners, the men refused to slow their operation. Finally they were arrested on a misdemeanor charge for fouling the city's water supply. The two were sentenced to pay a \$10.00 fine plus costs, but chose to serve five days in jail rather than pay.¹⁶

In early 1886 Ashland citizens still fiercely debated whether to spend money on a fire engine or on water mains. The issue was expense. The Ashland Tidings supported the piping system and called for a five-inch pipe, yielding at least 120 pounds of pressure, to be laid from the creek above Marsh's Mill to the Plaza..¹⁷

In early July 1886 Mayor George Engle appointed the city council as a committee to meet with Ashland citizens regarding fire protection. The committee, with citizen input, was to determine what kind of protection residents wanted and how it would be financed.¹⁸ Prior to the meeting councilman Lyttleton wrote an open letter to the public in which he firmly supported purchasing equipment as the cheaper method of protection:

...In matters of expenditure of public money small tax payers have a right to be consulted, at least to the extent they are concerned; and that money collected from them for fire purposes should not be expended at the will alone of those paying \$10.00 and upward. In short, there should be no property qualification to entitle hearing on this question... Remembering that I was elected councilman less than a year ago ... and still believing that your interests will best be promoted by a fire extinguishing apparatus that will be available in all parts of the town, and the cost which will not irretrievably sink your city in debt, I advise you to make plain to the council your wish in the matter.¹⁹

At the meeting, residents favored the piping plan but believed the cost to be prohibitive. Proposed piping would cost \$6000 more than the \$1200 the fire fund currently on hand. The

council instructed the mayor to determine if \$6000 at eight percent could be obtained.²⁰ On August 6th the Ashland Tidings wrote:

... It is generally admitted that the best plan would be to lay a water main through the streets with fire plugs at convenient intervals and secure a fall from a point high up the creek, sufficient pressure to give all the force and quantity of water desired without the use of any engine. But the heavy expense which would be required precludes the possibility of laying the pipe all over town, and as only the most exposed business center could be given protection in that way now, many of the citizens object and think it would be better to buy a little hand engine that could be dragged anywhere in town.

...A majority of the city council favors the proposition to lay a pipe that will cover the business center and rest at that for the present
...Opposition to this proposition developed at once, and a meeting to consider the question was called...²¹

Citizens attending this meeting ruled that only property owners could vote on the resolution and that the votes were to be taken by ballot. Seven attendees approved the council's action, thirty-five voted against it. Those present appointed a committee to report the resolution vote at the next city council meeting.²² This committee, however, failed to attend the council meeting, and the governing body took no action on the issue.²³

In early September, with a vote of three to one, the council authorized the City to negotiate a loan of \$6,000 for "the purpose of establishing a water works or purchasing such fire apparatus as the present wants of the city may demand...."²⁴ The funds were available in October, but the project was stymied when some council members rebelled. The newspaper reported:

...The plans of the city council have been blocked and it appears that nothing further can be done in the matter at present. When the matter was discussed and the decision arrived at to borrow money and put in pipes with hydraulic pressure for fire protection, three members of the council, Messrs. Bish, Hill and Martin, voted together for the project. Mr. Lyttleton, the other member of the council, wanted a fire engine...

Afterwards, an agent of some fire engine house spent several days in Ashland and Martin promptly changed his mind and became a warm advocate of the engine plan. This leaves the council evenly divided on the question, but as the Mayor ... is known to favor the original plan of laying pipes, the two engine men, Lyttleton and Martin, have resorted to the novel method of blocking all business in the council by absenting themselves from the meetings and thus leaving the council without the quorum required for the legal transaction of business. Their object is to prevent any action in the

matter till after the annual election, which should occur on the first Monday in November, in the expectation of seeing a new council elected favorable to the purchase of a fire engine.²⁵

The editor questioned whether an election could be legally held until after a quorum of the council had met to appoint election judges as provided for in the city charter. The newspaper explained that if no election were held, "the present officers will hold over, and the blockaders will be beaten at their own game ... since they will expel themselves from the council by refusal to attend six consecutive regular meetings.... Meantime," the editor continued, "There is considerable other business besides water works which needs the attention of the council, and the spectacle of everything being neglected in this way is one calculated to make more than a few people thoroughly disgusted, to say the least."²⁶

In the few remaining weeks preceding the election, piping system proponents and the steam fire engine backers promoted their plans. Mayor Engle, backed by councilmen Hill and Bish, asserted that the piping system would cover the greater part of the town for the money. Supporters of the engine plan stated that pipe for the system had been underestimated and that it would always need repair. They warned that the water pipe would be expensive and, being only for fire protection, would produce no revenue by sale of the water. In addition, they stated, the taxation burden would be too much on local citizens. The fire engine would be cheaper, give better protection to all parts of the city, and go places the pipe wouldn't reach.²⁷



Ashland View, 1886, City of Ashland Collection

The November election brought out 221 voters. There were two slates of candidates proposed; one by the water pipe convention, and the other nominated by a group opposed to the water pipe at a meeting held a few days before the election. At the last minute, the water pipe system opponents adopted resolutions abandoning the engine idea entirely. They favored a plan to loan the \$6,000 in the fire fund to a responsible company that would lay the pipes for fire protection and then be able to sell water to citizens for domestic use.²⁸

The action of the anti-water pipe convention diffused the hotly debated issue that had divided the city council before the election. Mayoral candidate J.M. McCall and the "water pipe ticket," received 133 votes. Candidate W.F. Songer for the "equal protection ticket," received 84 votes.²⁹ The Tidings stated, "The people have spoken in unmistakable terms in favor of water pipe protection, and the council can now proceed with the matter knowing that they are endorsed by the people...."³⁰

In December 1886, twelve years after the town's incorporation and seven years after the disastrous Plaza fire, the council invited proposals to construct Ashland's water works. Major components of the project were the pipe on the creek to achieve a 140-foot fall, pipe for the rest of the system, the head works, and sixteen "double hydrants at appropriate points."³¹ On January 12, 1887, the city council authorized construction of the water works and agreed to pay John Barrett of Portland, Oregon, \$7,000 for the job.³²

In January, 1888 the new piping system and hydrants were tested when severe cold hit Ashland. Nearly all the house hydrants and small water pipes in town froze and residents carried water from wells and ditches. Although citizens feared fire, the local newspaper stated reassuringly:

...So far as the city water pipes are concerned, there need be no uneasiness. The pipes are buried deeply, and water is running through. The hydrants are made in such a way that they cannot be frozen, as all the water above the ground is allowed to escape from them when they are closed...³³

In April, Ashland residents observed a decrease in the amount of water in Ashland Creek and worried about water availability for the coming summer. The newspaper reported:

Parties who are taking water out of Ashland Creek say the volume of water is less for this time of year than has been noticed for a long time. The cause of this is probably due to the fact that, while we have been having very pleasant weather, there has been an entire absence of successive warm days and evenings combined, hence the large amount of snow on Ashland butte doesn't melt.³⁴

Early in 1889 Ashland became the first town in Jackson County to have electric power. Eight streetlights, ordered from New York, were placed in the central area.³⁵ The local paper reported:

Ashland Plaza was lighted for the first time last Friday by a 1200 candle power arc light suspended in one of the upper doorways of the Ashland Flouring Mills. The light was a bright surprise to most of our citizens... It was supplied with electricity by a small dynamo.³⁶

Power to run the system came from Ashland Creek. A plan for electric power was first discussed in late 1888 when a group including H.B. Carter and S.B. Galey organized the Ashland Electric Power and Light Company, incorporating with a capital stock of \$15,000. The company stated their purpose, "to establish, maintain and conduct a system of electric lights throughout the city of Ashland and adjacent country..."³⁷

Ashland Ordinance No. 62 granted a perpetual franchise to the company on January 30, 1889. The company sold stock, bought water rights and land, and soon purchased two Edison direct current dynamos – each with a sixteen-candle power capacity. The first plant was constructed on the present site of the tennis courts in Lithia Park.³⁸

On February 21, 1889 a new Ashland charter was filed with the Secretary of State. Work on the charter had seen extended and often bitter, debate. Opponents complained that it gave the council too much power in issues such as water rights, borrowing money, liquor control, and alteration of city limits, without going to a vote of the people.³⁹ Specifically, the council was empowered to borrow on "the faith of the city," money not exceeding \$50,000 for a new water works.⁴⁰

Although the water works built in 1887 helped fire protection efforts, the city badly needed a more comprehensive water system. The newspaper noted:

One of the pressing needs of Ashland is the establishment of a proper system of water works, which will supply the whole town through pipes and supersede the open ditches which now furnish the greater portion of the supply. The city already has a system of water pipes, laid for fire protection chiefly, which covers the business part of town, and furnishes water with a pressure sufficient to afford as much protection as is given by an ordinary fire engine.

The water committee of the last city council recommended that this system of pipes be extended as rapidly as could be done, till it covers all parts of town... Something should be done and done soon, to give the city an adequate water pipe system...⁴¹

The issue resulted in more political turmoil. On May 22, 1889, the city council set a special election for bonds for the city water system.⁴² In June 1889, the Tidings came out strongly for the proposal, explaining that the old ditches, which had supplied the city with water for years, were insufficient and a health menace. Critics of the proposal complained that the council had not sufficiently planned location for the pipes, that they had not

gathered adequate estimates of cost, and that they had no legal right to take enough water from the creek for a system.⁴³ The Ashland Tidings editor wrote:

It is a question of the gravest moment; an issue on which hangs the destiny of our city ... The ditches which have supplied the people and the city with water the years past cannot meet the requirements of today, to say nothing of the future. Open ditches, with water soaking the soil constantly along their course, a surplus running where it should not, and the ditches themselves catching surface washings, may do well enough for a hamlet, but as constructed and used in Ashland they become a positive menace to health in a town of the size of ours, even when the natural drainage is good.

In open canals so small, and of such length, running through dooryards and other yards, the water can be kept neither cool in hot weather nor pure at any time. Taken in pipes from a distance far enough up the creek to cover the whole town, the water supply will be the purest, the freshest, and the best of any city in America.⁴⁴

Citizens held a mass meeting on the plaza to hear speakers on both sides of the issue. Council member J.S. Walter presented the council's case, defended the plan, and described the system and costs. J.T. Bowditch spoke for the opponents. He said that the City had no definite information about plans and costs, and stated that "he didn't agree with Dr. Walter in anything." A project supporter said, "the city must have the water works..." adding, "Let the city get the water the best way it can, and let the council proceed in a business way and put in the best system of water works that can be had." S.B. Galey stood to speak for the opposition, but the crowd was impatient and tired and he moved to adjourn the meeting until the next week...⁴⁵ On election day, voters approved the water works proposal by a vote of 248 to 38. The newspaper stated:

Ashland followed her record of enterprise, pluck and progress last Thursday by a practically unanimous vote in favor of the proposition for a city bond for \$50,000 for waterworks... Of the 38 who voted against the proposition, nine-tenths will protest today that they want the new water works, but voted against the bond issue because... they can't possibly vote the same way that some of the neighbors do, or because it has become a habit to vote against any proposition made by the city government.⁴⁶

The Council accepted the proposal of the John Barrett Company in Portland, the corporation that had built the earlier system. The plan called for two components, an upper system to serve the hilly area above the Boulevard and North Main Street, and a lower system, to serve Iowa Street, Hargadine Street and the railroad area. The Bank of Ashland bought the water bonds in October 1889, and they went at a premium. Within a month the city accepted bids for construction of an open reservoir on upper Granite Street, pipe and

hauling. Officials began procuring rights of way for the system.⁴⁷ The Ashland Tidings described the project:

The pipe will give a fall of about 140 feet from the head to the level of the plaza, and will thus furnish all the pressure desired at the sixteen double hydrants... The head works include a dam across Ashland Creek, a flume 30 to forty feet long to carry the waters thence to the bulk-head, and a bulk-head 16 feet long, six feet deep and five feet wide, with divisions so as to allow free flow of water into the pipe – the whole creek if necessary-and yet afford a perfect screen to prevent all trash from entering.⁴⁸

Although the majority of citizens had supported the water works proposal, conflict over the project arose during the last six months of the year. The project superintendent, who was busy on another contract, was several months late beginning work in Ashland. The delay frustrated citizens who awaited water.⁴⁹ Some residents complained about the location of the water system, accusing water committee members of laying the largest mains near their own property. Other residents insinuated that there was a conspiracy among a few individuals to direct profit to themselves, by manipulating the disposal of the water bonds.⁵⁰

