

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

History of New River

In 1851, John Kirkpatrick led an expedition through the area north of Floras Lake. He described the land bordering the Pacific Ocean as a “great swamp,” dominated by large expanses of water containing wet meadows, backwater marshlands, and spruce swamps. At that time, a vast floodplain connected a network of small creeks, lakes, and rivers that drained the area.

California’s 1849 Gold Rush created a new market for farm goods from the north, enticing settlers to cultivate the rich lands of coastal Oregon. In 1856, the area east of New River was first homesteaded. The new tenants brought with them cattle, dairy cows, sheep, and other grazing animals. Dairies and cheese factories, some of which exported world-class quality products to Europe, sprang up along the southern Oregon Coast. The discovery of gold on the Sixes River later that year drew prospectors and more settlers to the region, increasing the local demand for dairy and meat products. This in turn produced a need for more pastureland.



Historic Langlois, looking north on Main Street (present-day Highway 101). *Photo Credit: Bandon Historical Society*

Draining wetlands for farming and grazing was a common practice of homesteaders as they settled the Western United States and was soon applied to much of the wetland along the Oregon Coast. Digging drainage ditches allowed water to easily run off the area, leaving a dry meadow or pasture. These artificial channels carried water much more quickly into tributary streams and eventually the ocean. These

activities are still practiced today, and many ditches continue to be cleaned and maintained to keep water from inundating pasturelands.

According to local lore, the formation of New River began during the Great Flood of 1890. This flood washed through Floras Creek, wiping out a number of farms in its wake. But rather than flowing over wind-swept sand dunes that temporarily blocked the mouth of Floras Creek to the ocean, the floodwaters carved a new channel that flowed north, parallel to the ocean. In seeing this, local rancher Louis Knapp Sr. proclaimed, "It's a new river!" New River in fact is just an extension of Floras Creek that was created in the old deflation plain of the shoreline sand dunes.

In the late 1800s, another factor came into play that would further transform the landscape. To prevent the encroachment of shifting sands, non-native European beach grass was planted along the Pacific Northwest Coast to protect roads, shipping channels, and other infrastructure. This exotic plant quickly began colonizing the open sand dunes along New River in the 1930s and 1940s. With its remarkably long and tenacious root system, the grass restricted sand movement. As a result, the accumulated sand raised the height of the foredune between New River and the ocean. This elevated foredune served as a barrier to ocean tides which had breached the dune at varying points through the years. Once stabilized, the foredune reduced New River's contact with the ocean. Consequently, New River continued to carve its way further north before eventually finding an outlet to the ocean.



New River, looking north from Storm Ranch.

By the mid 1950s, New River had carved its way six miles along the coast, merging with Croft Lake outlet before draining into the ocean. The river's mouth continued its northward migration, and by the early 1980s it had moved another two miles, merging with Fourmile Creek. By 2004, New River measured over nine and a half miles long, entering the ocean at its confluence with Twomile Creek. If left undisturbed, the mouth may continue its progress northward another three miles until reaching sandstone

formations at China Creek. New River remains an extremely dynamic and unpredictable system, a model of nature's response to human alterations.

Additional information about the history of New River can be found throughout Part Two and in Appendix A: Chronology of Events.

A Land of Varied Uses

Most of the visitors to New River come to enjoy recreational activities such as fishing, boating, bird watching, hiking, picnicking, and sightseeing. Most of the users express an interest in preserving the area in its natural state and keeping it undeveloped, especially in view of the influx of people along the southern Oregon Coast.

Oregon's population growth is affecting the region by increasing real estate values. Large open tracts of land are being purchased by developers or subdivided and sold for home sites. The private lands surrounding BLM-administered areas at New River are used for various economic or recreational pursuits including:

- Ranching
- Cranberry farming
- Small woodlots
- Private residences, summer homes, and other housing developments
- Bed and Breakfast businesses

Purpose and Scope

This plan update provides direction for comprehensive management of the New River ACEC and any additional acreage acquired for inclusion into the ACEC.

