

WASHINGTON STATE HISTORIC RESOURCE DOCUMENTATION

U.S. Department of Energy
Bonneville Power Administration
YAKIMA COUNTY

PURDIN DITCH

Prepared in
Partial Fulfillment of a
Memorandum of Agreement
For the Capping of the Purdin Ditch

By
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I. IDENTIFICATION

Location:

The Purdin Ditch is located in the North Yakima Conservation District (NYCD) on private land in Yakima County, Washington. It is managed by the Purdin Ditch Association (PDA). The ditch is diverted from the west bank of Dry Creek, a tributary of Wenas Creek, located in the northeast corner of Section 24, T15N, R17E. The ditch flows southeast for approximately 3.1 miles, continuing through Section 25, T15N, R17E; Sections 19 and 30, T15N, R18E; and terminating in Section 31, T15N, R18E (Figure 1).

Present Occupant: Purdin Ditch Association Users

Present Owner: Purdin Ditch Association Users

Present Use: Agriculture/Subsistence – Irrigation

Historic Context and Significance:

The Purdin Ditch is a privately owned irrigation ditch constructed in the 1870s and named after James Purdin.¹ Though the exact date of construction is unknown, it is considered one of the oldest ditches in the county, and was constructed with a horse and plow.² The oldest water right associated with the Purdin Ditch belongs to the PDA with a priority date of June 30, 1870. Its purpose of use is noted as stock watering during October 16th to March 31st.³ This predates the first survey of the area by the General Land Office (GLO) – which was not completed until 1875 (Figure 3 and 4). There are 23 water rights for the purpose of irrigation and stock water associated with the 10 laterals that extend from the Purdin Ditch.⁴ These date between 1870 and 1882. The designated period of use for these laterals varies; the earliest begins in March with a majority ending mid-October.

There are differing accounts regarding the start of irrigation efforts in the Yakima Valley. Some of the earliest records date back to 1847, when Christian priests arrived in the valley to establish a mission. Other sources suggest that Yakama Chief Kamiakin had developed irrigation techniques prior to the arrival of the Christian missionaries; utilizing water from Ahtanum Creek to irrigate a garden.⁵ Cattle, sheep, and horse ranching were the predominant focus of early agricultural efforts in the area, as many Euro-Americans settlers dismissed the possibility of farming due to the arid climate. Smaller farming operations began to pop up near rivers and streams for ease of irrigation purposes, though they were slower to gain

¹ It is likely that nearby landowners assisted in this process, including members of the Longmire family (Longmire v. Smith, L.R.A. 308 - Wash. 1901).

² Amara, Mark and Kim J. Lancaster. *Cultural Resource Site Identification Survey of the Purdin Ditch Association Users in the Wenas Valley, Yakima County, Washington*, 12.

³ Washington Department of Ecology, 2019.

⁴ Washington Department of Ecology

⁵ Pfaff, Christine E., “Harvests of Plenty: A History of the Yakima Irrigation Project, Washington,” 4.

traction. These small-scale cooperative irrigation efforts, like the PDA, demonstrated Yakima Valley's potential for further agricultural pursuits outside of mere grazing land. Irrigation cooperatives were common in the 1870s into the 1890s. Farmers would join together "to construct ditches that were easily constructed, fairly primitive, and relatively inexpensive, for the purpose of improving their respective lands."⁶ The *Farmers' Cooperative Company* was one of the first cooperatives to harness water from the nearby Naches River for irrigation. "Around 1867, construction [began] on a small diversion located 1 mile above the mouth of the Naches on the south side. In the 1870s, [the ditch] was enlarged and expanded."⁷ The six mile long, seven foot wide "Old Union Canal," irrigated approximately 2,300 acres in and around the town of North Yakima – later renamed Yakima.⁸

The arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad in the mid-1880s ushered in a population boom of individuals hoping to establish their own farming and ranching enterprises. The swift growth in population quickened the development of irrigation efforts in and around the Yakima Valley. In attempts to mitigate the mounting problems surrounding the increasing number of competing irrigation operations (cooperative, private, and federal), Washington's territorial legislature passed a law in February 1886 to regulate irrigation and water rights in Kittitas and Yakima Counties.⁹ "In 1890, Yakima County had 15,129 acres under irrigation. By 1900, the county could boast 47,588 irrigated acres and the largest system of canals in the State."¹⁰ This substantial increase was due largely to private endeavors and the start of large-scale Federal Reclamation projects, which became the foremost player in water development.¹¹ "While much of the surrounding region was dominated by large scale comprehensive U. S. Bureau of Reclamation irrigation distribution projects, the Wenas Valley's Purdin Ditch [had been] initiated entirely on its own."¹²

