

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

EDWARD SOLBOS



STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH



Interview Conducted and Edited by:
Donald B. Seney in 1994, 1995
California State University-Sacramento
For the Bureau of Reclamation's
Newlands Project Oral History Series



Interview desktop published—2017

Oral History Program
Bureau of Reclamation
Denver, Colorado

SUGGESTED CITATION:

SOLBOS, EDWARD. ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW. Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney. Edited by Donald B. Seney and desktop published by Andrew H. Gahan, historian, Bureau of Reclamation. Repository for the record copy of the interview transcript is the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland.

Record copies of this transcript are printed on 20 lb., 100% cotton, archival quality paper. All other copies are printed on normal duplicating paper.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	i
Statement of Donation.....	iv
Editorial Convention.....	vi
Introduction.....	vii
Oral History Interviews.....	1
Early Life.....	1
Searching for Work.....	2
Hired by Reclamation.....	3
Discovering Duchesne.....	5
Work in Reclamation's Duchesne Office.....	6
Central Utah Project.....	7
Getting Support for the Central Utah Project.....	10
Congressional Authorization.....	12
Reclamation's Relationship with Congress.....	14
Changes to Reclamation's Management Style.....	16
Changing Agency Cultures.....	19
Reclamation Accomplishes Things.....	21
Rethinking the Utilization of Reclamation Facilities.....	22
Multiple Perspectives on Complex Issues.....	24
Making a Success on Truckee River Issues.....	28
Environmental Compliance.....	29
Time was a Factor in Determining the Environmental Document.....	32
Having Support Up the Line.....	33
Empowering the Area Offices.....	36
Public Participation.....	39
Cui ui Recovery Plan.....	41
Heightened Awareness of Native American Needs.....	44
Role of the Press.....	45
Opening Up Communications within the Bureau.....	49
Issues Important to the Commissioner.....	50
Directing TCID to Deliver Water to the Fallon Tribe.....	51
Make Up of Personnel within the Duchesne Office.....	54
Press Relations in Duchesne.....	56
Reasons for Moving West.....	57

Diverse Experiences Important within Reclamation.	58
Applied for a Position in Boulder City.	59
Life in Duchesne.	62
Operations and Maintenance Office in Boulder City.....	64
Small Reclamation Projects Loan Program.	65
Problems Associated within O&M.	67
Great Opportunity to Diversify Experiences.....	69
Wes Hirschi.....	70
Construction Issues with CAP.	71
Politics Associated with a Project.....	73
Travel Demands.	74
Living in Boulder City.	75
Working with Consultants on the CAP.....	76
Reassigned to Phoenix.	79
Opportunity to Manage an Environmental Restoration Project.....	80
The Weaverville Job.	84
Crash Program to Save Fish.....	87
Funding Problems.	90
Frustrating Parts of the Job.	91
Communities Revolved Around Fish Runs.	93
Bureau Frustrations because of the Ability to Manipulate Biological Systems.....	94
Issues with Doing Something Imaginative within Reclamation Culture.....	95
"We Put Out a Movie".	96
Coming to the Newlands Project.	99
Deciding to Become Newlands Project Manager.	102
Preparing for the Project Manager Interview.....	106
Difficulties on the Newlands Project.	108
Opportunities Lost.	109
Having Tribal Representation on the TCID Board.	111
TCID's Diminished Political Power.....	112
Troubling Lack of Success.....	114
Government's Position.	115
Uncertainty of Water Rights on the Project.	117
Settlement II Negotiations.....	118
Recoupment.	120
Progress is Hard to Come By.....	122
Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance.....	123
Wise Use Movement.....	124
Perspectives on OCAP.....	125
OCAP Enforcement Work.	127
Maximum Allowable Diversion.	130