The Valley Record, lost no time in blaming the Republicans. The Democratic newspaper pointed out that after Mayor D.R. Mills had advertised the bids for \$50,000 in bonds, City Treasurer E.V. Carter, also the Bank of Ashland's cashier, had made sure that his bank got the bonds. The editor pointed out that Mayor Mills was coincidentally a stockholder and director in the Bank of Ashland.⁵¹ The newspaper went on to quote Section 17 of the new city charter that stipulated that "No member of the common council shall, during his term of office, be interested in any contract, the expenses of which are to be paid out of the city treasury."⁵²

Tensions increased as the December 1889 election neared. Citizens called a mass convention to nominate candidates for office. J.M. McCall placed incumbent D.R. Mills' name in nomination. C.W. Logan nominated H.C. Hill, who was made nominee of the convention. A dissatisfied group left this meeting and returned to the city council room, where members named Mayor D.R. Mills as their candidate. Each group selected its own slate of city candidates. H.C. Hill won with 215 votes to 170 votes for D.R. Mills.⁵³

The Valley Record editor described the election results:

The sentiment of the people was so outspoken that they would have defeated the once popular mayor [Mills] with the proverbial yellow dog as an opposition. The same intelligent community that had believed it to its public interest to elect this man by a majority of 200 out of 300 with a full vote polled, expressed itself only too willing to get rid of him by a large majority and put anything in his place.⁵⁴

The year 1890 began with terrible weather. In mid-January, the large accumulation of snow in the mountains halted railroad traffic over the Siskiyou, stranding passengers at Ashland. By the first of February, warm rains melted the snow and Ashland Creek quickly reached flood stage. At one point the high water threatened to halt the electricity production in the new plant by backing up over the wheel, but crews dug a new creek channel to divert the water away from the machinery.⁵⁵

Ashland Creek's flooding water cut out a large part of A.D. Helman's garden in a low area. Other residents who owned property along the creek in the lower areas of town lost fencing and valuable improved ground. Although damages were serious, the effect on Ashland in general was not as devastating as other floods. The Tidings stated:

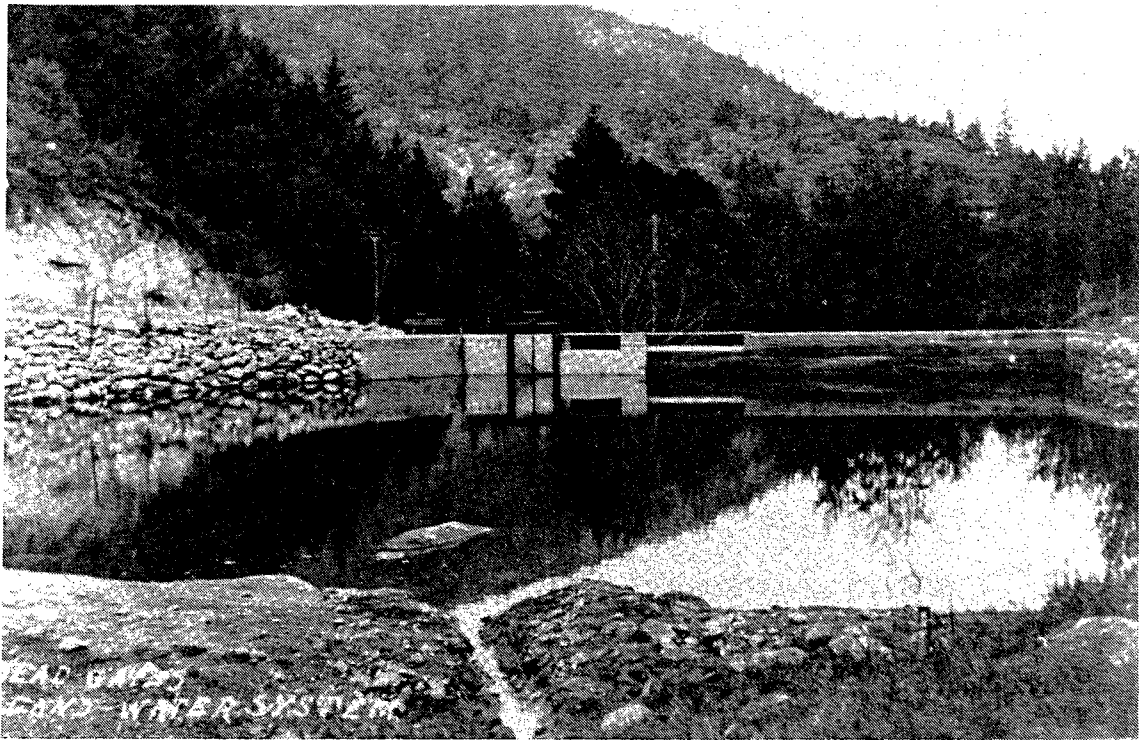
The high water of 1880 did great damage to the gardens and meadows on Ashland Creek below town, but this time, though there was more water, no damage of consequence has been done. A large channel and considerable work since to protect the lands, as well as a sharp lookout and prompt work yesterday, are to be thanked for the small extent of the damage this time.⁵⁶

Now that the flood has come and gone, and has given a second sample of how high Ashland Creek can rise in time of freshet, the people feel more secure than ever before from danger by high water to property in the lower part of town. It is shown that if the channel of the creek be kept clear in its comparatively straight course through town, the rapid fall will carry off safely as great a volume of water as can come from a flood even greater than any yet known here, and there need be no apprehension of danger unless it be from a phenomenal cloud burst or something of that nature. The clearing of the channel and walling the creek banks in places should be commenced now, however, to save the work of sandbagging the banks in one or two places where there is danger of cutting.⁵⁷

Construction on Ashland's new water system continued through the spring and summer of 1890. The work was finally finished near the end of October. The Tidings reported:

The whole town is practically covered with the pipes of the two systems... The supply of water is abundant and pure, and the pressure is sufficient to make the fire hydrants equal to a steam fire engine for fire purposes.⁵⁸

Although pleased with the new system, the Ashland Tidings editor regretted the delays in completing the project – delays that meant more cost to the city for digging the trenches and the loss of revenue that would have come in if the pipes had been ready for irrigation season.⁵⁹ Critics of the project submitted a complaint to the city council concerning the cost, condition and limitations of the new city water works. The council listened, but took no action.⁶⁰



Ashland Reservoir, Upper Granite Street, City of Ashland Collection

With the December 1890 election approaching, the Valley Record flayed promoters of the water works. They repeated their criticism of the Bank of Ashland, as well as of city officials who they still accused of conspiring to line their own pockets.⁶¹ The editor stated that government officials, water committee members, or their relatives, tapped the upper system where the pipes were largest. "The schemers tap from a pipe that could produce a flood worse than the Johnstown affair," whereas "people on the lower system that has 141 tappers into it, have not had an opportunity to quench their thirst from even a three-quarter inch pipe."⁶² Despite intense criticism from some citizens the municipal ticket, led by G.M. Grainger for mayor, won handily⁶³

By the following July, Ashland again experienced a reduction in its available water supply as the weather warmed and use increased. The city council passed Ordinance 103 regulating the use of city water.

The Ashland Forest Reserve, which consisted of most of the Ashland Creek Watershed, was created by presidential proclamation on September 23, 1893 to and officially recognized the area a municipal watershed preserve.

During the 1890's Ashland continued to experience a seasonal shortage of water. Each summer the supply ran low. In July 1896 the Ashland Tidings reported:

Many people having taps along the principal mains leave a faucet, and sometimes two or three of them open full force all of the time, with the result that other people who live in the suburbs or at a distance from the large mains are unable to get any water at all from their faucets.⁶⁴

The Superintendent of the Water Works published a notice:

It has been found that if everybody using water for irrigation purposes tries to irrigate at the same time, some persons get more water than they are entitled to, while others cannot get any. Therefore it is ordered by the fire and water committee that all persons living west and north of Ashland Creek may use water from the city water mains for irrigation and sprinkling lawns only on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of each week, and that all persons living east and south of Ashland Creek, use water for the said purposes only on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday of each week. The Supt. Of water works is instructed to turn off the water from any person who neglects to obey the foregoing regulation.⁶⁵

Two summers later the water shortage was great enough that the city council forbade the use of water for power. The Ashland Tidings reported:

The attention of the council was largely taken up with a consideration of the water question; the increasing scarcity of water; some persons get none, while other persons waste it. Some persons pay no attention to the rules made by the council for the use of water. What rules can be made that will be nearer equal to all parties?

For the present the council decided that all use of water for power purposes must be at once stopped; that any parties using the city water for running private electric lighting plants, must cease to use it for that purpose... The city will hire an extra man to see that the present rules and regulations are strictly lived up to.⁶⁶

At the close of the nineteenth century Ashland had basic water facilities in operation. An open reservoir lay above what is now Lithia Park; a pipe distribution system and fire hydrants served much of the city. Summer, however brought frequent water shortages and low water pressure often prevented effective use of fire equipment.

THE GROWING YEARS, 1900-1929

During the first two decades of the twentieth century the City accomplished watershed protection regulations, acquired water rights, battled regular water shortages, constructed dams on the forks of Ashland Creek, crafted agreements with the Talent Irrigation District, screened the domestic water supply and constructed Hosler Dam and Reeder Reservoir. Ashland established a solid interest in remaining independent regarding water issues.

Between 1900 and 1910 Ashland's population nearly doubled. Commercial development expanded out East Main Street, orchards were planted on Ashland hillsides. The flour mill was dismantled to make way for a city park and the Plaza and East Main Street were paved to accommodate automobiles. By 1910, with a population of 5020, Ashland flourished.

Ashland's seasonal low water supply curtailed domestic and agricultural water use. Each summer as irrigation uses increased, residents ran short of water. In 1902 after upper water system's main pipe burst, water problems became more severe. The newspaper reported:

The main pipe of the upper system of the water works, bursted last night for the second time this winter. The flood of last night and the bursting of the main washed out a tree and carried it down the canyon so that the branches rested on the new flume of the A.E.P. & L Co. which caused it to sag temporarily and reduced the power at the light plant. ⁶⁷

After an investigation, the city council voted to contact everyone claiming water rights on Ashland Creek and to propose the sale of the water rights to the City. The council requested that persons claiming these rights provide the officials with abstracts, deeds, or title papers indicating their legal entitlement. In April 1902, the council called a mass meeting to propose the sale of water rights. ⁶⁸ In September, with the water supply at a low, the City notified residents that all irrigation must cease. Those who disregarded the order would have their water turned off immediately.

In October 1902, the City purchased the water rights of the Ashland Manufacturing Company. ⁶⁹ The following winter, the council voted to replace ten-inch water pipes with eighteen-inch pipes. By June 1903, Ashland's superintendent of the waterworks had laid 6500 feet of water mains and lateral piping. ⁷⁰ Officials soon realized the City's need to control water use on Ashland Creek. In December, 1903 Ashland residents approved a measure authorizing the City to incur necessary expenses to control the water supply "for domestic, irrigation and municipal purposes within the city limits. ⁷¹ At the same time problems with debris in the watershed further affected both the water and sanitation. The Ashland Tidings editor wrote:

...A very few hundred dollars spent in clearing the channel of Ashland Creek of logs and vegetable matter, for a mile above the intake of the city's upper water mains, would not only conserve the

water supply but also prove a sanitary measure of great value to the people of Ashland.... Ashland's fine water supply must be maintained in quality and quantity...⁷²

Early in the twentieth century, the council faced the serious problems caused by the lack of sanitary sewers. Physicians had warned for years of dangerous health conditions and annual efforts to "cleanup filth and garbage" in the city netted only temporary results. Under direction of the council, engineers planned "complete system of sewerage for Ashland."⁷³ After surveying the city, the engineers estimated that a system could be installed for about \$20,000. The council adopted the plan in February, 1902 and discussed where to dump the sewage.⁷⁴ An election to authorize bonds for the new sewer system was set for April 26, 1902. City attorney E.D. Briggs spoke in favor of the proposed system:

Conditions have changed from ten years ago, when Ashland had a population of 1700 and property couldn't be given away. Now property was worth six times that much... As to the necessity of a sewer he had only to refer to the stench encountered in going along certain streets. It is a disgrace to Ashland."

