



Water Resources Department

Records of the Water Resources Department, 1852-1988, document the activities of the department in developing and managing the water resources of the state of Oregon. Except for photographs and maps which date to 1852, most records were created in the 20th century. The records consist of correspondence, reports and hearing transcripts, meeting minutes and agendas, land records, land and water surveys, maps, and photographs.

In 1900-1930s the predecessors to the Water Resources Department were mainly involved with the reclamation of semi-arid land in central and eastern Oregon. To fulfill the requirements of the Carey Land Act, irrigation companies began to construct irrigation canals and ditches to provide water to farmers in arid areas east of the Cascade Mountains. Because many of these early reclamation and irrigation projects were poorly managed resulting in contracts to furnish water to settlers far exceeding the available water supply, the state became involved in the projects. The state's involvement with one of these projects, the Columbia Southern Irrigating Company, is well documented. In addition, the Columbia Southern and other irrigation projects are well documented in the Arid Land Record, Certificates of Proof, Desert Land Board Reclamation Records, Desert Land Board Records, and Survey Record Books. The records of the Irrigation and Drainage Securities Commission and the Reclamation Commission further document government activities in overseeing contracts of the irrigation districts.

Beginning in the 1930s, the Water Resources Department became involved in hydroelectric projects as local governments and commercial companies sought permission to construct dams, appropriate water, and form utility districts to furnish electric power. These activities are well documented by the Hydroelectric Project Records, the Hydroelectric Commission Peoples' Utility District Records, and the Hydroelectric Commission Minutes.

Two river basin commissions, the Upper Columbia River Basin Commission and the Willamette River Basin Commission, were formed to manage water resources in northeast Oregon and in the Willamette Valley. Both commissions were concerned with dams and reservoirs, irrigation and hydroelectric power, flood control, and erosion prevention. The Willamette River Basin Commission Records are supplemented by the Photographs series which contains photographs of the construction of dams and reservoirs which were commission projects as well as photographs of floods, flood damage, erosion of river banks and fields, and projects to improve river banks in the Willamette Valley.

Administrative activities of the Water Resources Department and its predecessors are documented by records (correspondence, reports, meeting minutes, hearing transcripts) which consist of communications between the boards or committees which set water policy and the department director who was charged with carrying out the state's water policy. These activities are documents in the Water

Resources Board Records, Water Resources Board Minutes, Water Resources Board Member (Emery N. Castle) Records, Water Policy Review Board Records, and the Water Resources Committee Records.

The Maps series consists of two collections of maps. One set was produced by the Oregon Highway Department and shows the sites of proposed state parks and recreation areas. The other set was produced by the U.S. Government Land Office and contains maps which date back to 1852. These survey plats cover 4 sections south from the Columbia River and 15 sections east to west from The Dalles to the Pacific Ocean. The surveys show both natural features (rivers, mountains, vegetation) and man-made features (trails, roads, townsites, building, land ownership), including early town plats of Portland, Oregon City, and The Dalles.

The Publications series contains published reports documenting department activities not covered in other series in this accession. Significant publications include drainage basin reports covering major river basins in Oregon dated 1950s and 1960s; ground water reports dated 1960s to 1980s; and a study of the long-range water needs of the state published in 1969 and covering major river basins in the state.

The total size of the accession is 101.1 cubic feet.

The new accession number for the Water Resources Department Records is 92A-6. The records were originally accessioned into the Archives under accession numbers: 60A-64, 61-59, 68A-13/1,2,3, 75A-86, 77A-157/1, 87A-57, 88A-22, 88A-27, 91A-27, and 92A-6. This session was held in Oregon City at the home of H. M. Knighton.
