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

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## Introduction

Six sites along the valley of Clear Creek between Golden, Colorado, and the confluence of Clear Creek with the South Platte River in the northern part of Denver (see Index Map) were selected to illustrate the evolution of the present-day landscape in the valley in terms of sand and gravel mining, reclamation, and landscape modification. Five of the sites were previously described by Sheridan (1967) to illustrate land usage at that time and to determine the potential for development at each site.

Aerial photographs, including those used by Sheridan (1967), were selected for each of the sites to illustrate how each site has changed over the years. Each of the aggregate resource maps was georeferenced to a UTM projection, and the appropriate parts of the Digital Raster Graphs of the 1994 versions of U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps were overlaid to provide points of reference. The distribution of the alluvial deposits that can be used for high-quality aggregate is shown on the aggregate resource map of each site, and a brief description of each alluvial deposit is provided.

To illustrate the topography of the sites, each aggregate resource map includes a detailed topo-graphic map draped over a sun-shaded Digital Elevation Model. The aggregate resource maps show the locations where selected ground photographs were taken that portray how the sites look to an observer today. Additional photographs illustrate various aspects of the sites that are of ecological or historical interest.

Figure 32. Oblique aerial view of sites 1 and 2 along Clear Creek in 2000. View is to the west. The mine land just south of Clear Creek is county owned. The land north of Highway 58 is being reclaimed for light industry. The larger rectilinear water reservoirs to the west (site 1) are reclaimed gravel pits for brewery usage. The eastern lakes (site 2) are multi-purpose lakes for fishing and wildlife.

Figure 46 (right). Oblique aerial view of sites 4 and 5 along Clear Creek in 2000. View is to the northeast. Baker Reservoir is the large lake in site 5.

## Site 1 Clear Creek at McIntyre Street

Figure 33 (right and below). Aggregate resource map (after Schwochow and others, 1974b). Unit F1 is the modern flood-plain deposits. Unit T1 is a low terrace deposit that corresponds to the Louviers Alluvium. Both of these units contain coarse gravel that makes high-quality natural aggregate; they are the major aggregate-producing units in the Clear Creek valley. Numbers refer to the locations where ground photographs were taken.

The straight-sided polygons on this aerial photograph indicate that much of the modern Clear Creek flood plain south of the creek was being used for agriculture. North of the creek, the flood plain was moderately vegetated (dark), including a substantial number of trees, but lacks distinctive polygonal field patterns. The braided drainage pattern of Clear Creek indicates that the natural channel had not yet been significantly altered. Colorado Highway 58, the major four-lane divided highway connecting Golden with Interstate 70, had not yet been constructed.

Gravel was being extracted from terrace deposits north of Clear Creek at sites west of McIntyre Street (G1) and at the northern edge of the photograph adjacent to the vegetated flood plain (G2). Directly to the south, gravel was being extracted from the Clear Creek flood plain by operations both north (G3) and south (G4) of the stream. (Aerial photograph from U.S. Geological Survey.)

By 1965, all evidence of farming in the flood plain south of Clear Creek was gone. Gravel extraction had expanded from G1 eastward across McIntyre Street, including the interchange area of the yet-to-be-built Colorado Highway 58 (G1a). The operation at G2 appears to have been completed, but a new operation had opened up immediately to the east. A major expansion of the gravel extraction occurred to the east, south, and southwest of G4. The Rolling Hills Country Club (now Applewood Golf Course) had been established over an unmined part of the Clear Creek flood-plain gravel deposits. (Aerial photograph from Sheridan, 1967, p. 18.)

By 1978, dramatic changes had taken place along the Clear Creek valley at McIntyre Street. The major four-lane divided highway connecting Golden with Interstate 70, Colorado Highway 58, complete with an interchange at McIntyre Street, had been constructed across the northern part of the site, including areas where gravel had previously been extracted. The channel of Clear Creek had been straightened, narrowed, and moved to the north. The vegetation in the flood plain north of the original channel was virtually gone, and gravel was being extracted from all of the flood plain south of the new channel and east of McIntyre Road, except for the Applewood Golf Course property. Gravel extraction had been completed at the sites of Coors Lake B-3 and the small ponds north of the golf course, and the pits were being used for water storage. (Aerial photograph from U.S. Geological Survey.)

By 1992, gravel extraction was complete. The pits at Coors Lake B-4 and the "A" Water Lakes had already been put into use as water storage for the Adolph Coors Brewing Company. Extraction of gravel in the pit that contains the easternmost of the "A" Water Lakes actually encroached on the golf course property. The "B" Lakes are the first clay-lined reservoirs reclaimed by the aggregate industry from sand and gravel pits in the State. (Aerial photograph from U.S. Geological Survey.)

Figure 34b. View looking east along Clear Creek, rail lines, and frontage road. Rabbit brush and non-native Russian Olive thrive along the embankment. The straightened channel is armored with rocks and cobbles.