Issues When Taking Over the Project Office.....	131
Water Transfers.....	133
Communications with Washington, DC.....	134
Outlooks between Different Administrations.....	136
Area Manager Concept.....	137
Department of Interior's Involvement in Project Issues.....	139
Complexities of the TROA.....	139
TROA Negotiations Primarily Handled by Departments of Interior and Justice.....	143
Negotiations with Sierra Pacific.....	145
A Good Contract.....	149
The Settlement Two Negotiation Process.....	150
Philosophical Issues.....	152
Repercussions from PL 101-618.....	153
State of Nevada's Interest in Settlement Negotiations.....	155
Possible Benefits for Water Users.....	157
Sierra Pacific Power's Role in Settlement Negotiations.....	158
The Conservation Caucus.....	159
Relationship between Farmers and Environmentalists.....	161
Problems with Farmers' Models.....	162
Running Model Runs on the River.....	163
"Almost too Much Data".....	164
Decoupling Issue.....	166
Pyramid Lake Tribe's Interest in Negotiations.....	166
The Possibility for Fallon Tribe Getting Their Own Irrigation District.....	168
Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance.....	169
TCID's Role Became More Prominent during Negotiations.....	170
Upper Carson River Interests.....	172
Reno-Sparks Interests.....	174
Conduct of the Negotiations.....	175
Casualties of Newlands Project Conflicts.....	176
Future of the Newlands Project.....	178

Statement of Donation

Enclosure 1

**STATEMENT OF DONATION
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS
EDWARD J. SOLBOS JR.**

1. In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth in this instrument, I, Edward J. Solbos Jr., (hereinafter referred to as "the Donor"), of Weaverville, California and formerly of Carson City, Nevada, and Roseville, California, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Archives and Records Administration (hereinafter referred to as "the National Archives"), acting for and on behalf of the United States of America, all of my rights and title to, and interest in the information and responses (hereinafter referred to as "the Donated Materials") provided during the interviews conducted on August 10 and 17 and October 24, 1994, and on October 25, 1995, at Carson City, Nevada, and Sacramento, California, and prepared for deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration in the following format: cassette tapes and transcripts. This donation includes, but is not limited to, all copyright interests I now possess in the Donated Materials.
2.
 - a. It is the intention of the Archivist to make Donated Materials available for display and research as soon as possible, and the Donor places no restrictions upon their use.
 - b. The Archivist may, subject only to restrictions placed upon him by law or regulation, provide for the preservation, arrangement, repair, rehabilitation, duplication, reproduction, description, exhibition, display, and servicing of the Donated Materials as may be needful and appropriate.
3. Copies of the Donated Materials may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the National Archives, including the Bureau of Reclamation. Copies of Donated Materials may also be provided to researchers. The Bureau of Reclamation may retain copies of tapes, transcripts, and other materials.
4. The Archivist may dispose of Donated Materials at any time after title passes to the National Archives.

Date: 8/8/2010Signed: 

Edward J. Solbos Jr.

INTERVIEWER: Donald B. Seney

Having determined that the materials donated above by Edward J. Solbos Jr. are appropriate for preservation as evidence of the United States Government's organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and transactions, and considering it to be in the public interest to accept these materials for deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration, I accept this gift on behalf of the United States of America, subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth in the above instrument.

Date: _____

Signed: _____
Archivist of the United States

Editorial Convention

A note on editorial conventions. In the text of these interviews, information in parentheses, (), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition. In the case of strikeouts, that material has been printed at 50% density to aid in reading the interviews but assuring that the struckout material is readable.

The transcriber and editor also have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

While we attempt to conform to most standard academic rules of usage (see *The Chicago Manual of Style*), we do not conform to those standards in this interview for individual's titles which then would only be capitalized in the text when they are specifically used as a title connected to a name, e.g., "Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton" as opposed to "Gale Norton, the secretary of the interior;" or "Commissioner John Keys" as opposed to "the commissioner, who was John Keys at the time." The convention in the Federal government is to capitalize titles always. Likewise formal titles of acts and offices are capitalized but abbreviated usages are not, e.g., Division of Planning as opposed to "planning;" the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992, as opposed to "the 1992 act."