James Harold Purdin was born in Linn, Missouri on December 11, 1835.¹³ In 1863 Purdin married Adaline Clemmens – the couple would have seven sons. In the early 1860s the couple began their journey west; eventually settling in Yakima County, Washington c.1870 according to the PDA water rights.¹⁴ GLO records indicate that Purdin obtained a land patent on September 9, 1878, for 160 acres.¹⁵ Though census records indicate his primary occupation as a farmer, he is also noted in U.S. Postmaster records as being appointed to Selah, WA. He

⁶ Pfaff, 1-2.

⁷ Pfaff, 5.

⁸ Pfaff, 5.

⁹ Pfaff, 8.

¹⁰ Pfaff, 4.

¹¹ Pfaff, 83.

¹² Amara and Lancaster, 39.

¹³ Ancestry.com

¹⁴ Washington Department of Ecology

¹⁵ BLM GLO Records

worked as Selah's postmaster from July 20, 1876, to August 18, 1879.¹⁶ On December 5, 1879, Purdin switched appointments to Wenas, WA where he worked until April 3, 1882.¹⁷ Newspaper records indicate that he returned to his position as postmaster later that decade.¹⁸ Purdin also served on the Democratic County Central Committee as a representative of the town of Wenas.¹⁹ In 1894, Purdin sold his farmland to take a yearlong excursion with Adaline; traveling to "Kansas, Missouri, Oregon, and other states... now well satisfied that [Yakima County] cannot be surpassed as a place of residence."²⁰ Upon his return, Purdin rejoined the Democratic County Central Committee. He died in 1898.

According to GLO records, other nearby land patent holders at the time of the ditch's construction included David Longmire (1844-1925) and his cousin Charles Longmire (1848-1933).²¹ The Longmire family continues to live in the Yakima Valley area, with several Longmire's still members of the PDA.²² Though not the first Euro-Americans to settle in the area, the Longmire family is considered one of the first families to arrive by wagon train. David was just nine years old when his family emigrated from Indiana to the Yakima Valley and resided there the rest of his life.²³ He developed a thriving farm and ranch, becoming "one of the largest stock raisers of the valley [as well as] one of the first orchardists here, planting his first orchard in 1872."²⁴

Longmire also played a critical role in the interpretation of water rights pertaining to irrigation operations in the state of Washington. Though not explicitly named, Purdin Ditch was likely one of several ancillary ditches mentioned in the 1901 Washington Supreme Court Case *Longmire v. Smith* (58 L.R.A 308). When farmers upstream of David Longmire's property began diverting water from Wenas Creek, Longmire filed a lawsuit claiming that because he held the earliest water rights, he was entitled to water for his irrigation purposes before it was diverted to any other property. The landmark case ensured that, "prior appropriator of waters in Yakima County holding a possessory right to a definite tract of agricultural land is entitled to water for the irrigation of the whole thereof as of the date of his original appropriation, when his use of the water for irrigation has been continuous and his extension of the area of cultivation has been made with reasonable diligence."²⁵

¹⁶ Ancestry.com, "Appointments of U.S. Postmasters, 1832-1971."

¹⁷ Ancestry.com, "Appointments of U.S. Postmasters, 1832-1971."

¹⁸ *The Yakima Herald*. "THESE ARE THE WINNERS: The Democrats Do a Good Day's Work. A Strong Ticket Nominated." August 18, 1892.

¹⁹ *The Yakima Herald*, "Democrats Meet In An Enthusiastic Convention." September 16, 1902.

²⁰ *The Yakima Herald*. "Local News a La Mode," August 22, 1895.

²¹ Charles would convey his property to David in 1878 (Caldbick).

²² Amara and Lancaster, 13.

²³ Caldbick, John. "Pioneer David Longmire buys homestead in Wenas Valley, Yakima County, on March 10, 1871."

²⁴ Caldbick.

²⁵ *Longmire v. Smith*, L.R.A. 308 (Wash. 1901)

The Longmire name is engraved into at least two features on the ditch, including the headgate and drop dam, as well as a secondary drop feature to the south. There is conflicting evidence on the date of construction of the headgate and drop dam feature. A large chunk of concrete dated “March 18, 1930,” is located several feet from the dam, and was likely once part of the joint feature (Figure 6). “Jerry Longmire,” who was the great-great grandson of Charles Longmire, is also engraved into the headgate; suggesting that the headgate-dam feature was either torn down and rebuilt or repaired several decades later by Jerry.²⁶ Though there are no clear dates in association with the secondary drop feature, in comparison of the names engraved and Wenas Cemetery records, it is likely that the drop feature was constructed around the turn of the 20th century. The names listed were likely the members of the PDA at the time (Figure 11).

