Evolution of the Landscape along the Clear Creek Corridor, Colorado—Urbanization, Aggregate Mining, and Reclamation

By Belinda Arbogast, David L. Kuepper, Jr., Roger A. Mielick, and John Hickman

Introductions

1873

Mining

1894

1900–1920

Aggregates

1900–1910

Landform Evolution

I

J

K

L

M

N

O

Introduction

Background

Natural forces shape the Clear Creek landscape. The Golden City and South Platte Railroad Company's bridge across Clear Creek in Golden, Colorado, was swept away by a flood in 1894. Several men and a boy are on the remaining large upright timbers of the bridge.

1900–1910

Agriculture has also influenced the Clear Creek landscape. Development of the area around Clear Creek increased from 136,746 residents in 1900 to more than 199,243 residents in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau). Citrus, apple, cherry, and apricot orchards, and large field crop operations such as potatoes and corn, were common in Clear Creek County. A 1910 map of Agriculture shows the location of orchards in the study area.

1910–1990

The powerful change from farmlands to urban settlement across Clear Creek valley is also evident. Most of the rides from the 1910 map have been built over. Many of the buildings were constructed of large, square timbers. The use of iron tubing was minimal.

1994

The contrast between water features in 1901 and 1994 is clear. The irrigation ditches of 1901 have been replaced with concrete canals in 1994.

Future urban growth will require increasing amounts of water and aggregate. The urban area expanded to cover 31 percent of the county by the 1990's. The area's population has increased to about 204,000, and further urban growth is expected.

In addition to the development of new cities along Clear Creek, such as Golden, Arvada, Commerce City, and Northglenn, the reclamation of sand and gravel pits in the study area has removed hundreds of acres of high-quality gravel deposits. This has created a large gravel reserve in the Denver area that extends from the confluence of Clear Creek with the South Platte River to 144th Avenue. The gravel pit sites are now used as wildlife habitat along parts of Clear Creek.

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