

Land Use Timeline  
for  
Crow Canyon  
and the San Lorenzo Creek Watershed

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*This document reports historical data collected by the San Francisco Estuary Institute, with the assistance of Tammy Turpin of Alameda County Clean Water Program, as part of the Crow Canyon Watershed Science Project. This information will be used in the next phase of the project to help assess current water and sediment supply processes. Information presented covers the past 230 years, with greater emphasis on the less well-documented early eras. Further historical information from this project can be found in the Appendix Database, and in the project archive established at the Clean Water Program by Tammy Turpin. Special mention should be made of the voluminous contributions to the local history by John Sandoval, and the generous assistance provided by local historians Frank and Janice Delfino, and MaryAnn McMillan and Martin Eschen.*

- Pre-Contact      The San Lorenzo Creek Watershed, including the canyons, the present Hayward and Castro Valley areas, and the bayshore was held by the Yrgin people prior to European contact. Local historian John Sandoval described the Indians of this area collecting rock salt from the natural salt evaporators along the bayfront marshes, and "abound[ing] on the coastline from Alvarado to San Lorenzo to San Leandro, having rancherias on each little stream ending each growth of trees." Specific information about the land management practices of the Yrgin has not been compiled to date, but based on information about other tribes, the Yrgin likely performed purposeful burning, selective harvesting, and other activities which shaped the native landscape, including characteristics of vegetation cover, infiltration, run off, and sediment supply. (11, p. 261; 14, p. 4-5, 9-10)
- 1770              Spanish explorer Fages camps on a "deep creek" near present day Hayward, calling it "Arroyo de San Lorenzo." (15, September 14th 1969)
- 1772              San Lorenzo Creek is described by Crespi: "the bed of the arroyo [close to the mountains] is very full of alders, cottonwoods, and willows." (10, p. 119)
- 1775              San Lorenzo Creek is described by Sal as: "equally populated with cottonwoods and alder." (10, p. 119)
- 1794              Early establishment of Mission San Jose. (6, p. 15)

- 1795 San Lorenzo Creek is described by Danti: "has little water and a few cottonwoods." (10, p. 119)
- 1796 Mission San Jose reported to have 150 head of cattle, including 60 yoke of oxen, 180 sheep and goats, 15 tame horses and six head of others, and six tame mules. (6, p. 15)
- 1797 Mission San Jose is officially established. San Lorenzo Creek becomes the center of an extensive and intensive ranching operation run by the Mission. Sandoval, based on Father Duran, describes the territory: "Mission grazing lands extended from the Alviso-Warm Springs line north to San Leandro Creek, and from the borders of the Bay east to the crest of the Livermore Hills. The main cattle corridor was 25 miles long and three to nine miles wide. 'Mission cattle both large and small', reported Father Duran, 'feed on this corridor and through its center, some fourteen miles from the mission, flows the San Lorenzo Creek, the only abundant and permanent supply of water in the stretch. On its banks lies a mission rancho.'" (14, p. 6)
- 1799-1805 Displacement of the Yrgin to Mission San Jose. (11, p. 261)
- early 1800s? Indians from the Mission are noted as "settling" in the County Hospital area next to the diramaderos ("overflowing of the springs") to work as vaqueros attending the Mission herds. Large willow thickets and a channel extending nearly to the Bay reflect the substantial amount of water contributed to the springs (3000 gallons per minute). This land is actually deeded to the Indians in the Spanish land grants. (18, 17, p. 37)
- 1817-1828 The number of cattle and sheep grazed by Mission San Jose approximately doubles to about 15,000 each. This is the most rapid period of increase. In contrast, between 1805 and 1820 the number of each had fluctuated between 5000 and 8000. (17, p. 73)
- 1825 The Mission is reported to have 3000 Indians and 62,000 cattle, 140 tame horses, 1500 mares, 420 mules, 310 yoke of oxen and 62,000 sheep. However, the 62,000 number reported (twice) seems too high in comparison to later reports and has not been used here. (18, p. 37)
- 1828 Mission San Jose is reported to have 15,000 cattle and a similar number of sheep/goats. Some researchers identified this year (or 1826) as the peak of Mission livestock production, but greater numbers are reported by some authors later. However, despite the differences in estimates, it appears that by the 1820's and 30s Mission San Jose had reached a high stocking density which was probably the maximum possible for the area (see entry for 1834) . (3, p. 2-5; 17, p. 73)