The convention with acronyms is that if they are pronounced as a word then they are treated as if they are a word. If they are spelled out by the speaker then they have a hyphen between each letter. An example is the Agency for International Development's acronym: said as a word, it appears as AID but spelled out it appears as A-I-D; another example is the acronym for State Historic Preservation Officer: SHPO when said as a word, but S-H-P-O when spelled out.

Introduction

In 1988, Reclamation created a History Program. While headquartered in Denver, the History Program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

In the case of the Newlands Project, the senior historian consulted the regional director to design a special research project to take an all around look at one Reclamation project. The regional director suggested the Newlands Project, and the research program occurred between 1994 and signing of the Truckee River Operating Agreement in 2008. Professor Donald B. Seney of the Government Department at California State University-Sacramento (now emeritus and living in South Lake Tahoe, California) undertook this work. The Newlands Project, while a small- to medium-sized Reclamation project, represents a microcosm of issues found throughout Reclamation: water transportation over great distances; three Native American groups with sometimes conflicting interests; private entities with competitive and sometimes misunderstood water rights; many local governments with growing water needs; Fish and Wildlife Service programs competing for water for endangered species in Pyramid Lake and for viability of the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge to the east of Fallon, Nevada; and Reclamation's original water user, the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District, having to deal with modern competition for some of the water supply that originally flowed to farms and ranches in its community.

Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to:

Andrew H. Gahan
Historian
Environmental Compliance Division (84-53000)
Policy and Administration
Bureau of Reclamation
P. O. Box 25007
Denver, Colorado 80225-0007
(FAX: (720) 544-0639)

For additional information about Reclamation's History Program see:

www.usbr.gov/history

(Intentionally blank)

Oral History Interviews
Edward Solbos

Seney: Today is August 10, 1994. My name is Donald Seney. I'm with Edward Solbos, Jr., in the Carson City Bureau of Reclamation Office. Good afternoon, Ed.

Solbos: Hello.

Seney: I want to start by asking you to tell me about your family, where you lived, a little about their background, and where you were born and where you grew up.

Early Life

Solbos: Okay. I'm from the East Coast, Connecticut is where my parents live. I graduated from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. I married a home-town girl in the town that I was raised in, Tolland, Connecticut. After graduation from Brown . . .

Seney: Before you get onto that, could you tell me a little about your mom and dad and where they came from and what your father did.

Solbos: Okay. Our family, in general, are from Lithuania. My grandparents came over from there with so many other immigrants, and went through Ellis Island and all of that stuff that you hear about. They resided, eventually, in Pennsylvania, and both of my grandfathers worked in the mines in Pennsylvania and eventually died at a young age from black lung, both of them. My dad vowed that he would never work in the mines and moved from Pennsylvania.

Seney: Were they miners in Lithuania?, because there were a lot of Lithuanian miners in Pennsylvania.

Solbos: They were fairly young when they came over, and just when they started getting into the work force the Depression hit and all of that, and those were hard times, there's no doubt about it, back then. And of course there weren't a whole lot of safety kind of regulations relative to the mining industry and the union activities were pretty fierce in those days. And a lot of interesting stories about how they survived.

My grandfather used to get on a train during the Depression and go for a hundred miles and pick blueberries and send the money back. And I mean, things were pretty amazing back in those days. Everybody has those stories. But they were, I guess, the fairly typical immigrant families that existed back then.

My dad then married someone in Pennsylvania and moved to Connecticut, got a job in a garage, eventually then moved to a job in a government aircraft plant and basically worked on projects for the war effort, (laughing) and there were wars all through the times that he was there. And put myself and two other sisters that I have through college. He's dead now; he died a few years back. And the rest of the family, my sisters have all gone to college and are married and relatively successful. So that's my history.

Seney: When were you born?