Figure 34a. View looking west of transportation lines along Clear Creek. Front Range foothills near Golden, Colorado, are in the back-ground. Gold was dredged along this stream bed.

Figure 34c. View southeast across Coors Lake B-4 toward residential housing (refuge landscape) on the north side of South Table Mountain.

Site 2 Clear Creek at Youngfield Street

Figure 36. (right and below). Aggregate resource map (after Schwochow and others, 1974b). Unit F1 is the modern flood-plain deposits. Unit T1 is a low terrace deposit that corresponds to the Louviers Alluvium. Both of these units contain coarse gravel that makes high-quality natural aggregate; they are the major aggregate-producing units in the Clear Creek valley. Numbers refer to the locations where ground photographs were taken. This view shows agrarian and open space as the predominant land uses in July 1937. The Clear Creek flood plain is shown in the bottom half of the photograph. The braided creek channel, dark vegetation, and polygonal field patterns are similar to site 1. However, the reclamation end use and final land forms are markedly different. (Aerial photograph from U.S. Department of Agriculture.)

By 1965, there were extensive sand and gravel pits in operation, large amounts of farming and riparian vegetation were gone, residential development was beginning, and water reservoirs were being formed. The vegetation along the southern terrace appears relatively constant in areal extent. Sheridan (1967) noted the aggregate resource between Clear Creek and the Brannan Sand and Gravel Co. Plant No. 11 became unavailable due to residential development. During this time, Plant No. 11 was being considered for housing development, a recreation center, or water storage for the city of Arvada. The Lee Sand and Gravel Co. site was being backfilled along Youngfield Street frontage for residential or business use. (Aerial photograph from Sheridan, 1967, p. 19.)

Interstate 70 and Highway 58 were major marks on the landscape as mining continued in the southern half of the site, expanding east along Clear Creek. The Brannan Plant No. 11 eventually is reclaimed as a wetlands park, a different end use from what was planned. A part of the Lee Sand and Gravel Co. pit eventually becomes part of a greenway corridor in the City of Wheat Ridge, and the southwestern section is developed for business use. (Aerial photograph from U.S. Geological Survey.)

Development of the mineral resources of this area have resulted in a combination of wildlife/greenbelt and recreation landforms. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish artificially created water reservoir forms from naturally occurring ones. The water reservoirs reclaimed from sand and gravel pits on this site appear organic and curvilinear while the channel of Clear Creek is artificially straightened. (Aerial photograph from U.S. Geological Survey.)

Figure 37. West entrance to Ward Road Ponds in 1999. This is a small wetland area close to Interstate 70.

Figure 40a (right). Stone dam separating West Lake from Clear Creek.

Figure 40b (below). View southwest across West Prospect Lake (shown in fig. 36, 1992) showing industrial scars from past concrete aggregate production along the shoreline.

Figure 41 (above). Scene from frontage road (along I-70) looking west.

Site 3 Clear Creek at West 44th Avenue

Figure 43 (right and below). Aggregate resource map (after Schwochow and others, 1974b). Unit F1 consists of the modern flood-plain deposits. Unit T1 is a low terrace deposit that corresponds to the Louviers Alluvium. Both of these units contain coarse gravel that can be used to make high-quality natural aggregate; they are the major aggregate-producing units in the Clear Creek valley. Numbers refer to the locations where ground photographs were taken.

This aerial photograph shows areas of intensive agriculture in a region that became one of the finest truck-gardening areas in Colorado. Sheridan (1967) reported three attempts in the 1940's to obtain sand and gravel operating permits on the indicated acreage. All

requests were denied due to protests of area residents. (Aerial photograph from Sheridan, 1967, p. 21.)

By 1965, urban residential development resulted in loss of aggregate resource and agricultural land (Sheridan, 1967, p. 21-23). Homes lined the creek terraces, and patches of dark-green vegetation were fragmented and reduced. (Aerial photograph from Sheridan, 1967, p. 22.)

This view in April 1992 shows Interstate 70 to the north, Anderson Park just south of West 44th Avenue, and Johnson Park west of Wadsworth Boulevard. The aggregate mineral reserve could have been removed during an interim land use but residential pressures were against mining in the area. Birdland Park, in the northwest corner of the site, is an example of a park reclaimed from a former gravel pit. (Aerial photograph from U.S. Geological Survey.)

Figure 44a (above). Skateboard ramps and playing fields.  
Figure 44b (right). A man-made duck pond and picnic area.

Figure 45 (below). Panoramic view of Clear Creek west from Wadsworth Boulevard, including surrounding highways. Johnson Park (see fig. 43, 1992) is the green area to the left of the creek.