Ashland voters defeated the sewer bonds three to one, with 106 votes for the system and 295 votes against it.⁷⁵ Infectious diseases continued to flourish and within a short time city officials constructed a pest house in the lower part of town to house people sick with typhoid.⁷⁶

The following year City officials tried again to acquire a sanitary sewer system for Ashland. The council promised that the sewage would not be disposed of in Ashland or Bear Creeks, but on ground owned or leased by the City, and handled by the most "approved sanitary methods practicable." The city would be divided into districts for sewerage service and service would not be obligatory in any district until:

...A majority of the residents of said district shall petition the council for it, but when so ordered the expense shall be borne by the residents of the district according to the assessment plan...⁷⁷

Resident J.K. Van Sant wrote in favor of the sewer:

Shall we have our beautiful little city a city of health or shall we vote in the coming election for typhoid fever and diphtheria. You are aware at the present time that there are a great many cases of typhoid in this city. Would you prefer yourself or friends to be stricken down with this terrible malady and pay your money for medicine and doctor bills or would you prefer to pay a little more for taxes?⁷⁸

An anonymous citizen wrote of "unspeakably vile" conditions:

The mountain breezes and sunshine keep the air sweet in great part, but at night when the breezes fail there arises in the lower levels of the town, a stench like that of a charnel house over a giant cesspool. The most beautiful mountain drives and the finest fruit in Oregon won't balance the daily inhalation of "all the well defined and separate stinks" to be found in the charming town of Ashland.⁷⁹

Every physician in town agreed that the sewer was needed, and they spoke up. Dr. Parsons cited "sixteen cases of typhoid fever on the 'flats' within the past two or three months," and noted that "anyone who passes through the lower part of town at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning cannot help but notice a stench which is very offensive."⁸⁰ Dr. Hicks stated that "The people living on the high places or hills should ... help the people in the hollow by voting for sewers..."⁸¹ "Of course we need sewers," said Dr. Brower. He continued:

In my opinion, if we had a sewer system and if our water was filtered, there would be about one doctor who would have to leave town... People who have used water from springs or wells or from that pipe at the S.P. roundhouse are the ones who have had the typhoid fever.⁸²

The Board of Trade reviewed Ashland Creek pollution problems and pledged their support for the city council. Reviewing water purity, Board president Morris read a letter from Dr. Gardiner, chief surgeon of the Southern Pacific Company in which he reported having treated a number of Ashland railroad men in the company's hospital the previous summer for typhoid fever. Dr. Gardiner recommended a thorough investigation of the water supply and of the watershed that drained into Ashland Creek.⁸³

Citizen committees walked the city to encourage support for the sewer measure. Residents noted the high number of typhoid cases in town during the summer months. On election day, October 19, 1903, voters overwhelmingly voted to borrow \$20,000 to install a city sewer system, 416 in favor and 89 against.⁸⁴ In June, 1904 the council passed Ordinance No. 235 prohibiting trespass, pollution or diversion of Ashland Creek.

Water shortages and intense concerns over Ashland's water supply led to the fraying of the long association between the City of Ashland and the Ashland Electric Power and Light Company. These water shortage problems and reduced financial resources encouraged the city council to consider operating a municipal power plant on its own. The council set an election for December 15, 1903 for voters to consider amending the city charter to establish and operate a City power and light plant. The issues submitted to voters included proposals to incur debt for water bonds and to establish an electric power and light plant.⁸⁵ Ashland voters passed the proposed charter amendments by a large vote.⁸⁶

In 1904, efforts to eliminate the AEP&L Company's hold in Ashland began in earnest. During the summer, heavy private water demand meant that the power company was

unable to provide adequate electricity and Ashland was soon without streetlights at night – a problem that continued until late October when water use declined.⁸⁷

The Ashland city council brought a suit against the AEP&L Company over water rights along the creek. City attorney Phipps argued that the company had no valid title to take water from Ashland Creek and was trespassing on the municipal water system. The power company denied the assertion, saying that the City water system encroached upon their rights.⁸⁸ The power company saw no option but to submit the case to circuit court. The majority of Ashland city council members agreed.⁸⁹ During the summer of 1905 the City of Ashland built a case to support their entitlement to water rights on the Creek. Their answer said, in part:

... The early settlers have continuously used the waters of the creek for domestic use and for irrigation through the Applegate, Hargadine, Walker and Million ditches on the east side, and through the West Ashland Ditches Nos. 1 and 2, the Anderson mining ditch and the Helman-Myer ditch on the west side and by the use of wooden water pipe as laterals from said ditches before the installation of the present water systems, and also quite generally from each of the mill ditches...

... In 1886 the many open ditches through the city became a menace to the growth and health of the city and it became necessary ... to supply the city of Ashland with a more efficient and complete water system... In 1887 the council appropriated all the waters of said creek to be taken and used as the growth of the city might require.⁹⁰

The City set a special election for June to authorize bonds in the amount of \$30,000 to purchase water rights on Ashland Creek. Although the turnout was small, voters overwhelmingly passed the measure at 182 votes and 9 votes against, enabling the city to purchase several water rights including those of the Ashland Flouring Mill and Ashland Iron Works.⁹¹

In August 1905 the AEP&L Company suddenly shut down their power plant, saying the engine was out of order because the City had taken all the water and they could not operate their machinery. The Tidings reported:

“For two nights last week, Ashland was in a position to enjoy the glorious moonlight undiluted with any of the devices of man... The soft rays emanating from earth’s greatest progeny, which showed nearly a full face, had a practical as well as the romantic appreciation of this public, as they lighted the way through the streets, which otherwise would have been as dark as Erebus.”⁹²

The two sides attempted an agreement, but power company suggestions that they use water from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m, and that the City have use in the daytime, did not meet with

council approval. The council expressed concerns about water availability for emergencies and refused to agree to anything except city ownership.

Late in 1905 AEP&L offered to sell its entire holdings in Ashland water rights, plant, poles and wires, and a contract with Condor Water and Power company at Gold Ray for cost and interest.⁹³ In mid-December the Tidings wrote:

The controversy... has been a disturbing factor in Ashland for several years, and has rent the city into factions and been detrimental in more ways than one, besides leaving the streets in darkness for many months past and engaging the city in expensive litigation...have been negotiated in a compromise through efforts of Mayor Butler... and receiving unanimous approval, the city council, enacted it into an ordinance....⁹⁴

The city council unanimously approved accepting the company's offer to sell, with ditches, power plant, water rights and land. The company kept its distribution system and continued to supply the City with power through a contract with Condor Company lines. These lines were being rushed toward Ashland from the Gold Ray Plant on the Rogue River.⁹⁵

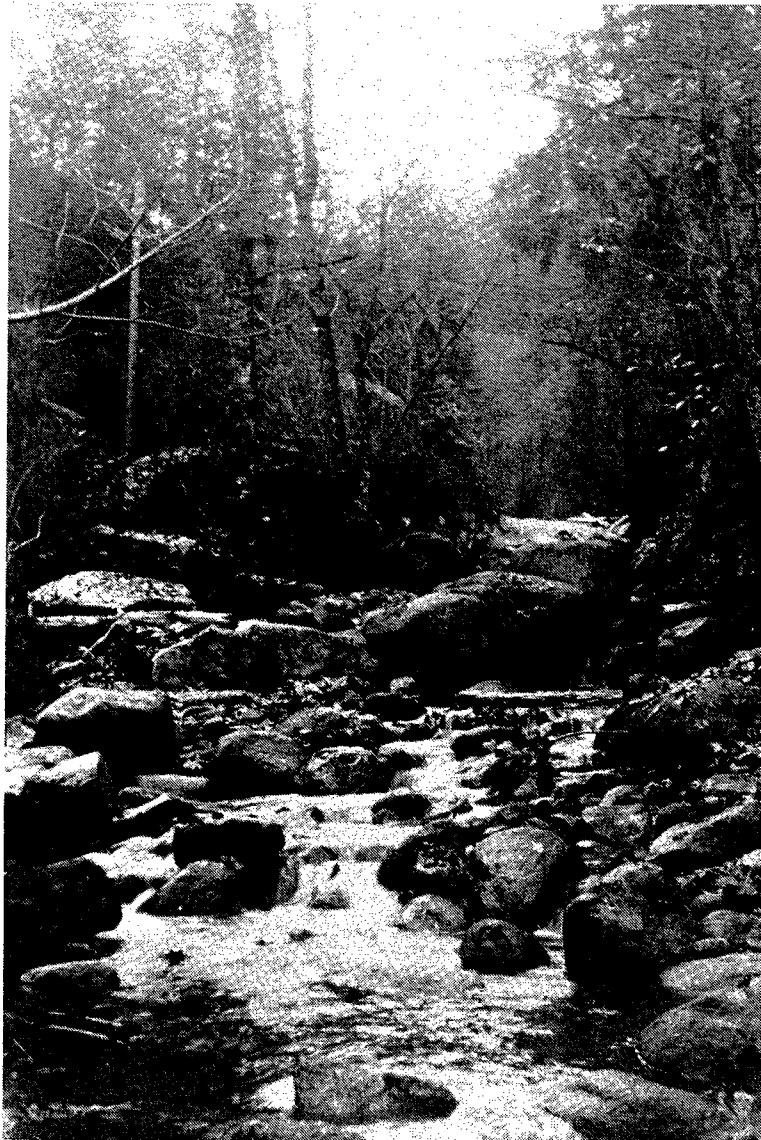
In 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt, by proclamation, redefined the Ashland Forest Reserve and added 136,900 acres to the area, most of which lay west of the Ashland Creek drainage. The Ashland Forest Reserve was soon absorbed into the Crater National Forest with headquarters in Medford. The creation of the Forest further protected the city's water supply.

In 1908 the city council engaged Portland engineer Frank C. Kelsey to survey Ashland Canyon and to estimate the available power for electricity and costs for development. The engineer estimated that the powerhouse, pipeline, water wheel, governor, generator, distributing system and other equipment would cost \$66,700.⁹⁶

Work continued at the new municipal powerhouse site through the winter and spring of 1909. On July 17, 1909 the City of Ashland signed a contract with Medford contractor Richard I. Stuart for construction of the new facility. By December, the plant was in operation. Council members reported that the "Ashland Municipal Electric Light plant and system is an asset, paying for itself and saving."⁹⁷

The city council set a special election for August 23, 1909 to authorize \$50,000 for re-funding of water bonds for the water works improvements. The bond issue passed.⁹⁸ Dams and small reservoirs were constructed on the east and west forks of Ashland creek to divert creek flow for power production and for domestic use in the high elevation sections of the city.

In November 1909, the City purchased the Anderson Mining Ditch for \$4000, thus acquiring one of the most important established water rights on Ashland Creek. The local newspaper explained:



Ashland Creek, City of Ashland Collection

The Anderson ditch has been the only recognized outstanding established right to the waters of Ashland Creek as against the rights already acquired by purchase or appropriation by the city, and its purchase will now leave the city in practically undisputed possession of not only all the waters of the stream, but of practically all the lands along it from the intake of the lower water system to the national forest reserve. The Anderson mining ditch was located in 1861. It is thought that the city can find it profitable to repair it in places needed and continue the sale of water from it, thereby earning the interest cost on the investment.⁹⁹

Pollution problems continued in Ashland Creek in early 1910. The council ordered the Water Committee to clean up the canyon and sent the police chief to examine the situation. The newspaper reported that, "Chief of Police Irwin verbally reported on condition of the creek up the canyon, finding the same to be far from a sanitary point of view, but encumbered with rubbish, which needed to be cleared out..."¹⁰⁰

In September 1910 the city council retained W.J. Roberts, a consulting civil engineer from Medford to investigate and make a full report on Ashland's water system. Roberts highlighted several issues for the council. The most critical defect in the system, Roberts stated, was the "total absence of any storage or reservoirs," resulting in an "overflow and waste at both intakes at night, leaving a shortage by day." Other problems included excessive pressure in the lower portions of the city, small mains, and too few fire hydrants to supply the growing city.¹⁰¹ Roberts recommended the eventual installation of meters and the construction of reservoirs having a combined capacity of at least 5 million gallons. He suggested that the City place one on Crowson Hill at the top of Terrace Street, and the other near Montana (Holly) Street near the head of Gresham Street.¹⁰²

In mid-November the city council accepted Roberts report and set an election for December 14, 1910. Supporters of improvements to the water system described it as one of patches "from beginning to end," that needed reconstruction. Opponents pointed to "excessive bond burdens" and stated that existing obligations ought to be liquidated before assuming new ones. They called attention to the municipal electric plant still uncompleted.¹⁰³ When votes were counted, out of 602 votes cast in the election, 210 citizens voted for the water bonding plan, and 392 voted against it. The city council faced repairing the system somehow.¹⁰⁴

On May 10, 1911 another special election was held to vote on \$27,000 bonds for improvements to the water works. This time no reservoir was included, but the purpose was to substitute a large pipe in the upper part of the system. The City was already at work on a concrete dam and new intake, using proceeds accruing from the water system itself.¹⁰⁵ Election results showed that 231 voters opposed the plan while 98 residents supported it. In explaining the defeat, The Tidings cited citizen belief that the new pipe was not necessary and believed that it was not the right season to start the project.¹⁰⁶

The City government's money problems continued in 1911. The city council approved an ordinance forbidding any purchase of \$50 or more without approval, except in emergency concerning streets or in the water system or electric plant. The Ashland Tidings reported a "shake-up in the city council" regarding how the council juggles money. Council members differed on the need for strict economy, and the paper reported the "city is having trouble paying its bills."¹⁰⁷

In the fall of 1912, City Engineer F.H. Walker reported to the council's water committee on his recent investigations in Ashland Creek Canyon as to "the possibilities as to the building of dams and reservoirs to increase the city's storage capabilities and possibly waterpower for the electric light plant." Engineer Walker closed his report, saying, "... The necessity of additional water for city use is bound to come to us at no distant day."¹⁰⁸ The council discussed the Walker's report but took no formal action.