Solbos: April 6, 1953. I'm forty-one years old. So then after graduation from Brown, the job market was not good at that time.

Seney: That would have been about?

Searching for Work

Solbos: In '76. Actually it was in '75 that I graduated. I put out a lot of job [applications], really wanted to go out West. My whole family had never been west of Pennsylvania before, and it was a "brave new world," you know, out there, just like it had been for so many other people. And so I really wanted to come up with some work out West. I had some job offers with private companies that didn't materialize.

Seney: What did you major in, in college?

Solbos: Civil engineering. In fact, I even came out on some interviews out West, and began to recognize the role of the Bureau of Reclamation in the West and it seemed like all the major things that you would ever look at—Hoover Dam, or Shasta, or Grand Coulee [dams] or any of the things that I learned about as a student or even knew about from trips—were all Reclamation facilities. And it just started to become, at least to *me*, a place that I would want to become associated with and want to work with, work *for*.

Seney: You didn't know anyone.

Solbos: No, I had absolutely no contacts whatsoever out here, or contacts with Reclamation for that matter. So I went through the process of just finding out how to get a job with the government and responded to a general vacancy request for civil engineers for the Bureau of Reclamation out West.

Seney: What was your response when you encountered the government's intake process?

How did you react to that?

Solbos: It wasn't that—if I understand your question—it wasn't very difficult. I mean, it seems now—and it is that way for professional people even now, I think—Reclamation has got hiring policies for engineers. They had them then and they do now; that is a pretty straight-forward process. Other people, for instance, secretaries and non-professional people, have to go through all kinds of hoops, taking civil service exams and getting on O-P-M [Office of Personnel Management] registers and all these things. I've hired a lot of people in my career, and the hoops that those people have to jump through to get a federal job are pretty darned extraordinary, and a lot of people get frustrated and don't do it. But that was not an issue with me; it was a fairly straight-forward process. The only thing, I just had no inkling as to where to go.

Seney: Why don't you explain *your* process? Tell me what it entailed.

Solbos: Well all it was, was to get a federal job you'd go to a place like a post office or someplace, get a form, fill out your qualifications, attach your transcript, send it, like probably to the Office of Personnel Management, I would imagine. They would then rate you. The only rating that really *I* had to do was whether or not I started as a Grade 5 or a Grade 7. If you had certain grades in school you could start as a seven, if you didn't then you started as a five, and that was the only real rating they did.

Seney: And which did you start at?

Solbos: As a seven. And then once you were qualified by O-P-M as having the right education and the grades, they sent you another form that asked you, basically, where you wanted to go. And I had no restrictions on where I wanted to go other than I wanted to be West somewhere, because I didn't know anything about it anyway. So I just filled out those forms and said I had no area restrictions. They came back relatively quickly with two jobs: one was in Duchesne, Utah, which is a little town in northeastern Utah, and the other one was in Helena, Montana. Not knowing at all about either one of them, I figured Duchesne would be warmer, and I found out that was a big mistake. (laughter) Then I learned all about chinook winds and all the things Helena, Montana, gets. But I picked Duchesne.

Hired by Reclamation

I got a job in January of '76 with a small office that was responsible for doing

design work for what was called the Central Utah Project.¹ [We] bought a car for \$399, I remember, and me and my wife drove across country, which was quite an adventure, and it was in January. And we had a terrible travel all the way across. It was really a tough trip at the time; we broke down, it happened to be in Detroit, which turned out to be a great place to get an old Chrysler fixed, (laughter) and managed to limp it out to Duchesne. Kind of an amusing anecdote, I guess to me, as you get past Denver and into that direction, it kind of gets bleaker and bleaker. It wasn't, certainly, anything like the terrain that we had ever been familiar with.

Seney: You wife was, as you said, a hometown girl, so she was from Connecticut as well.