In 2011, the Purdin Ditch was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with early agricultural developments in the Wenas Valley. At the time it retained integrity of location, design, setting, materials, association, and feeling. The documentation states:

“Throughout central Washington irrigation ditches have played important roles in settlement and contributed to the success of agricultural communities throughout the region especially since impacted areas are predominantly in arid/semi-arid environments. While much of the surrounding region would become dominated by large scale comprehensive U. S. Bureau of Reclamation irrigation distribution projects, the Purdin Ditch was initiated entirely on its own.²⁷ The Purdin Ditch was one of the earliest constructed pioneer hand-dug earth ditches in the area and has been maintained over the past 140 plus years to supply water for agricultural purposes to landowners within the district...”²⁸

II. DESCRIPTION

The Purdin Ditch is an earthen, unlined, gravity ditch that was constructed by a horse team and plow.²⁹ It has been maintained by the PDA annually to clear sediment obstructions, add reinforcements to prevent spillage/leaking, and remove vegetation. The ditch flows north to

²⁶ Gerald Merritt. *Jerry Longmire* (1930-2020) was the great-great grandson of Charles Longmire; and served as President of the PDA for a number of years. He was a Purdin Ditch water user for his entire life (Amara and Lancaster).

²⁷ The Yakima-Tieton Irrigation Canal was one of the first projects to utilize federal dollars following the passage of the Reclamation Act in 1902.

²⁸ DAHP HPI # 154113

²⁹ Woody, Dave, Noah Oliver, and Corrine Camuso. “Cultural Resources Identification Survey of the Purdin Ditch Users.” 2011.

south – irrigating the lands west of Dry Creek and stretching to the easternmost slope of Cleman Mountain. The ditch measures approximately 2-3ft deep, 3-4ft wide, and 3.1 miles long.

The point of diversion of Purdin Ditch is located in the northeast corner of Section 24, T15N, R17E, on the west bank of Dry Creek; a tributary of Wenas Creek. The water is then diverted into the ditch from Dry Creek via a metal headgate and drop dam (Figure 5). A wooden plank engraved, “John R,” provides access from one side of the headgate to the other (Figure 6). There are two other engravings on the concrete portion of the headgate. Of the two engravings only one is legible: “Jerry” is engraved on the southeast wing of the headgate.³⁰ Near the drop dam is a large piece of concrete that is engraved with initials and the date “March 18, 1930” (Figure 7). This was likely once a feature of the Purdin Ditch and reflects the ongoing alterations and upgrades that have been made to the ditch since construction. Approximately 175ft south of the headgate is a secondary concrete drop feature with inscriptions on the east flank reading (Figure 11):³¹

CLASS
2-8-6
13-10-15

OWNERS

C.M. LONGMIRE
L. LONGMIRE

From the headgate, Purdin Ditch flows approximately 0.5 miles before passing through a culvert under Jenkins Road. The ditch runs along the west side of Longmire Lane for approximately 1.5 miles; briefly crossing underneath to the east side (just north of Conrad Road), before returning to the west side. The ditch runs for approximately 0.25 more miles before crossing South Wenas Road – running parallel until terminating in Section 31, T15N, R18E.

The Purdin Ditch has 11 culverts where it flows under roadways (Figure 2). A majority of these are modern construction. PVC pipes are in place at lateral locations where water is pumped from the ditch to landowner properties (Figure 12). There are two primary laterals

³⁰ The full engraving on the west wing of the headgate was covered up at the time of the 2024 survey. “Jerry Longmire” is the full engraving and was noted in the Amara and Lancaster survey in 2023.

³¹ Previous surveys have noted an expanded list of names present on the secondary diversion that were hidden by a new wooden access plank during the 2024 survey. These names include Lee Longmire, V. Longmire, Mett Longmire, [illegible] Longmire, John Cowan, A.R. (Arthur Richard) Smith. Based on research, it is likely that C.M. Longmire is “Charles Merritt Longmire” and “L. Longmire” is Louis Longmire” (Find A Grave Memorial).

that are diverted from the ditch, and eight secondary laterals (Figure 1). These primary and secondary laterals are a mix of earthen and unlined, as well as capped. All 10 laterals are smaller in length and width than the main canal. Though portions of Purdin Ditch have already been capped, the ditch and its associated laterals remain in use today and largely in their original alignment.