In November, 1913, the City ordered water meters and installed them in several locations. Within a year, however, the meters were determined as impractical due to considerable sediment in Ashland's water.¹⁰⁹

In April, 1914, City crews completed laying a 3000 feet of new twenty-four-inch pipe water main in Ashland Canyon. The local newspaper enthusiastically reported that "at least fifty percent more water can be delivered at the top of Crowson Hill than has been possible before."¹¹⁰ That summer, despite the new pipe, Ashland's water supply again ran short. In July the council issued a notice to water users to conserve and set regulations for alternate days for irrigation.¹¹¹

With the city's problems with water storage still unsolved, City Engineer Walker found a possible solution on a summer day in 1916, "while on a ramble up the left fork of Ashland Creek." Struck by the possibility of the location for a big storage reservoir he surveyed the site and prepared a thorough report for the city council. Walker estimated the storage capacity of a reservoir at this site as 25 million gallons, about twenty-five times the capacity of the city's lower reservoir, and fifty times the capacity of the upper reservoirs built for the electric plant. The Tidings reported that:

It was not the intention of the council to plan any such construction at present, but that some day the reservoir will be needed is conceded, and Mr. Walker's report will be filed so that when the need of more storage becomes imperative it can be used as most valuable data.¹¹²

In August 1918, the seasonal water shortage prompted the council to pass a new law eliminating lawns and parks and from sprinkling and irrigation privileges until further notice. Several property owners living in the higher portions of the city appeared before the council and petitioned for sufficient water to save their growing crops.¹¹³

The years following World War I saw new growth in Ashland despite the failure of several old institutions, including the natatorium, the Chautauqua, and hopes for a resort

city. In 1923, a group of Ashland businessmen, determined to revive the town, planned construction of a nine-story hotel. The Lithia Springs Hotel, which opened in 1925, became an important part of the commercial district development. The new endeavor could not, however, offset the devastating affect of the new Southern Pacific Railroad's cut-off between Weed and Eugene. In 1927 many railroad men moved away from Ashland. Houses were left vacant, landlords lost tenants and schools lost pupils. Money was tight in Ashland and running the city was difficult.

In 1919, the city council instructed the water department to estimate the cost of a screen at the power plant to keep out debris so water meters could be installed.¹¹⁴ Potential water shortages were noticed as early as April 1919. The Ashland Tidings editor wrote:

The city contracts with citizens to supply the water necessary for their lawns and gardens at a season price of \$8.00 per acre. Last year and the years before they paid the bill, but the water was not supplied. There has been a water shortage of greater or less degree every year since the writer has knowledge of Ashland. The people have paid for the water but the city has not supplied it in sufficient quantities to meet the demand. Ashland should set about at once with its plans for future water supply.¹¹⁵

In October 1919 an Oregon House of Representatives Report reviewed proposed legislation to add tracts of land "for protection of the water supply" of Ashland and several other Oregon cities. Bill HR 8028 was modified to provide for cutting timber only when the Secretary of Agriculture finds that such cutting may be done "without detriment to the purity of or depletion of the water supply..." In February 1920 the Senate passed the measure.¹¹⁶

In the spring of 1920 critical water problems remained unsolved. Local citizens petitioned the council to research means for providing an increase of water at once. Mayor Lamkin responded, saying that one of his hoped-for projects had been the construction of two dams up in the canyon to facilitate the water supply. He explained that World War I had ended all civic improvements and that the post-war shortage of labor and increased costs had made it impossible. The mayor stated that he now favored a water supply that would allow plenty of water for domestic purposes and for electric power only.¹¹⁷ The City engineer explained that the community needed "simply a water system for domestic purposes, not an irrigation system." "Under ordinary conditions," he said:

The system is sufficient for the purpose for which it was designed, and with the exceptions of unusually dry seasons, Ashland has an exceptionally good supply. This will not answer for acreage purposes however, and if that is what is demanded, it will mean an immense outlay, and necessitate the bringing of water from a great distance.¹¹⁸

The city council ordered Walker and the water department to investigate data concerning the amount of water that might be available, the best location for dams, and careful cost estimates.¹¹⁹

Ashland tempers grew short during the extreme drought of the summer of 1920. Little rain fell during the spring and irrigation rates were increased. In August the council implemented strict water use regulations and laws to be enforced. The council studied the need for an election and bonding for improvements to the system.¹²⁰ The Ashland Tidings editor wrote:

Not only is the lack of water apparent to promote the beauty of Ashland, but it is becoming absolutely essential to devise some means of obtaining more for domestic purposes. At the present low water period those who live in the hill districts are almost destitute of water on days when the lower sections of the city are being irrigated. There are many homes where only the merest trickle of water comes from the faucets at these times. These people cannot get enough water for ordinary household usage, for several hours during the days when irrigation is carried on below them. What is going to be done about it? Are we going to let Ashland revert to the desert?¹²¹

Talent Irrigation Project Director, F.C. Dillard and City Engineer, Walker, searched Ashland Canyon for suitable conditions to extend Ashland's water supply. While Dillard agreed with the local water commission that a reservoir site on the west fork of the creek was a good one, he stated that it would be advisable to investigate all sources in the hope of obtaining a site nearer the city.¹²² No solution was found.

In September 1920, the City held two important elections to vote on separate propositions for improvement to the water supply. One proposal called for the erection of an earthen dam and reservoir to store sufficient additional water in addition to the existing facility. The second proposal would authorize the council to issue bonds not exceeding \$100,000 to purchase land in Township 38 South, Range 5, known as the Buck Lake property, and pipe water to Ashland. Discussion regarding the two choices was lively, and most citizens realized the importance of the issue.¹²³ In the first election only twenty-five percent of eligible voters went to the polls. They voted 556 for the dam and 143 against it. In the following week's election, purchase of the privately owned Buck Lake property was defeated with 833 against the project and 60 votes in favor.¹²⁴

Following the elections, the City contracted with D.C. Henny, consulting engineer from Portland, Oregon. Engineer Henny inspected the proposed dam site at the head of the West Fork of Ashland Creek. The engineer concluded that construction of a reservoir at this site presented problems connected with other features of the city water supply system and offered suggestions for other means for preventing the shortages. Henny concluded that the available minimum supply of Ashland Creek was ample to meet maximum legitimate demands of all water users, including usual losses and waste, and that shortage of

the water supply in midsummer was probably due to excessive waste. He stated that no relief measures were likely to be permanently effective unless excessive waste was checked. He recommended that the irrigation supply be measured and charged for by quantity and placed on a rotation basis.

Other recommendations included installing pressure regulating gates, measuring water taken into the pipe system, and closing open pipe ends. Measuring water use during the winter would indicate the amount of waste in the domestic system. If excessive waste were discovered, a house to house inspection, with meters installed for individual users and reduction of pressure, should be effected. The general introduction of meters is certain, however, to be more effective, payment of water charges being made dependent on water consumed.

Henny suggested that construction of a reservoir on West Fork be deferred until "the necessity for it is more fully demonstrated than at present" but said, "If such reservoir should prove desirable, an entirely safe dam can be built at the site selected."¹²⁵ The Ashland City Council voiced support for Henny's recommendations and decided to try to control the present supply of water through metering, rotating water use in various zones, and by eliminating all waste.

In July 1921 the Oregon State Board of Health warned the City that its water supply was contaminated and recommended that the city own and control the entire watershed and install a temporary chlorination plant. After investigating various options, the city council purchased chlorination machines. Water Superintendent Hosler was instructed to construct a building to house the equipment.¹²⁶

Development of the water system project approved in 1920 was delayed because the city experienced financial difficulties. In 1922, the citizens demanded to know the status of the project they had approved. At the request of the council, City Engineer Walker responded to a petition signed by several citizens for construction of a reservoir in the watershed. He said :

The benefits to the city at large would justify the construction of a reservoir for domestic use only, when the shortage for such use is more real than it is at present... For the city to construct a reservoir at this time for what appears to be largely irrigation necessities of the individual owners, is asking far too much of the city at large, and far too little of the irrigator.¹²⁷

In October 1923, the Ashland City Council voted to acquire permanent stored water rights from the Talent Irrigation District for 800-acre feet of water per year. (The amount was later reduced to 600 feet).¹²⁸ Several Ashland residents protested that the purchase had been agreed upon without the vote of the people and took their case to court. In January 1925, the Ashland Tidings reported that the City had won the case. The article stated:

By a decision rendered by the Oregon Supreme Court yesterday, the contract with the Talent Irrigation District was validated in all particulars, together with the special obligation notes issued in connection therewith.... There was a group who opposed the council purchasing the Talent water without an election, but the Mayor and the council, believing that there was no necessity for the expense of an election on account of the revenues of the water department, went ahead on their own initiative.¹²⁹

The City engineer enthusiastically supported obtaining a perpetual right to water from the Talent Irrigation District, stating that it would cost no more than constructing one reservoir in our canyon, but "furnish us five times the amount of water." He explained that the Emigrant Creek Reservoir would hopefully be constructed in the next year, and that the city could then contract with the Talent Irrigation District.¹³⁰

Requiring no elaborate piping system, this water could be used for irrigation and thus allow the entire amount of water in the city pipe system to be used in the dry season for domestic purposes.¹³¹ Engineer Walker stated, "I feel that in so strongly recommending this plan I am supporting the best prospect our acreage owners will ever have for irrigation, not only for a few years in advance but for all time if so desired."¹³²

In February, 1924 yet another study was made of sources for additional water supply. At Walker's request, engineer Fred Henshaw investigated additional water supply sources. After reviewing all the past reports and proposals under consideration, Henshaw concluded:

The proposed extension of the Talent Irrigation System in 1924 to include Emigrant Gap Reservoir and Ashland lateral, will conclude irrigation development in the upper portion of Rogue River Valley for many years to come. It presents the only opportunity for Ashland to secure ample and relatively cheap water for irrigation.¹³³

The difficulties with the water supply reached a critical point in 1924. During the extreme drought of that summer, "parkways and private lawns quickly took on the aspect of a desert and furnished the city considerable free advertising of a damaging nature by auto tourists and others."¹³⁴ In September, as the drought season continued, the City hired engineer Stuart McKissick to prepare another report on the possibilities of water storage in Ashland Canyon. In justifying the necessity for yet another report, McKissick explained the need for a reservoir and said that an exhaustive investigation of the entire Ashland watershed was needed "so that the project could be presented to the voters in a form that would assure a successful plan."¹³⁵

Having surveyed what he believed to be every possible site, McKissick reported that Ashland Canyon lacked any possible natural storage possibilities. He described the four best of eight possible sites for a water storage facility in combination with a good dam site. Explaining the advantages and disadvantages of each, McKissick concluded:

...It is held to be clearly demonstrated that absolutely no storage exists anywhere in the canyon that the city can at the present time afford to seriously consider as water relief, for a great many years to come, the great expenditure being out of all proportion to the meager results obtained.¹³⁶

In August 1926, Mayor Wiley supported building a storage dam in the canyon and placed the issue on the November 1926 ballot.¹³⁷ Engineers estimated the cost of a reservoir in Ashland Canyon at \$351,000. The council considered other options including building a reservoir on Crowson Hill and purchasing additional water from Talent Irrigation District. In September the city council agreed to ask the voters in November to authorize municipal bonds of \$465,000 for improvements, extensions and additions to the city's municipal water system. Chief among the proposed improvements was construction of another dam in Ashland Creek Canyon. The dam was planned to provide an additional 20 million gallons of water for a ninety-day period. The measure also included building a distribution reservoir on the Crowson Hill site and improving the present system.¹³⁸