Solbos: And we'd been used to seeing some trees, for instance. And it was wintertime, it was cold. You know, we went through the Rockies and it was forty [degrees Fahrenheit] below [zero] in the place we stayed over in the Rockies, and the car wouldn't start in the morning, and it was just a lot of little things that made things look worse and worse, kind of, as we came across.

Seney: Did you get the sinking feeling that maybe this wasn't the right decision?

Solbos: Maybe this wasn't such a good idea, sure! Of course the parents didn't want us to go and, you know, all of that stuff, as always happens. And as you drive, as you approach Duchesne—of course we had a map, kind of a crummy map, of that area in Utah—and before you get to Duchesne, on Route 40, there's a town called Fort Duchesne, and Fort Duchesne is an Indian community, and I would have to say it's a visually not-too-appealing place. And when we got to Fort Duchesne we thought that was it. It only took thirty seconds to drive through the community, which was a bunch of government-built one-room facilities, most of them, you know, that didn't have doors on them and things, a lot of junk cars all over the place. It was a sad example of an Indian reservation. And then there was one decent building in town, this little brick building, which was the government office, but it was the B-I-A [Bureau of Indian Affairs] Office. So we looked around and my wife started crying and (chuckles) I walked into the office and said, "I'm here to report for duty." And it took about five minutes for people to realize that I actually was supposed to go to the next town, which was still thirty miles down Route 40. So when we finally got to Duchesne—which wasn't much to brag about either—it looked *great*, compared to Fort Duchesne. (laughter) So we introduced ourselves and started the career there.

1. The Central Utah Project is located in the central and eastern portions of the state of Utah. The project provides Utah the opportunity to beneficially use a sizable portion of its allotted share of the Colorado River water. Project irrigation water will be provided to Utah's rural areas in the Uintah and Bonneville Basins. Water will also be provided to meet the municipal and industrial requirements of the most highly developed part of the State along the Wasatch Front where population growth and industrial development are continuing at a rapid rate.

Discovering Duchesne

Duchesne was a real government-created town for that project. It was a small town of about, oh maybe 500 people, at the most, at that time, and a very large percentage of them were government. The predominant culture there was Mormon, which we were not at all [familiar with].

Seney: You'd never met the Mormons before?

Solbos: We didn't even know who they were. It was terrific for us in some ways, in that my wife learned to cook! They've got things called Relief Societies and all these things and so they—of course it's part of a process to get us into the Church—they did a lot of things for us.

Seney: Did you become Mormons?

Solbos: No. I joined the Church once to play basketball and got away with it for about one season, and then when I didn't transfer over into their religion, then they booted me out. (laughter) But I got what I could out of it. Like I said, my wife learned how to cook and we made some great friends with the Mormons there. They were very, very good people; we just didn't necessarily agree with joining their religion.

Seney: What about the Bureau office in Duchesne? Was it somewhat Mormon as well?

Solbos: Oh, yeah, it was ninety percent that way. Because—what I found out afterwards—it was extremely difficult to get people in there and generally the people they got were locals or people from Provo that were transferred out or something like that. I realized after I got there that the job that I had been offered had been open for two years, that no one had ever applied for it. And you know, here I thought that, gee, I'd really done some things and maybe I'd been the best guy out of twenty applicants, you know. Well I was the *only* applicant. I was the only one they'd had *forever*, because everyone else knew what the place was like.

Seney: You'd have to be from Connecticut, in other words, to accept it.

Solbos: To fall for it. Yeah, to fall for it. And I guess, for a lot of people that would go through there and look at that community it looked pretty bad, but really for us it was just fine, and I really enjoyed being there.

Seney: You had no children at the time?

Solbos: No children at the time, and that would have been a problem if we did. But we didn't have any money. They had government housing there, I think it was something like forty dollars a month, and you could deduct it on your income tax because it was determined by the government to be a non-desirable place, which meant it was a certain distance from a hospital and all vital facilities. And so, consequently, if you were required to live there you got these deductions on your income tax. So for like forty dollars a month, tax deductible, we got a place to live. And the salary, I remember, was \$12,518 a year.