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IV. GRAPHICS

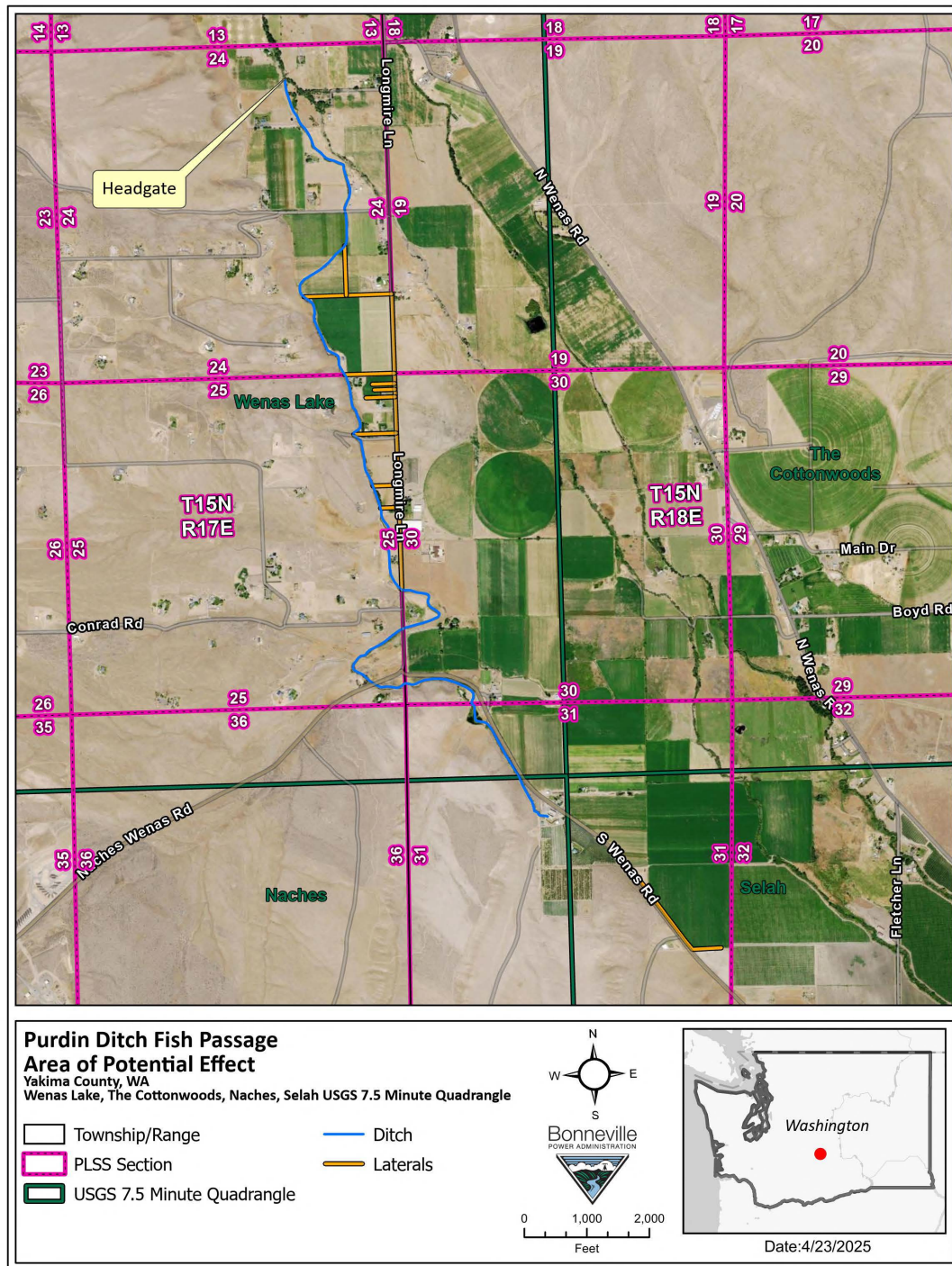


Figure 1: Purdin Ditch and Associated Laterals (2025)

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PURDIN DITCH
Yakima County, WA



Figure 2: Aerial of Purdin Ditch with Associated Culverts (2025)

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PURDIN DITCH
Yakima County, WA