#### Site 4 Confluence of Clear Creek and Ralston Creek at Sheridan Boulevard

Figure 47 (right and below). Aggregate resource map (after Schwochow and others, 1974b). Unit F1 consists of the modern flood-plain deposits. The unit contains coarse gravel that can be used to make high-quality natural aggregate; it is one of the major aggregate-producing units in the Clear Creek valley. Numbers refer to the locations where ground photographs were taken.

In this aerial photograph, three large areas of gravel extraction are visible in an agrarian landscape that is just 6 miles from downtown Denver. Areas "A" and "B" were slated to become sanitary landfill with plans for business and retail/hotel development. By 1965, the recovery of gold and silver coincided with the extraction of aggregate in area "C." (Aerial photograph from Sheridan, 1967, p. 23.)

With gravel extraction and infill nearly complete, some development plans changed, as is evident from residential housing covering the southern half of the site by 1978. Area "A" became light industrial while area "B" became a mobile home park. Both areas are examples of hidden landforms. Area "C" was reclaimed for water recreation. Area "D" is the future site for Arvada's Gold Strike Park, where Louis Ralston, in crossing the plains in the year 1849, found gold (Henderson, 1926). (Aerial photograph from U.S. Geological Survey.)

Figure 48. Mobile home park at 52nd Avenue and Sheridan Boulevard. This is an example of hidden scenery where residential land use followed infill of sand and gravel pits.

Figure 49a (right). IMI Motorsports Lagoon, east of Sheridan Boulevard. A concrete processing facility appears to be compatible with the water sports facility. Light industry and recreation followed the conversion of agricultural land to sand and gravel mining.

Figure 49b (left). View of ponds from I-76 between Tennyson Street and Lowell Boulevard, showing evidence of dredging. Birds congregate in the area for spring nesting.

#### Site 5 Clear Creek at Lowell Boulevard

Figure 50 (right and below). Aggregate resource map (after Schwochow and others, 1974b). Unit F1 consists of modern flood-plain deposits. It contains coarse gravel that can be used to make high-quality natural aggregate; it is one of the major aggregate-producing units in the Clear Creek valley. Numbers refer to the locations where ground photographs were taken.

Stages of reclamation in 1964 (Sheridan, 1967, p. 25). Areas "A" and "B" were mined in the 1950's and were intended to be reclaimed as water-oriented residential and recreational sites. Area "A" collected water from the Manhart and Kershaw ditches (marked as "inflow"). From the "outflow," water flowed to the Baker Metropolitan Water and Sanitation District. The longer, narrow ponds of area "B" were under development in 1966 as a fishing (north pond) and swimming (south pond) center. Area "C" was a private boating, fishing, and swimming facility. (Aerial photograph from U.S. Geological Survey.)

Figure 51a (left). Statue of Jim Baker, mountain man. He and his Native American wives operated a ferry and toll bridge across Clear Creek (at present-day Lowell Boulevard).

Figure 51b (below). View of Baker Reservoir, looking southeast. This area was purchased by the City of Westminster in 1989 to provide water storage, and it is operated for recreation by Adams County.

Figure 52 (right). Streetside view of Aloha Beach from Lowell Boulevard, looking east.

Figure 53 (below). Looking west along Clear Creek and Lowell Ponds State Wildlife Area. This area is just south of site 5 and Interstate 76, and immediately north of Clear Creek. Riparian shrubs stabilize the stream bank, create shade, and provide leaf litter (a food source for fish).

#### Site 6 Clear Creek at Pecos Street

Figure 54 (right and below). Aggregate resource map (after Schwochow and others, 1974b). Unit F1 consists of the modern flood-plain deposits. Unit T1 is a low terrace deposit that corresponds to the Louviers Alluvium. Both of these units contain coarse gravel that can be used to make high-quality natural aggregate; they are the major aggregate-producing units in the Clear Creek valley. Numbers refer to the locations where ground photo-graphs were taken.

This July 1937 aerial view shows a railroad cutting across the agricultural landscape. Clear Creek is a braided channel that would lose its diverse patterns of structure over the years for flood control and land develop-ment. Gordon Lake was already evident, and there was sand and gravel activity in area "A." (Aerial photograph from U.S. Department of Agriculture).

This color infrared view shows I-76 extending from lower left to middle right, crossing Pecos Street in the lower center part of the image. Housing developments are in the upper part of the image, area "A" operations have expanded west and east, and several water-filled former gravel pits are also visible. The complex natural pattern of 1930's Clear Creek is simpler in the present-day landscape. Wet meadows and riparian woodland are replaced by isolated ponds. (Color infrared aerial photograph from U.S. Department of Agriculture)

Figure 55a (right). Oblique aerial view of automobile and railroad transportation network and an aggregate recycling plant in 2000.

Figure 55b (below). Office buildings on landfill next to Gordon Lake.

Figure 55c (right). Vents for methane release from landfill located along I-76 and Pecos Street.

Figure 55d. View north along I-76, east of Pecos Street. With maturity, the row of ever-green trees will screen the shipping containers.

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