Seney: That must be an alright salary, wasn't it?

Solbos: That was fine, especially with no expenses. I mean, there was no place to spend any money in Duchesne! (laughter) The closest town was Salt Lake. A lot of people, just to buy a pair of shoes, would go 120 miles to Salt Lake. But, you know, I had an old car and I never thought I could get there anyway, and so we never went to Salt Lake, you did everything in that community. And most of the things that you needed, you ended up getting at garage sales or borrowing from people anyway, and so it was very cheap to live and so we saved some money and so it worked in fine for us.

I also was working toward getting my Professional Engineering License and so the long cold dark winters was a great opportunity to study. And so generally all winter long I would study for the test, and eventually passed the test. And so that kind of worked into that style too.

My hobby's fishing and my wife's was too—I think I kind of created her that way—and the area had terrific fishing in it. It was very remote, it was extremely easy to go to a place where there were no other people around, and the fishing was terrific. I've still got fish on my wall at home now that we caught while we were there for five years in Duchesne.

Seney: You spent five years there?

Work in Reclamation's Duchesne Office

Solbos: We spent five years there. I was supposed to go there under a rotational assignment where I was supposed to work there for awhile and then go down to Provo for awhile and maybe Salt Lake for awhile, but they had had such a hard time getting people to go to Duchesne, once I got there I was *there*. And I went from a rotation assignment to working six-tens and I worked six-tens for five years.

Seney: Tell me what that means.

Solbos: Oh, six 10-hour days. They were always understaffed and to get a design engineer, like I was, out of college, was very hard for them to do, and so they just loaded me up with work. We had a little design staff that just kind of worked day and night.

Seney: So you worked six days a week, ten hours a day.

Solbos: Yeah.

Seney: All the time, pretty much.

Solbos: For five years, yeah.

Seney: Is there extra pay for that?

Solbos: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we got overtime for it. When you reach a certain level in the government, you don't get paid overtime, but at those lower grade levels, yeah, you get paid overtime. So we did good. You know, we made a lot of money at the time. And it got kind of a drag to work those kind of hours, but every once in a while, you know, you could tell the supervisor that you've kind of had it, and they might give you a month of regular time, which was like a vacation. And (laughs) then you go back to the six-tens again.

Seney: What were you doing? Describe to me what you were doing.

Solbos: Okay. Our office, for certain designs—and I'd have to call them non-major designs—we did the entire design and we put out a specification on them. And I did those designs. For instance: buildings, we built a field station that was later turned over to the district; roads, we could do the whole design for those, and they had computer programs even back then where you could work out the mass balance on the roads and the cuts and the fills and all of that. So we could do the entire design, put out a contract and build it. On major designs, like the [dams, tunnels and larger pipelines, the designs were done in Denver. ~~whole concept of the CUP.~~

Seney: The C-U-P meaning?

Central Utah Project

Solbos: C-U-P, Central Utah Project. Like so many other Bureau projects, the whole concept is to take water from a mountainous area in a remote part of the country and collect it in a number of reservoirs, move it through conveyance facilities like pipelines or