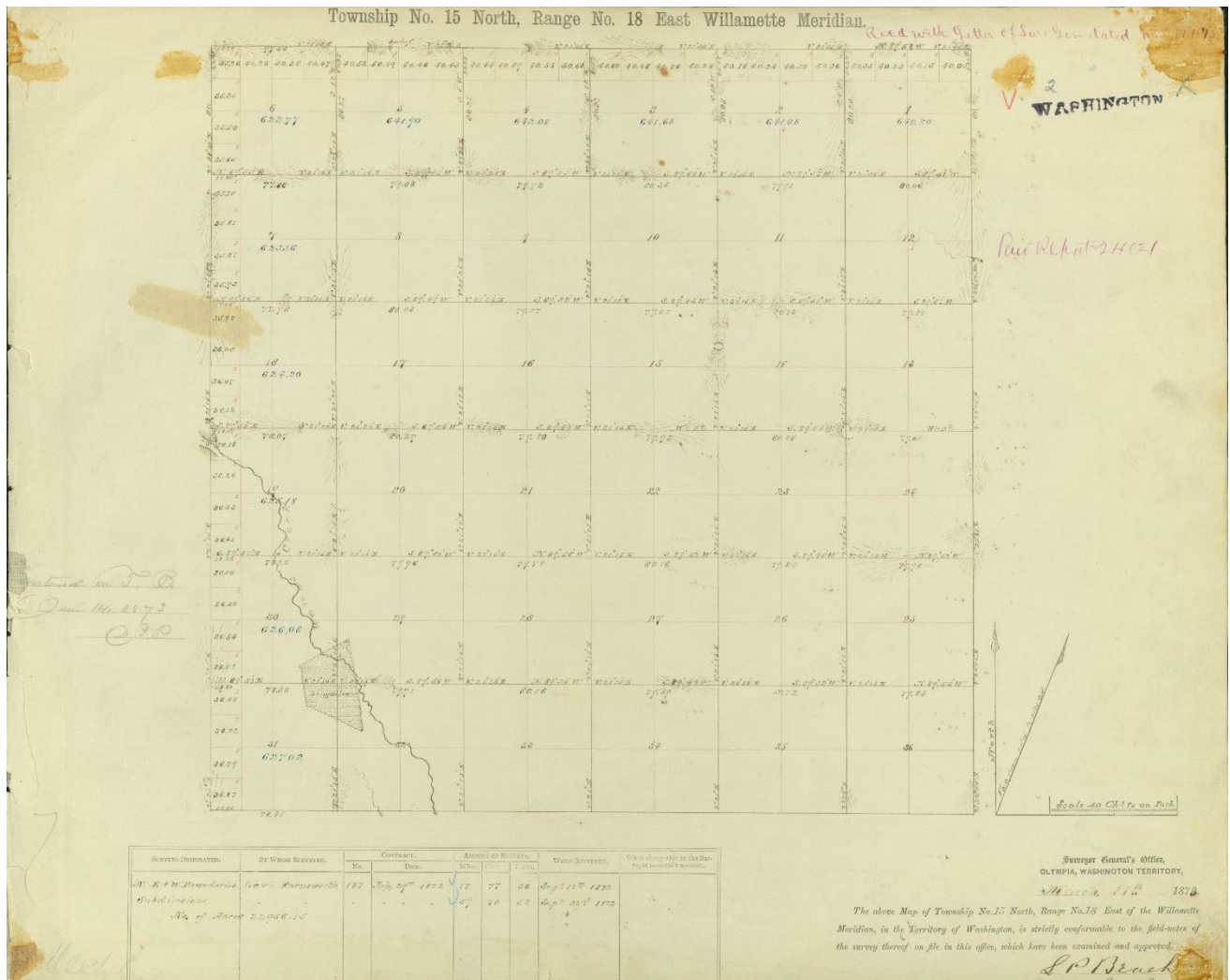


Figure 4: Original land survey, "Township No. 15 North, Range No. 18 East Willamette Meridian." Purdin Ditch, nor its tributary Dry Creek were noted in the survey (GLO 1873).



Figure 5: Metal headgate and drop dam where water is diverted from Dry Creek, looking northwest (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 6: Metal headgate, looking northeast (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 7: Concrete piece from headgate dated March 18, 1930 (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 8: Purdin Ditch, looking south from the headgate (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 9: Purdin Ditch, looking south towards drop structure (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 10: Concrete drop structure, looking north (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 11: Inscribed text on concrete headgate (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 12: PVC pipes connected to pumps that deliver water from Purdin Ditch to landowners properties, looking north (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 13: Overview of Purdin Ditch where it crosses Jenkins Road, looking south (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 14: Purdin Ditch where it crosses Longmire Lane, looking north (Schiffman, 2024)



Figure 15: Overview of Purdin Ditch, looking south (Schiffman, 2024)