The purpose of the plan update is to address changes that have occurred since the New River ACEC Management Plan was completed in May 1995. Such changes include clarification of the management direction as well as accomplishments and on-going management actions set out in the original plan. This update also explains what we have learned thus far about the natural and cultural resources of the area, it identifies some gaps in our understanding of this dynamic system, and it provide ideas for future research.

Planning Framework

In the BLM planning system there are three levels or tiers:

1. Policy (national and regional level directives)
2. Coos Bay Resource Management Plan (May 1995)
3. Activity Plans (site-specific plans such as this one)

Support at the National Level . . .

Many of the goals and objectives embraced in the New River Management Plan complement Bureau-wide and regional initiatives. The Fish and Wildlife 2000 program, at both the national and regional (Oregon/Washington) levels, for example, call for maintaining sufficient quantity and quality habitat to ensure an abundant and rich diversity of wildlife, fish, and botanical resources. These programs endorse public outreach, including education, to promote widespread understanding of BLM management efforts. These efforts include collaboration with other federal agencies, organizations, and landowners in management actions that contribute to species recovery.

Watchable Wildlife, Adventures in the Past, and BLM's Priorities for Recreation and Visitor Services are three programs that underscore the importance of maintaining a diversity of natural resources like those at New River. A major focus of Watchable Wildlife is providing wildlife viewing areas and educational opportunities. Adventures in the Past creates educational opportunities and teaches stewardship of cultural resources. BLM's national goals for recreation and visitor management are:

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities on lands and waters managed by the Department of the Interior.
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources on lands and waters managed by the Department of the Interior.
- Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.

. . . And at the District Level

The Coos Bay District operates under its Resource Management Plan (RMP), as supplemented and amended, which is in conformance with the Final Environmental Impact Statement on Management of Habitat for Late Successional and Old Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its Record of Decision, as supplemented and amended (Interagency, 1994). The Coos Bay District RMP addresses the designation and management of special areas such as New River to protect their unique natural, cultural, and recreation values.

The People and the Process

In March 1992, the BLM hired a Natural Resource Specialist to oversee the planning process and compile, edit, and write the New River ACEC Management Plan. That summer, BLM formed a citizen steering committee to provide public recommendations for the plan. These individuals lived near New River and had an avid interest in the area. The members represented a cross section of the local community, businesses, and other interests.

An internal BLM group was also formed, known as the interdisciplinary team. This team of BLM specialists brought their professional expertise and experience to the issues and concerns of New River. The formation of this group is required under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations. NEPA regulations also require public involvement and comment through the planning process. The citizen steering committee provided early public input and guided the plan's direction from its conception. The steering committee and interdisciplinary team met periodically to define the plan's goals, objectives, and management actions. Many sensitive issues were also discussed in the process, such as

off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, visitor use levels, artificial breaching of the foredune, and proposed guidelines for waterfowl hunting and fishing.

Once the groundwork of the plan was laid, the interdisciplinary team completed an Environmental Assessment (EA OR 128-93-15) to insure that no significant adverse impacts to the area would result. This EA led to a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and a Decision Record that was signed by the BLM Field Manager on April 7, 1995. After more than three years of intensive planning, the Final New River ACEC Management Plan was published in May 1995.

Over the next nine years, a majority of the plan's management actions were implemented by the BLM. In late 2003, it was determined that a plan update was necessary to describe accomplishments, provide up-to-date resource information, and clarify management direction for the ACEC. A new BLM interdisciplinary team was then formed to update the plan. Since the plan update does not change the intent of the original management plan, a new Environmental Assessment is not required.

BLM Interdisciplinary Team Members

Chris Church	ACEC Manager, Team Lead
Nancy Brian	District Botanist
Tim Barnes	District Geologist
Dan Carpenter	District Hydrologist
Jay Flora	Natural Resource Specialist (GIS Mapping)
Jim Heaney	Wildlife Biologist
Sharon Morse	District Interpretive Specialist
Pam Olson	Fisheries Biologist
Kerrie Palermo	District Wildlife Biologist
Reg Pullen	Outdoor Recreation Planner
Paul Rodriguez	Realty Specialist
Steve Samuels	District Archaeologist
Dennis Turowski	Natural Resource Staff Administrator
Dave Wash	District Outdoor Recreation Planner