At the council's instructions, in September 1926, C.A. Malone, Superintendent of the City Electric Department, appraised the City water system and to make recommendations for the proper conservation and distribution of the water supply. In strongly supporting metering, Malone reported:

The flat rate method of charging for water service is a heritage to us from pioneers in the water-works field, thereby carrying the approval of long custom, together with the approval of the wasteful user, because it winks at his extravagance at public expense. It seems to devolve wholly on the water-works men to gradually make obsolete the flat rate system. Flat rate charges or assessments are admittedly inequitable and conducive to wasteful habits, but being yet with us, they should always appear in excess of meter rate charges, for the same amount of service, with the hope that such a practice will create converts to the metered or measured service method.¹³⁹

In the ensuing weeks preceding the November election, the Tidings carried a series of articles that discussed Ashland's water situation. In the first of these columns the editor stated that although Ashland residents wanted an adequate water supply, they also "want to know how and why and where their money is being spent." He wrote:

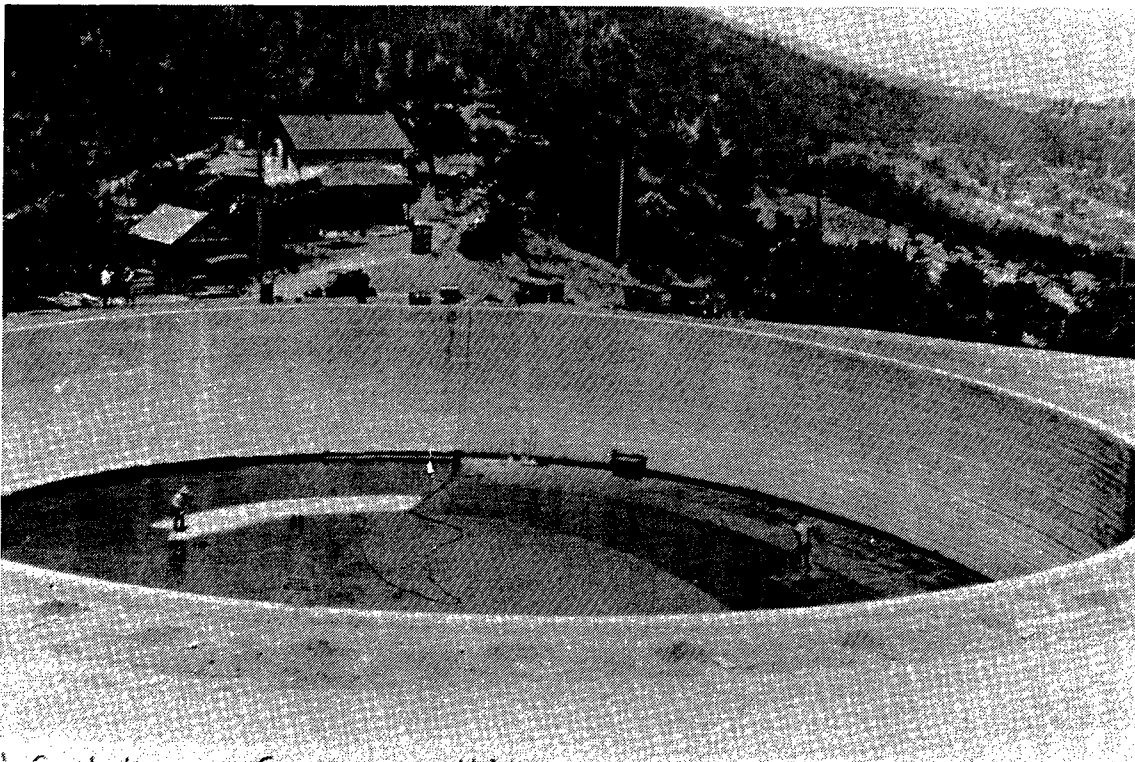
During the past summer months – and even today – the people of Ashland have learned to their sorrow and financial loss that the present municipal water supply is inadequate. Parched lawns, burned-up home gardens and drooping fruit trees stand out today as living skeletons of the drought which Ashland has experienced.¹⁴⁰

In the November 1926 election, residents voted to acquire T.I.D. water 691 yes to 540 no, and passed the water bonds with a vote of 665 in favor and 611 against the measure.¹⁴¹

Early 1927 brought another flood in Ashland. On February 21, 1927 the Ashland Tidings reported that “an unestimatable amount of damage [occurred] when the bridge on Water Street was completely washed out, while the one on Van Ness Avenue and two in the canyon were badly damaged.” During ensuing weeks workers cleared the slides and repaired the many washed out bridges.

Recognizing that the contract for the dam would not be let before August 1927, and that it could not be completed during the year, the council unanimously approved a new water policy. Expenditures were predicted to be in excess of \$125,000 during the winter, spring and summer of 1927. The policy included the following provisions:

1. Replacement of Lithia Spring pipeline.
2. Construction of a concrete by-pass around lower intake in the canyon.
3. Construction of Crowson Hill Reservoir.



Crowson Reservoir, 1927, City of Ashland Collection

4. Installation of new distribution system.
5. Extension of Talent Irrigation service to the Normal School, park and to private consumers wherever practicable.
6. Gradual installation of meters.
7. Complete revision of existing water rates to raise about \$60,000 per year from water rates (present water rates are around \$30,000 per year).
8. Placing in effect water conservation measures recommended by the consulting engineers as being a positive necessity.¹⁴²

The council also declared that:

The summer and fall of 1927 be devoted to the clearing of Reeder Gulch damsite, building of a new road around the dam, design of dam, exploration of rock, gravel, sand and other concrete materials in Canyon, and every detail of preparation advanced as rapidly as possible that the contract may be let and the dam completed during the 1928 season, subject to future detailed recommendations of the engineers.¹⁴³

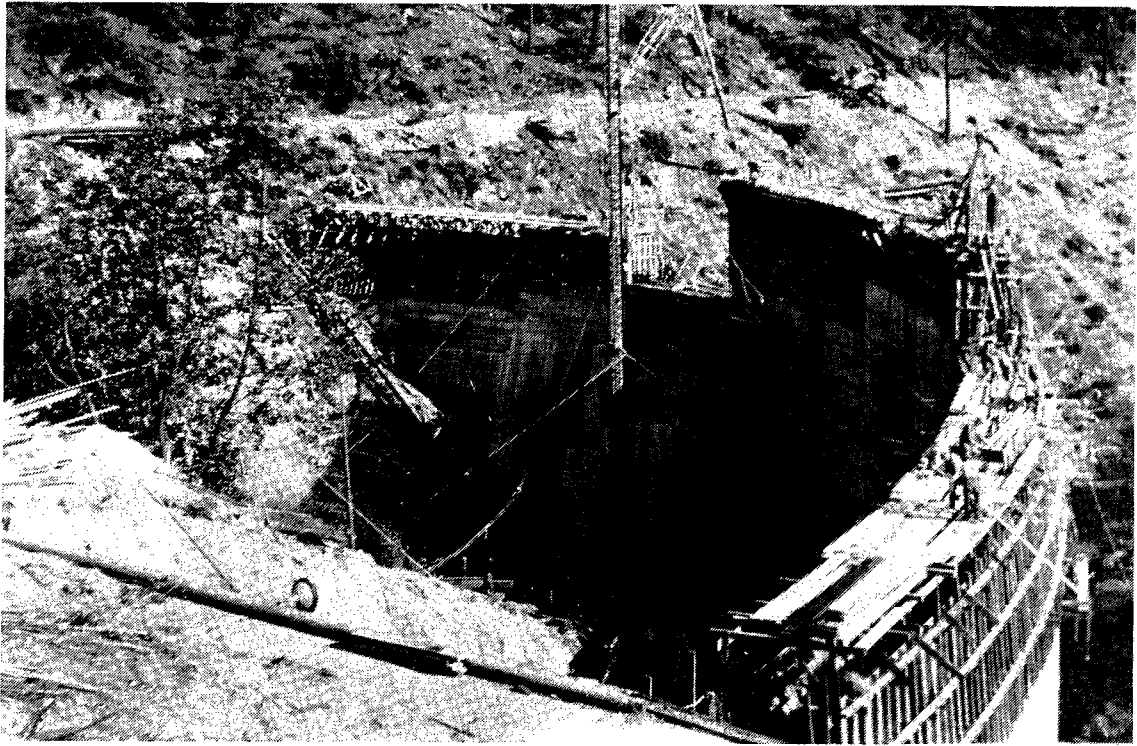


Reeder Gulch Dam Site, July 20, 1928, City of Ashland Collection

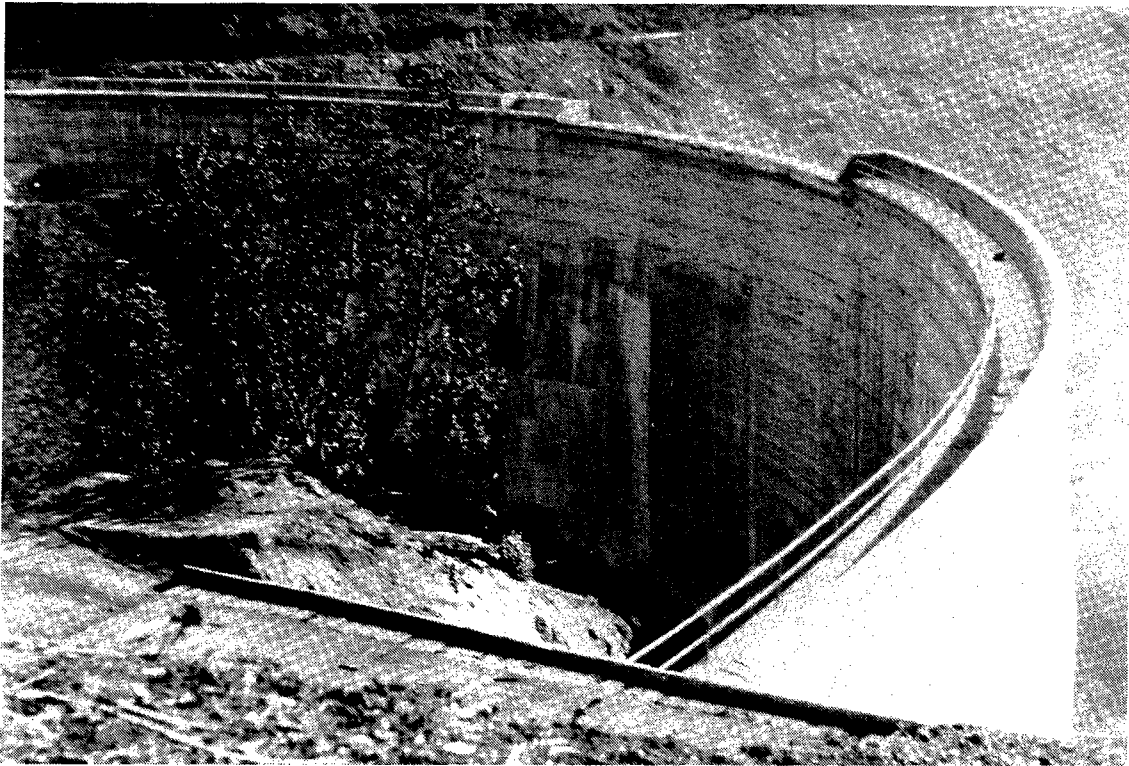
Construction of the dam was intensely debated through 1927. After a sufficient number of Ashland residents petitioned to defer construction of the canyon dam until the existing water supply (with improvements) proved inadequate, the City scheduled an election on May 31, 1927 regarding the deferment. The measure to delay was defeated.¹⁴⁴ Work began on Crowson Reservoir with a capacity planned for 2.2 million gallons. In April 1928, the City signed an agreement with the Parker-Scram Co., and construction began on the steel reinforced concrete 114-foot high Hosler Dam.¹⁴⁵ The new facility was connected to the power facility although its primary purpose was water supply.

In 1929 the city and the Forest Service crafted a cooperative agreement whereby the Ashland Creek watershed would be protected and managed for domestic water use. Timber harvest, which had been allowed within the watershed on a very limited scale prior to the 1929 agreement, was halted until a period of partial and clear cutting in the 1950s. Controversy over logging, road construction and expanded water development within in the Ashland Creek drainage continued to mark relations between the city and the Forest Service in ensuing years.¹⁴⁶

Between 1900 and 1930, extremely dry summers, population growth and citizen demand, prompted the City of Ashland to expand the water system. Until completion of Hosler Dam and Reeder Reservoir, residents had depended on the water works constructed several decades earlier. With updated water and sewer facilities Ashland finally began to see a reduction in pollution and health problems that had plagued the town for years.



