Black River Drainage Basin History

At the turn of the century, all four rivers, the White, Green, Black, and Cedar, contributed to the Duwamish River.

In the 1800's, the Black River transported water from Lake Washington through an outlet located where the Renton Airport is located today.

The Cedar River joined and flowed into the Black River a short distance south of the lake. The White River, drained the north side of Mount Rainier, flowed past Enumclaw, veered north just south of the present location of Auburn, and, after receiving the waters of the Green River, merged north to flow into the combined Black and Cedar Rivers and streamed into Elliott Bay as the Duwamish River.

In 1906, a large flood diverted the White River into the Stuck/Puyallup drainage. Shortly thereafter the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made the above drainage change permanent by constructing a diversion dam. Today the White River flows via the Puyallup River into Tacoma's Commencement Bay.

In 1916, the Montlake cut that formed the Lake Washington Ship Canal from Lake Washington to Lake Union was completed. Operations at the new canal lowered the Lake Washington by about 9 feet and brought the lake surface below the level of the outlet at Renton and the lake water ceased to flow into the Black River. Since that time, Lake Washington has discharged west through the ship canal and Ballard Locks.

Sometime in the late1920's or early 1930's, the flow in the Black River was further reduced when the Cedar River was channelized through Renton and diverted to drain into Lake Washington; the Cedar River no longer flowed into the Black River.

In an attempt to provide flood and drainage control in the Green River Valley, streams flowing off the west side of the Soos Creek Plateau have been channelized and directed northward on the Valley floor east of the Green River. In 1966, the East Side Green River Watershed project was conceived to further control flooding in the Green River Valley east of the river and north of Auburn. Completed components of the project included the Black River Pump Station and Forebay (storage pond) and the P-1 channel. The P-1 channel is the channelized lower portion of the Spingbrook Creek, a major drainage channel on the valley floor.

As a result of all the drainage changes that have occurred in the 20th century, surface waters within the entire east side of the Green River Valley north of Auburn now flow to the Black River pond. The pond level is lower than the channel that connects the pond to the Duwamish River. The Pump Station pumps overflow water from the pond up to the Black River channel, which flows into the Green/Duwamish Rivers.