- 1827 Trapper Jedediah Smith describes downtown Hayward as having abundant grass for pasturage, and water in the arroyo, as well as a brush and cactus corral. (*14*, p. 15)
- 1834 Mission San Jose inventories over 24,000 horned cattle, 1100 horses and mules, and 19,000 sheep, goats, and hogs. It is the second most prosperous of the 21 missions, and the most important agricultural mission in northern California. Analyzing this information in conjunction with the description of the Mission's grazing lands (see 1797 entry) gives 24,000 cattle in 150 square miles, or an average density of roughly one cow per four acres by this time. (Grazing intensity in the vicinity of the key water source of San Lorenzo Creek was undoubtedly higher.) This estimate corresponds with Bowman's (1927) estimate of stocking density during the Spanish era. By averaging the estimates of three pioneers of the period, and comparing them to livestock densities reported in testimony made in 108 land grant cases, he similarly obtains a rough average of one cow per 4-5 acres. (*3*; *12*, p. 5; *14*, p. 15)
- 1835 The San Ramon Grant gives the upper portion of Cull and Crow Canyons to Don Jose Amador. (*14*, p. 16)
- 1837 Evidence of overgrazing the area is reported. Six thousand head of cattle are moved to the east side of the East Bay Hills (Livermore Valley) "as growing to the quantity of cattle on the Mission lands, feed is becoming scarce and they have died in considerable numbers of pure starvation." (*14*, p. 136)
- 1839 Guillermo Castro takes possession of land in what is now the center of Hayward, building a small adobe and moving "300 prime young steers . . . to the Castro ranges along San Lorenzo Creek." (*14*, p. 22)
- 1840 As the Castro Ranch replaces the Mission grazing operations, Castro establishes herders camps on the banks of San Lorenzo Creek, in the redwood groves, and at the mouths of canyons, including Crow. Cattle are described as extending to the fringes of Crow and Dublin Canyons (where they were at times stolen by Indian renegades). Some inference about relative spatial impacts can be inferred. The mouths of the canyons where cattle were provided with salt licks and shelter probably received higher intensity impact. In early summer, cattle were concentrated in the lush Castro Valley for fattening. (*14*, p. 24-25, 103)
- 1841 Mexico confers the 26,723 acre San Lorenzo Alto Rancho to Castro. (*2*, section 30; *14*, p. 9)
- 1842 Mexico confers the San Lorenzo Baja Rancho to Soto. It is one-quarter the size of Castro's Grant ("San Lorenzito") and includes marshlands and adjacent lowlands. (*14*, p. 25)
- 1842 Castro's herd is estimated at 10-15,000 head of cattle. Sandoval comments that "number of animals killed corresponded with the number of calves marked and the kind of year, for the range could only support a fixed number." Over

approximately 27,000 acres, this estimate suggests a density of one cow per two acres, which would be a substantial increase from the Mission era. (*I4*, p. 16; *I3*, August 24, 1944)