Reeder Gulch Dam Site, October 11, 1928, City of Ashland Collection



Reeder Gulch Dam Site, December 1928, City of Ashland Collection

DEPRESSION, WAR AND EXPANSION, 1930-1960

Ashland's economy, which had been tenuous during the later 1920's, worsened with the stock market crash in October 1929. Like people in the rest of the country, local residents struggled through the Depression years. The City government maintained basic services. Although there was little money for staff or equipment, officials helped many people by providing free electricity and water.

During the 1930s, Ashland experienced problems with water supplied through the Talent Irrigation District system. Many residents believed that the City's agreement with the District was unsatisfactory. In his final message to the council in 1932, Mayor Thornton stated that purchasing water from the T.I.D. had been a "failure and a big mistake" due to uncertain supply and poor quality.¹⁴⁷

In 1935, the City of Ashland urged the State Legislature to pass a bill adding 41,600 acres to the Rogue River National Forest for forest management and municipal watershed protection so that they "may be managed so as to adequately protect the city's source of water supply." H.R. 8312 passed the legislature the following year.¹⁴⁸

Federal funds available for municipal public works projects helped Ashland during the Depression years. In early December 1937, the municipal water committee reported that the twenty-four inch wood pipeline constructed in 1914 was badly in need of replacement. The council applied to the Works Progress Administration (WPA) for funding. With assistance from that agency, the City installed improvements to the water line.¹⁴⁹

When the Depression ended, Ashland's 7740 residents soon turned their attention to war. City officials tried to provide city services on limited budgets and with reduced labor availability. In 1941, the city council approved an agreement with the Bellview Cooperative Water Association that served the area south and east of the city. By this agreement, the City would read meters, collect water rents and perform other business affairs for the Association. The Bellview organization petitioned the council for an increase in the amount of water given them as a minimum. This request highlighted the urgent need for an increased water supply for the expanding population. The council continued considering ways to increase that supply.¹⁵⁰

In December 1941, Mayor Wiley announced that plans were underway for an auxiliary water reservoir of 2 million gallons to protect against any possible contamination of the lower reservoir and to improve the quality of water.¹⁵¹ World War II intervened, however and officials shelved plans for a new water facility.

When the War ended in 1945, Ashland's population began to grow steadily. Building reports indicated that construction had more than tripled in five years. In 1940, Mayor Wiley stated the City had 1664 light and water customers and by the end of 1945, had

2034 subscribers. New homes appeared throughout the community and several new sawmills supplemented those already in existence.¹⁵²

The council again discussed the city's water supply. Suggestions that the City turn to the use of wells for water were discounted when it was evident that they could not produce enough water to serve the community. City Superintendent Biegel recommended additional surveys in the Mount Ashland area for water supply sources. Although he favored construction of a new reservoir in the canyon, Beigel stated:

Regardless of how many dams might be built or what amount of water might be brought in to the city, unless wastes are eliminated there would soon be a shortage of water... Meters could be installed through the entire system at a cost of approximately \$45,000. This would probably make a saving of about 20% to 25% in the amount of water used.¹⁵³

Biegel recommended study for a treatment plant to improve the taste of the water and regulation of sprinkling in the summer months.

In 1946, the City council voted to accept a study by A.D. Harvey, Medford consulting engineer, hired to study the city's water supply. Specifically, the City had requested that Harvey investigate obtaining new sources of water from the Klamath River watershed on the southern slopes of Mt. Ashland. Harvey reported:

The results of the investigation for additional water are disappointing, in that we do not find that there is sufficient water to be had from sources back of Mt. Ashland to warrant the expense of obtaining it. The water is there, but it flows too early in the year to enable you to make use of it without additional storage. Since construction of more storage will provide you with sufficient water without such a great expense... it seems sensible to provide such storage now and defer the investment in additional water until a much later date when and if it becomes absolutely necessary to obtain it.¹⁵⁴

Harvey also recommended that the City construct a dam on the West Fork of Ashland Creek, build a water filtration plant with sufficient capacity of not less than six million gallons per day, build two new, two-million gallon capacity covered reservoirs, and cover the Crowson Hill reservoir to insure the quality of the city's water.¹⁵⁵ Stating that "The total flow of water in Ashland Creek, if properly stored and used, is sufficient to provide water until after the year 1966," Harvey continued:

We believe the basis used in preparing these forecasts to be on the conservative side, in that while your population may not ever become greater than 10,000 people, it may continue growing at the present rapid rate longer than we have anticipated. If this happens,

you may expect to have an acute water shortage much earlier than we have anticipated. For that reason and also because money for such purposes can now be obtained at very cheap rates of interest, it is strongly recommended that immediate consideration be given to this problem. Even starting now, it will be 1949 before these facilities can be planned, constructed and placed in service.¹⁵⁶

The council voted to hold a special election the latter part of July to authorize \$750,000 in water bonds. The Ashland Daily Tidings reported:

The city engineer was urged to continue with all dispatch his studies of the most feasible source of additional water, and he assured the mayor and council that study, water measurements, and reconnaissance surveys to that end would go forward...

The mayor and several members of the council made a point of the fact that they knew that what the people wanted was plenty of water, and a good quality of water. They also stated that general metering of water was not desired, as it was felt that lawns and gardens would in some cases be neglected.¹⁵⁷

In January 1948 heavy rains swelled small streams causing Reeder and Emigrant dams to overflow, letting the full force of the water into Ashland and Bear Creeks. The floodwaters filled storm sewers and sent torrents of water cascading over city streets. Silt washed across the sidewalks and roads and plugged the sewer system. Several property owners reported flood damage. Floodwater filled the basement of Weitzel's Department Store on the Plaza and tenants fled as the creek threatened to undermine the building.¹⁵⁸

On January 8, 1948, three days after the flooding began, Dr. Harvey A. Woods, City Health Officer, reported that laboratory tests made at Ashland Community Hospital showed that water taken from Ashland mains was not potable. It took two days for Ashland residents to get fresh water when tank trucks finally distributed water.¹⁵⁹

Late in January A.D. Harvey assessed the flood situation and made recommendations to correct future trouble due to floods in Ashland Creek. His suggested paving the floor of the creek as a means of increasing the flow of the creek by about twenty percent. He also recommended constructing a concrete rectangular culvert sixteen feet wide, nine feet high and fifty-five feet long. The council accepted his report.¹⁶⁰

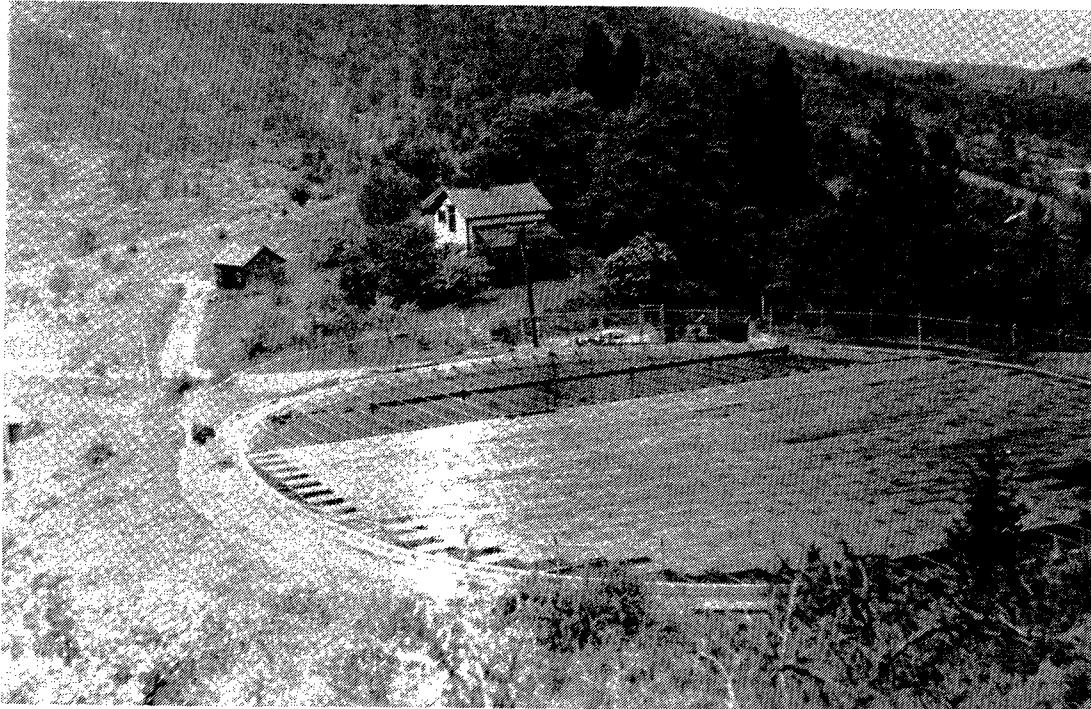
In early February 1948 the city council discussed construction of a water filtration plant. The screen that had been used for years only removed large material and much of the time citizens had muddy water when they turned on their faucets. One resident suggested that the City should investigate obtaining Medford water. The council, however, set an election to authorize the council to issue general obligation bonds not in excess of \$400,000 for a water filtration plant, three covered reservoirs and partial renewal of the distribution main.¹⁶¹

On February 24, 1948, Ashland voters decisively approved the filtration plant and auxiliary reservoir with a more than two to one margin. When tallied, the votes were 750 for the bond issue and 367 against it.¹⁶² Construction of the new rapid sand filtration water treatment plant, with a 6 million gallons per day capacity, was completed in 1949.

During 1948 the city council authorized contracting for construction of a 2.2 million-gallon reservoir on upper Granite Street in Ashland canyon. The new reservoir replaced the open reservoir that occasionally had allowed untreated water into the city's lower area.¹⁶³ Crews added gates to the spillway at Hosler Dam, increasing the capacity of Reeder Reservoir to 280 million gallons. By 1949 the City was almost fully metered.¹⁶⁴ In October 1949, Consulting Engineers A.D. Harvey and S.C. Watkins submitted a final report on the filtration plant and the Granite Street Reservoir to the city council.

During the 1950's Ashland's post-war growth continued. As funds became available, the City worked on streets, sewers, and water. Tourists stopped in Ashland for the Shakespeare Festival and Lithia Way was cut through to carry northbound traffic through the downtown area and Main Street was diverted to one-way for southbound traffic. The Southern Pacific discontinued passenger service between Portland and Ashland as automobile use expanded.

In 1952, workers constructed the concrete cover for Crowson Reservoir to protect the purity of the stored water. In April 1952, the Ashland City Council changed the name of Reeder Gulch Dam to the Earl Hosler Dam as Hosler retired.¹⁶⁵



Crowson Reservoir, 1953, City of Ashland Collection

In 1955 the U.S. Forest Service put the Ashland Creek Watershed under multiple use management. The agency constructed access roads in the watershed and in 1958 initiated logging within the area. These logging operations would continue until 1965, with a total of approximately seven-percent of the watershed being logged.¹⁶⁶

The Bellview Water Association discussed the City's offer to take over their water system.¹⁶⁷ In late December 1955, Ashland escaped serious flood damage as a result of heavy rains. Street crews cleared ditches and storm drains, and damage was confined to low-lying areas of the city.¹⁶⁸

Between 1930 and 1945 Ashland struggled to maintain basic services through the Great Depression and World War II. After the war, money continued to be scarce while at the same time population increased. City officials were forced to make do with old equipment or war surplus items.

THE MODERN ERA, 1961-1998

Development and change marked Ashland in the 1960s and 1970s. The town had more people, new schools, businesses and institutions. In 1962 the population numbered 9,477. The power structure, which had been easily identifiable for decades, became less apparent as new groups of people moved to Ashland and supported different causes.¹⁶⁹ In 1960 Mount Ashland ski resort, with an area of approximately 180 acres opened in the Ashland Watershed. A new community hospital opened in 1961 and the same year, the First National Bank, (now Wells Fargo), replaced the old Ashland Hotel. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival constructed the Angus Bowmer Theater in 1969-1970.

