

Long Tom Watershed Council

By **PAUL REED**

We know that humans have modified the Long Tom River, but geological evidence points to the greater hand of nature with the likelihood that the Long Tom was once a tributary of the Siuslaw River. A study by geologists Ewart M. Baldwin and Paul W. Howell, published in the August 1949 edition of Northwest Science, points to evidence that the Long Tom, with its ancient tributaries, flowed westward through the valley between Elk and Fish creeks in what many now call Hale Valley, west of Noti.

The Long Tom had three main branches in the Pliocene epoch (10 -1 million years ago): the northern (ancient Bear

Creek), the central (ancient Long Tom) and the southern (Coyote Creek).

Ancient Bear Creek headed where Bear Creek flows today, but instead of turning westward near Goldson it flowed southwestward around the Poodle Creek bend, joining the other streams just west of present Noti and then trended westward, joining the Siuslaw in the Coast Range. A prominent tributary from the north, the present headwaters of the Long Tom, joined Bear Creek just south of Alderwood State Park and remains now as the principal stream of this area.

The middle branch, that of the ancient Long Tom, was likely the smallest of the branches and drained little more than the north slope of the hills to the east, perhaps as far as Bailey Hill and Spencer Butte. It may have also received the water of Amazon Creek.

Ancient Coyote Creek had two forks, Fox Hollow Creek and another unnamed branch, and trended northwesterly. Although it now turns northward, it formerly drained by way of Sturtevant and Noti creeks to Noti.

There were several factors which may have caused the capture of the westward draining Long Tom tributary of the

Siuslaw and diverted it to the Willamette.

Geological evidence that can be seen in roadside cuts along Highway 126 indicates that during the Pleistocene epoch (1 million - 10,000 years ago) the eastern slope of the Coast Range tilted upward as much as 264 feet to a mile. This upward tilt would have decreased the westward fall of the river and significantly decreased its ability to cut a new channel through the bedrock.

Ancient landslides and erosion depositions likely were the final blows that caused the now slow, westward moving river to seek a new channel through the highly erodible soils of the east slope of the western foothills. Evidence indicates that the Willamette often overflowed the crown of the valley during flooding and may have cut a significant channel to the west of its present channel. It is likely that the slowly eroding Long Tom found this channel, and it became the mainstream where it remained until humans began modifying it in the 1940's.

Please visit our web site (www.longtom.org) for more interesting information about the Long Tom River and its watershed, past and present. The council's next meeting will be Nov. 28 at 6:30 p.m. at Monroe High School.

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