- 1850s While agriculture during the Spanish era was limited to gardens for local consumption, more extensive farming now begins in the area, with the arrival of American farmers following the defeat of Mexico and the subsequent transfer of California to the United States. Farming becomes very successful on the flatlands. Farmers William Granville Crow, Leah Norris, and William S. Cull settle in the respectively named canyons. The description of conversion of the land by a farmer named Stewart in the Call Canyon may be indicative. During this period he began to grow grain on the flatlands, with some of the fertile bottomlands along the creek being developed into apricot, pear, and cherry orchards, while grazing cattle on the hills. (*9*, p. 8; *I4*, p. 111)
- 1852 Early farmers describe the fertility of the land, remarking on mustard fields 20 feet tall. Cattle continue to be concentrated along San Lorenzo Creek, as indicated by a dispute in which an Estudillo family member asks squatters who have fenced the creek to "allow the poor animals to take their daily beverage of pure, fresh water, and keep them from dying of thirst". (*I4*, p. 77, 81)
- 1853 Roberts Landing becomes major shipping point for local products. (*I4*, p. 89)
- 1854 The first Alameda County bridge across San Lorenzo Creek is built outside Hayward. (*I4*, p. 42)
- 1858 United States General Land Office Surveyor describes lower San Lorenzo as "in a high state of cultivation" and notes that "along the banks of the creek there is a narrow belt of sycamore timber". (*8*, p. 174)
- 1860s Mechanized reapers and headers begin to replace hand harvest of grain. Standard headers are drawn by a 4-horse team, and are described as being used in "very steep areas." (*5*, p. 9)
- 1862 The massive floods in the winter of 1862 cause San Lorenzo Creek to flood adjacent lands two feet deep, and "large chunks of land bordering the creek were gouged out along its banks. The creek changed its course several times during the winter." (*I3*, p. 3)
- 1863 The San Francisco, Alameda, and Hayward's narrow gauge railroad is the first to enter southern Alameda County. (*I4*, p. 149)
- 1864 Orchards are extensive: Meeks employs 100 people and uses an irrigation reservoir 3 1/2 miles away in the foothills. (*I4*, p. 326)
- 1866 Brighton Market, a stock market and slaughtering center, is opened at the mouth of Crow Canyon (present-day Crow Way in Center Street). (*I4*, p. 178)

- 1868 Major earthquake on the Hayward Fault is said to have ended the flowing of the springs at Diramaderos. Meek's orchards are reported to include 20,000 almond trees, 3000 plum trees, 32,000 currant bushes and 800 to 1000 sheep. (*18; 14 p. 327*)
- 1870 A eucalyptus tree farm is planted at the juncture of Crow Creek and San Lorenzo Creek, with 680 trees distributed over 45 acres. The population of Hayward is 504. (*14, p. 124*)
- 1876 San Lorenzo Creek is described as having uncontrollable flows every winter, with debris from upstream swept on the creek and often washing out bridges. (*14, p. 223*)
- 1878 As the population grows, increasing frustrations about dramatic flooding are recorded, from even relatively small creeks. Sulfur Creek is described as "completely dry eight months out of the year, yet during the winter, especially the wet ones . . . the dry, insignificant ditch becomes a raging torrent sweeping out everything which impedes its way." The construction and reconstruction of bridges and culverts continues. (*14, p. 232-233, 255*)
- 1880 Population of Hayward is 1231. (*14, p. 230*)
- 1880s Traction engine harvesters weighing 11 tons are introduced to West Coast agriculture. (*5, p. 27*)
- 1885 Hayward Daily Journal reports in April that two fishermen catch 60 trout on the first day of the season on San Lorenzo Creek, and in November the catch of a 14 pound salmon at the narrow gauge railroad crossing is noted. One hundred and five trout are also reported to be caught from Palomares Creek in a single day. (*14, p. 279, 337*)
- 1900 Surveyors of the United States Coast Survey note that the tidal marshland at the mouth of San Leandro Creek has expanded substantially, while adjacent marshland has receded. The marsh at the mouth of San Lorenzo Creek has also expanded substantially. They ascribe these changes to agriculture: "heavy winter rains scouring new plowed fields have changed the interior margin of the salt-marsh lands." (*19*)
- 1954 San Lorenzo Creek Federal Project creates a flood control channel from the Bay to Hesperian Boulevard. (*1*)
- 1960 Crow Canyon Road widened by the County. (*16, p. 2*)
- Early 1960s Crow Creek is described as "drying up every summer and there were little holes or pools in the creek [where] you could catch fish, most likely steelhead fry. Now you can't find the fish." (*7*)
- 1962-63 Crow Creek dam is built. (*1*)

- ~1962 Crow Creek in the vicinity of the Crow Canyon Park is reported to be straightened, with some effects noted immediately downstream by local residents. (7)
- 1964-65 Don Castro Reservoir built on San Lorenzo Creek. (1)
- 2000 Population of Hayward 144,000. (4)

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