Ashland changed in other important ways. Elmer Biegel, City Superintendent for thirty-two years, retired and a city administrator was named to replace him. Growth and planning requirements consumed civic energy. In 1964 a group of Ashland citizens petitioned the city council to craft a long-range plan that would assure orderly and progressive growth. The committee predicted future costly improvements including an eventual expansion of the water system, storm sewers and extension of sewage mains. Ashland adopted its first zoning ordinance the same year.¹⁷⁰ During the 1960s the Bellview water system became inadequate in many areas and the City could not supply it in the necessary quantity without major improvements. The City and the association agreed that the City would purchase the group's assets and construct a new main line to the area.¹⁷¹

In 1959 the City tried to secure aid from the U.S. Soil Conservation Service to construct Winburn Dam, believing that the Service would benefit by the flood control provided by the reservoir. Through a joint effort, foundation cores were taken along the proposed axis of the dam and costs estimated. With projected expenses at 1 million dollars, the Conservation Service declined to participate.¹⁷²

For years Talent Irrigation District water had been used to ease use of Ashland Creek water for irrigation. When a 1960 study showed that the city needed additional water, the city council signed a contract with the T.I.D. for 300-acre feet of water at an estimated cost of \$4000 per year. The additional 300-acre feet, the study showed, represented about the same amount of water as supplied by a dam the size of Hosler Dam in Ashland Canyon.¹⁷³ Irrigation District records indicated that in the previous year the city had used 500-acre feet of the 756 they owned, and would soon consume the remainder. In December, the city council discussed the terms and charges for acquiring additional water from the Talent Irrigation District for city use.¹⁷⁴

Ashland Daily Tidings reporter Marjorie O'Harra wrote an article describing Ashland's three water systems, (domestic, Lithia water and Talent Irrigation) administered by the water department. She explained that Ashland residents consumed close to four million gallons of water every day, with the domestic water system distributing water through sixty-five miles of pipeline to about 10,000 people, with about 3000 metered customers. The City, she reported, had received recognition from the Oregon State Board of Health for meeting standards for purity of drinking water for the previous year.¹⁷⁵



Core Drilling in Ashland Canyon, City of Ashland Collection

City Superintendent Biegel negotiated to purchase two prior rights on the Helman Ditch in 1962. "Although they are small," he said, "they are establishing a price pattern for future purchases of water rights. As land in the lower northwest portion of the city fills with homes, more of these rights will become available. We should acquire all that become available." Biegel also reported the City's continuing discussions about building another dam in Ashland Canyon, but noted that it would be very expensive.¹⁷⁶

The City entered into an agreement with the Oak Knoll Corporation to supply water to its subdivision adjacent to the golf course. The agreement included a provision whereby the corporation would pay for the main line to the subdivision and provide all of the facilities within the development. The agreement allowed for 250 water services.¹⁷⁷

In 1964, three years after an engineering firm had investigated expansion of the water treatment plant; it became apparent that extensive improvements were needed. The plant was converted to a high rate filtration system which increased the capacity to 8 million gallons per day and more automated control was added.¹⁷⁸ New technology also allowed water department employees to monitor where water was going, and to reduce the amount when overflowing occurred.

Just before Christmas in 1964, Ashland reeled from one of the potentially worst floods in the city's history. Heavy steady rains, which began falling late the previous night, brought flooding. Five of Lithia Park's bridges went underwater. The city water reservoir began spilling early on the morning of December 21, but workers kept the run-off under control. Mud and muck littered the park. Basements filled with water in several sections of the city. By Christmas Eve, the floodwater gradually receded. Ashland escaped serious damage.¹⁷⁹

In January 1966, Director of Public Works Allen Alsing attributed the bad taste and smell of Ashland water to work under way on the city's water system. He explained that an organic substance in the turbidity of the dam [had combined] with the chlorine to produce the problem. The water, he said, was safe to drink.¹⁸⁰

In June 1966, the newspaper reported that Ashland would buy another large chunk of Talent Irrigation District water. The new purchase would be part of a thirty-year agreement to augment Ashland's supply during the summer months, either by pumping it into the water treatment plant, or by releasing it into Ashland Creek. Although City officials believed that Ashland wouldn't need the additional water for ten to fifteen years, they would "buy the water now before it becomes unavailable." They expected the purchase to provide water for the growing city through the foreseeable future.¹⁸¹

During the summer of 1966, although other sections of drought-plagued Oregon were running short of water, Ashland water supplies remained in good condition. The Public Works Director pronounced the domestic water supply, consisting of stored winter rain and snow run-offs adequate, as was irrigation water from Lake Hyatt via the Talent Irrigation District. He cautioned, however, that if the drought continued for an extended period, City officials would have to monitor the water supply closely.¹⁸²

The City faced extensive dredging of Reeder Gulch Reservoir in late 1966. The reservoir had partially filled with an estimated 57,000 cubic yards of silt as a result of the 1964 flood. Although the work had been scheduled to begin on October 1, the City requested a delay from federal officials in order to wait until spring when water flow in the watershed would be at its peak. Permission was granted and the City awarded the contract to an Astoria firm to dredge the reservoir.¹⁸³

By 1969 City officials had selected a second dam site in case Ashland ever needed another dam to store water. It was located about two miles up the west fork of Ashland Creek above the existing Hosler Dam, on what was known as the Winburn site. Owned by the City, the site had been explored many times through the years. While describing the location, Allen Alsing explained that other water sources probably would be developed before serious consideration would be given to another dam.¹⁸⁴

Workers repaired Hosler Dam in 1970 after an examination of the structure the previous year. The top of the dam was given a new covering of concrete, a new trestle for pipe bringing water out from the bottom of the dam was built, and trees that had grown close to the downstream side of the structure were cut down.¹⁸⁵

In the fall of 1970, after a city councilman predicted that Ashland would soon be using reclaimed water, City officials quickly responded that Ashland is not "reclaiming water for any use and probably will never have to do so." Edward Fallon, superintendent of Ashland's Water Department, explained however, that reclaiming the effluent from sewage plants and piping it back into the water system was commonly done for industrial uses in many larger cities. To quell other criticisms, the superintendent stated that the T.I.D. water pumped into Ashland Creek to supplement the flow came from Howard Prairie and Hyatt Lakes and was not been used for irrigation before it entered the creek. Fallon said if demand increased substantially, the City might, at some point, take some of the T.I.D. water from the two mountain reservoirs and run it through the city's water filtration plant to supplement the city's water supply.¹⁸⁶

In 1971, in order to prepare for the time when the City would need T.I.D. water to supplement its domestic supply, water officials asked the council to authorize a pumping station to carry T.I.D. water to the treatment plant below Hosler Dam. The City had reserved an annual 1500 acre-feet in the T.I.D. system but currently was using only about half that for irrigation and occasional supplementation of Ashland Creek flow. Staff estimated that pumping water might be needed within five years. Ed Fallon tried to allay concerns that the T.I.D. ditch water would be highly contaminated with agricultural chemicals.¹⁸⁷

The summer of 1972 brought a heat wave that challenged the water supply. Ashland residents, the newspaper reported, were consuming water during the crisis at seven to nine million gallons a day.¹⁸⁸

In March 1973, as City crews cleaned Reeder Reservoir of mud, sand and debris, Oregon State Police representatives investigated turbidity in Ashland and Bear Creeks. Accused of causing the problems while clearing sediment from the reservoir, Ashland officials defended the importance of protecting the City's water supply. An Oregon Game Commission fisheries official expressed concern about damage caused to steelhead eggs by the turbidity. The Ashland Tidings editor wrote:

State officials should realize that this time of the year is the only time that the reservoir clearing operation can reasonably be carried out... Draining the lake now can be done because it can be filled up again with spring runoff before the hot summer weather comes.

Doing this in the winter or fall is not feasible because of the danger that a freeze could curtail the flow in Ashland Creek above the dam, leaving the city with not enough drinking water if the dam is empty. . Concern for the environment must be a matter of degree. In this case, safeguarding the water supply for 14,000 people is infinitely more important than fish eggs.¹⁸⁹

The Department of Environmental Quality inspected the dam site and found no other way of cleaning the reservoir and safeguarding the city's water supply. The agency said that it would help the City try to find another way of removing the silt in the next year.

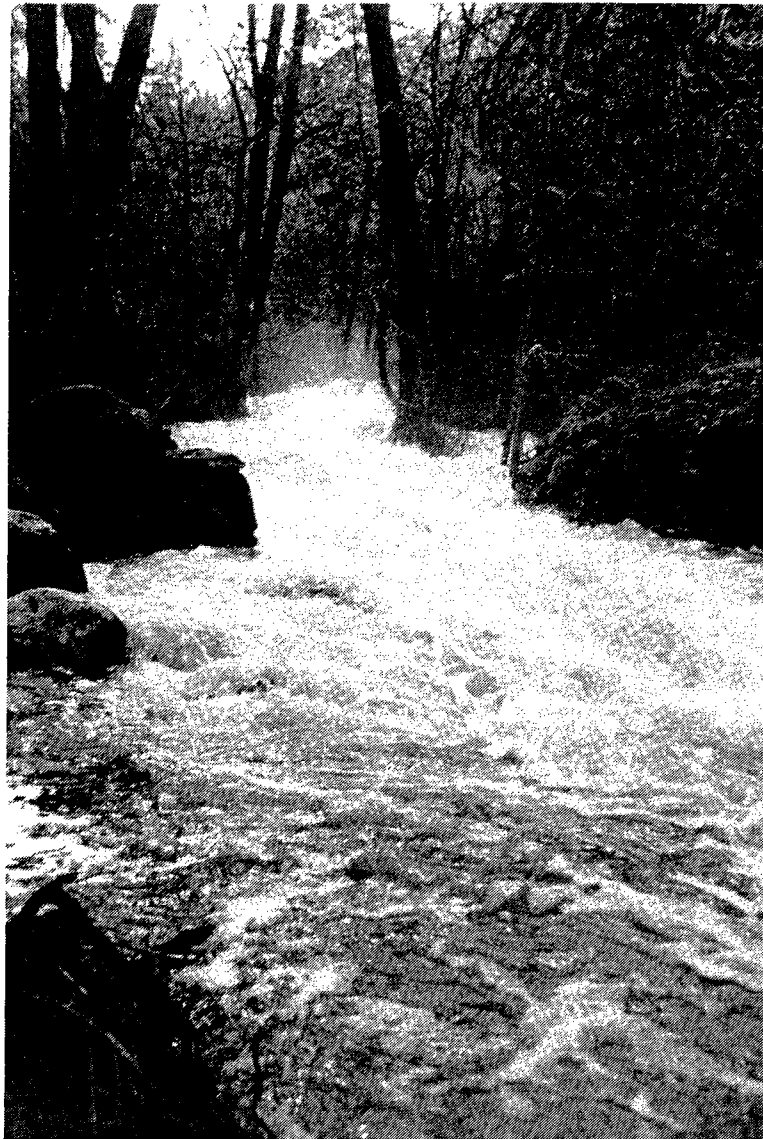
In mid-summer 1973 officials asked Ashland residents to begin conserving water after the City drew water from Reeder Reservoir in the earliest such move in recent history. As summer approached, conservation efforts increased. City staff asked residents to conserve; they turned off public drinking fountains, prohibited flushing streets, and reduced park irrigation.¹⁹⁰ In September Public Works Director Allen Alsing reported a continuing serious water situation. Although the city made it through the difficult season, the near-crisis prompted officials to consider the proposal to pump T.I.D. water from the ditch at Terrace Street to the water treatment plant just below Hosler Dam.¹⁹¹

In January 1974, Alsing completed a report on Ashland's water supply. The city, he concluded, needed more water. He recommended installing the pumping system for T.I.D. water as "soon as practicable" in anticipation of population expansion and critical water years in the future. His report, the local newspaper noted, advanced both the T.I.D. water pumping project and the long-discussed possibility of building a second storage dam at the Winburn site on the West Fork of Ashland Creek. Alsing recommended that pumping station be built as soon as possible and that the City retain ownership of the Winburn site. Additionally, he recommended that the City expand the filtration plant and purchase sites for reservoirs and pump stations to serve high elevations along the city's southeast hillsides.¹⁹²

In mid-January 1974, a rampaging Ashland Creek again flooded, demolishing the City's water system by knocking out the filtration plant in Ashland Canyon. The flooding, brought on by heavy rain and melting snow in the Siskiyou Mountains, caused heavy damage throughout the community. Within two days, Ashland officials shut off all water service. The National Guard delivered drinking water to local citizens.¹⁹³

The following winter, the Talent city council suggested that Talent and Ashland work together to solve their mutual need for more domestic water. The letter also recommended that the two communities jointly consider developing a treatment plant facility using TID water.¹⁹⁴

In July 1975, the Ashland's Water Resources Committee formulated plans for an Ashland watershed study required by the State Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as a condition of a waste water discharge permit. The City was to reduce the effects of sluicing sediment from Reeder Reservoir down Ashland Creek and provide an evaluation of alternate water supply sources, system modifications, continuous sediment removal, and improved watershed management.¹⁹⁵



Ashland Creek in Flood, City of Ashland Collection

The following year, Ashland Mayor Gary Prickett signed a contract with James Montgomery and Associates for consultant work on the watershed study. The one-year project would consider runoff, erosion, the impact of future human activities, and flood control above Ashland. The U.S. Forest service said it would cooperate with Ashland in the study by providing data.¹⁹⁶

Soon after the watershed study got underway, the City faced a possible water shortage as extended drought conditions lingered. Local officials decided not to flush silt from the reservoir due to the expected low water availability for refilling it. Public Works Director Alsing and other officials developed a contingency plan with several voluntary and mandatory water conservation measures. Alsing asked residents to immediately conserve water while the City tried to impound as much water as possible behind Hosler Dam.

In February 1977, the city council authorized the purchase of a temporary pipeline and pumps to carry Talent Irrigation District water to the treatment plant. The reservoir's water storage was at 72 percent. Alsing stated 'It's really imperative that we fill that reservoir. We can't count on more precipitation.' A grant supported construction of the temporary on-the-ground pipeline running from Terrace Street to the filter plant. At the end of February, the city council declared an emergency. The declaration banned washing buildings, cars, driveways or sidewalks, watering lawns or adding water to pools or cooling mechanisms, until further notice.¹⁹⁷

The Montgomery consulting firm submitted its report in March 1977. It recommended \$6 million dollars in projects including construction of a new dam and reservoir to enlarge Ashland's water supply, construction of a permanent pump station to take water from the T.I.D. system to the water treatment plant, and purchase of a cutterhead dredge to clean Reeder Reservoir of silt.¹⁹⁸

Some recommendations did not involve capital construction. These included suggestions that Ashland and the U.S. Forest Service cooperate in watershed management; that no more roads be built in the watershed; that no mining be allowed; that no enlargement of the Mt. Ashland Ski Are be considered for now and that the moratorium on watershed timber cutting be continued.¹⁹⁹

At the same time City officials sought to extend the Talent Irrigation District Season to supplement city water during the impending dry season. Because an October 1 closing date was set by law, the Mayor contacted the Governor's assistant in charge of drought relief to investigate keeping the ditches open in case Ashland needed the water in the fall.

By May, it appeared that the City might get supplemental T.I.D. water past the regular irrigation season in the fall if the water were designated for municipal and industrial use.²⁰⁰ The T.I.D., however, cautioned that Ashland should not look to the Talent system for year-round water delivery. The system, the manager said, was not geared for continual operations and if Ashland wanted to use T.I.D. water at any other time than the irrigation season, it would have to rely on some way of getting it other than a T.I.D.

canal.²⁰¹ In mid-July 1977, water began flowing through the pipeline that ran from the Ashland Canal near Terrace Street to the water filtration plant. T.I.D. water was taken from the canal and pumped up the pipeline to the water plant.²⁰²

Officials set an election for late July to allow issuance of up to \$590,000 in city bonds for building a permanent water pipeline to carry TID system water to the filter plant. An opposing group, the Water Conservation Committee ... said, "The permanent water pipeline to be built with the bonds would promote rampant growth and development in Ashland." They distributed pamphlets urging citizens to vote no in the election.²⁰³ The Ashland Daily Tidings editor wrote:

This is not a drought-related project. Rather, it is intended to supplement the watershed water supply anytime that's necessary including years when rainfall is short... [A] dam may be needed eventually, but the pipeline is the more immediately possible solution... For the money and considering its immediate benefits to Ashland water users, the pipeline is a good investment and deserves the voters' wholehearted approval.²⁰⁴

Ashland residents approved the bond issue with 780 votes in favor and 561 opposed. The total 1,341 votes represented only about fourteen percent of the registered city voters.²⁰⁵

In December 1978, the Ashland city council studied a water committee recommendation to conduct a comprehensive city water system study. The proposed project, to take approximately one year, would include analysis of the present water distribution system and future loads, a schematic showing the exiting and future lines, valves and reservoir locations, analysis of capacity and of capital improvements needed to maintain adequate flow. Allen Alsing explained that that an environmental impact statement by the federal Environmental Protection Agency could alter the capital improvements recommended in the recently completed Montgomery watershed plan.²⁰⁶

After months of study, the Environmental Protection Agency released its draft environmental impact statement for public study. The report analyzed four basic alternatives for cleaning Reeder Reservoir. EPA conclusions establish directives by which the state Department of Environmental Quality could approve or deny future permits for reservoir cleaning. The EPA plan, which highlighted protecting fish habitat, would require improvements to the city's water system to prevent polluting Bear Creek with sediment from Reeder Reservoir.²⁰⁷

The City responded to the draft statement by supporting efforts to restore and enhance the Bear Creek Basin, but said it wanted help. Local officials stated that U.S. Forest Service should halt all logging and road construction in the watershed before a costly water quality management program began. In ensuing discussions, City and U.S. Forest Service representatives disagreed on several issues regarding watershed management.²⁰⁸

Concerned about continued activity allowed by the Forest Service, the City of Ashland succeeded in having the area officially designated a watershed in June 1980. The local newspaper editor wrote:

The city has sought to have the area designated as a watershed to recognize that its primary purpose is the production of water. This week the Rogue Valley Council of Governments water quality committee recommended such a designation. That is a victory for the city. That is not a defeat for the Forest Service... The need to manage the forests is important and the Forest Service is right to be concerned about anything that might limit its options. But in the case of Ashland's watershed there should be no doubt as to whether forests or water comes first. It has to be water. And that is what the city wants recognized in writing.²⁰⁹

In the late summer of 1980 the Ashland Council investigated low water pressure problems in the area of the Mountain Ranch Subdivision in southeast Ashland. Residents expressed concern about threats to fire safety in the vicinity. Council members considered various kinds of water moratoriums to ease the situation and after four months of study, voted to limit development until the problem could be resolved.²¹⁰

The City announced an election to be held in March 1981, for a \$2.5 million bond issue for a four-year improvement project of the municipal water system. Prominent in the project was construction of a reservoir to keep water pressure high in the southeast quarter of the city, a pump station, replacement of old water pipes and repairs to Granite Street Reservoir.²¹¹

City Administrator Brian Almquist spoke enthusiastically in favor of the proposed bond issue and spent a great deal of time trying to clear up misconceptions. He explained that the bond was not directed at growth, but at correcting problems in the existing system. Additionally he tried to reassure people in the southeast moratorium district that the planned improvements were not a way of opening extensive lands in the area for development. Ashland voters defeated the water measure with a twenty-five percent turnout, 1,112 for and 1,465 against.²¹²

The following spring saw another dry year and Ashland once again faced possible restrictions on water usage. In mid-May 1982, voters passed a \$1.7 water bond similar to the previous one, but smaller in scope. It allowed construction of a new two million-gallon reservoir on Tolman Creek and also provided for new pipelines, a pump station, and an automatic valve for the Granite Street reservoir. Several street improvement projects were trimmed from former plans. City Administrator Almquist stated, "The vote gives the city confidence about the future of its water delivery and supply system."²¹³

In 1983, with the new water improvements not yet underway, portions of southeast Ashland and west Ashland had continuing water pressure problems. In July 1983, Visar

Construction bid successfully on the water improvements and by January 1985, the long-awaited water system neared completion. The new reservoir brought the city's total twelve million-gallon storage capacity well above both the four million-gallon average daily use levels and above the nine million-gallon summer peak usages.²¹⁴

In ensuing years Ashland's population grew and the demand on water resources increased. In 1987 and 1988, low stream flow years, city officials diverted approximately 550 acre-feet of TID water into the treatment plant or into Ashland Creek. The low stream flows prompted a study of means of obtaining new water sources to augment existing supplies. In 1988, as a first step in updating the Ashland Comprehensive Water Plan, the City retained R. W. Beck and Associates to produce a water supply report.

The consulting firm completed the document in May 1989. The report summarized existing water supplies, projected future demands, and evaluated alternative facilities to meet water demands through the year 2010. The report examined three alternatives to meet future water demands including Winburn Dam, use of Rogue River water through a pipeline and pump stations to deliver water from Medford, and water conservation measures.²¹⁵

Calling water conservation basically a "no-action" alternative, the report identified both the Winburn Dam and Rogue River water usage as viable options, although both would be expensive. The former would give the City more control over water usage. The report concluded that Ashland should initiate activities leading to the construction of additional water supply facilities by the year 1998. The report further recommended that officials adopt an ordinance using the basic framework of a water conservation and restriction program, and that the City initiate a feasibility level to study and locate the components of these additional facilities.²¹⁶

The City began evaluating various water supply options. Although the Beck report had dismissed water conservation as a serious option to meet the city's future water supply needs, City staff believed that conservation could make a tremendous difference. They contracted with Synergic Resources Conservation in July 1991, and found great promise in programs that could provide more water at a considerably lower cost. Implementation of the water conservation program, one of the first in Oregon, began in July of that year.²¹⁷

In May 1995, the City began renovation of the water treatment plant. Plans called for nearly full automation, back-up and monitoring systems, a computer that routinely checks the water's pH levels, chlorine content and other operations, and an air-scrubbing filtration system. Mayor Cathy Golden cut the ribbon at a dedication ceremony for the new \$3.9 million facility.

At year's end 1996, heavy rains pounded the upper Bear Creek Valley. On the morning of January 1, 1997 water surged over its stream banks and inundated the Plaza and areas along Ashland Creek. Floodwaters damaged the city's water purification system, sewage treatment plant and areas of lower Lithia Park. Ashland residents could

not drink city water for more than a week and couldn't flush toilets for much of January. When floodwaters receded, repairs got underway on the city's damaged public works facilities.²¹⁸ Repair costs were estimated at 3.8 million.

Although discussions of a pipeline joining other communities had occurred for years, the January 1997 flood brought renewed consideration as the Ashland, Talent and Phoenix studied the feasibility, environmental impacts and initial design of a water line intertie (TAP) from the Medford. The intertie pipeline would serve the entire municipal water needs for cities of Talent and Phoenix and potentially provide a portion of the future water needs for Ashland. Ashland Public Works Director Paula Brown explained that the TAP project could also supply water during emergency situations such as fire and flood.²¹⁹

During the spring of 1998, the city council debated whether Ashland should continue to participate in the intertie pipeline. The Medford Water Commission manager explained that "if Ashland wants water from us in the future, the line from our system to Talent needs to be large enough so that there is additional capacity for Ashland." Paula Brown reminded the council of other options including bringing TID water to the city by pipe instead of open ditches, reusing treated wastewater for irrigation, or combining it with Ashland Creek water for domestic uses, and expanding the city's conservation program.²²⁰ The Medford Mail Tribune described opposing stands on the intertie issue:

Argument for intertie: It preserves Ashland's option to obtain future water from another source, particularly in emergencies when Ashland's own system is inoperative or lacks enough water.

Argument against intertie: It will cost Ashland more than any of several alternatives and the water will come from farther away. Availability also increases likelihood of population growth.²²¹

In another action, the City is beginning the first phase of a \$23.5 million wastewater treatment project, including renovation of its sewage treatment plant which discharges into Ashland Creek, to comply with state water quality standards for Bear Creek by the end of 2000. The City plans to put byproducts from its sewage treatment plant, treated effluent for irrigation and sludge for fertilizer, on 840 acres of hillside land it owns outside city limits. Discussions continue between neighbors of the property and the City regarding environmental considerations of the plan.²²²

As 1998 draws to a close, Ashland faces critical questions regarding its water supply. The population continues to grow and weather years are still uncertain. Topics of the past remain and they are even more complex. Citizens still demand ample good water and still worry about cost and growth. Longstanding issues such as identifying the way to obtain water, upgrading and maintaining facilities and addressing environmental concerns still provoke intense discussion. An educated and interested public scrutinizes the process as officials consider both the present and the future in their plans.

Ashland's water source has evolved over thousands of years. The qualities that drew people to the area centuries ago continue to attract. Although our modern period reflects only a moment in history, the ways that we use and care for our stream's "living waters" will determine what remains for future generations that settle along its banks.

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- ⁵⁶ Ibid., February 7, 1890, 3:3.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., February 27, 1890.
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