- tunnels to a large population center to be used either for M&I water supplies—municipal and industrial water supplies—or agricultural irrigation. The concept there was to take it from the South Slope of the Uinta Mountains, north of Duchesne, and move it west to the, what they call the Wasatch Front, which is Provo, Salt Lake, Orem, that band there along the Wasatch Mountains. So that's what we did, and it was a major, major project, of multiple large reservoirs, difficult long tunnels, seven-and eight-mile tunnels through very difficult material, and pipelines. And I can't emphasize, I guess, the complexity of some of these things: very, very difficult terrain. I remember working on a syphon that, you know, came out of a mountain from a seven-mile tunnel, dropped virtually straight down in 1,500 feet of elevation about 200 feet across, and then back up about another 1,500 feet to go through another tunnel. And we're talking about 90-to 120-inch pipe; big stuff, pretty complicated.
- Seney: When you're talking about a syphon, this is something that will run (Solbos: By gravity.) and so it comes down and there's enough pressure behind it, it syphons it right back up?
- Solbos: Right back up the other side. On those kind of major designs for dams, tunnels, pipelines, we collected what they call design data, and we would collect all the things that needed to be done to send to the Denver Office to do those major designs.
- Seney: What would you need—to interrupt you—what would you need to collect for that? What kind of data did you collect?
- Solbos: Okay. Well, for instance, if you were building a dam, you had to do all the things needed to do to find a site, and so you might have two or three locations and you might have someplace to go, like they had definite plan reports and early studies, feasibility studies that would give the rough idea as to where this thing should be. But to finalize the location of it, you might have two or three locations that you'd do a lot things. You'd do geology in those areas, you'd do drill holes to see what the ground was like, you'd try to find borrow areas to provide the various materials that you need to build the dam
- Seney: So, in other words, places where you can take the material from to make the earth-fill dam.
- Solbos: And do it easier. Yeah. What's an economic way to do it? How do you get roads in? How would you manipulate different things? In other words, if you've got a real tight site it's a lot harder and more expensive to do than a site where a contractor can build a staging area where he can have two or three operations going on at one time. All of

these things have a direct relation on the cost of the project. So that's what design data is.

Now if you did a pipeline, you'd do a number of surveys, and you'd say, well there are three or four possible locations for this thing. And that would take into account people's houses and property and the difficulty of the terrain and what kind of stuff you had to cut through. And again, where are you going to get material to backfill the pipe, because the material you take out for the pipe you don't put back in, because it will ruin the pipe. It's big rock or it's whatever. You've got to have a special bedding material and free-draining material and different types of material to put that pipe back in.

Seney: So to kind of cushion the pipe with?

Solbos: That's right. So you've got to *find* that stuff someplace. So that's what you do for all of that.

[On] tunnels, [we did] the same kind of thing. You'd do a real comprehensive drill program for tunnels, and it would be a tough drill program because it was always real deep and it was always real difficult access to get to the top of a mountain that you could drill down whatever you had to, to get down to those invert elevations of where those tunnels would be going through, to determine whether or not the tunnel should go there. And of course if you've got faulting, you know, that's a big problem. And different kind of materials. You want materials, basically, that aren't too soft because then you've got all kinds of caving problems and things like that. You don't want materials that are too hard because it's harder than hell to get through them. So, you know, you're looking for the right locations for these things.

Seney: Did you have manuals, publications from Denver to say, this is how we proceed?

Solbos: Yeah, you had what were called Reclamation Instructions, and as a new engineer, that was almost a Bible. You would open the Reclamation Instructions and you'd go to page one and it would describe all the things that the Denver Office needed to have to do that particular thing. But it was just a description of what they needed. It wasn't necessarily a description of how to get it. And so, consequently, there was a lot of information that you would get from your supervisor and the people who had done that work before. And there were some long-time Bureau employees in that office who were able to provide that information, and also in dealings with people in Denver and all, you could figure out what they needed. And sometimes they would come out from Denver to look at things and to provide some advice on things so that

you didn't do a lot of work for nothing.

Seney: So there's an art here to this, as well as science.

Solbos: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Seney: Can you remember any particular difficulties that you had to overcome or any sort of new methods or means that you developed?

Solbos: Well, even back then, the relationships with Indian Tribes was an issue. All the work up there, whatever the project was, be it a dam, was on the Ute Indian Reservation. And there were a couple of different bands of the Utes up there that we were dealing with all the time. It seemed like whenever we were trying to get a borrow area or look an alignment, it was always going across a piece of Indian land. And our relationships with the tribe was always hot and cold. You know, as a low-graded engineer I had nothing to do with that; it was always, you know, the higher-level people that interfaced with those people. But that was always a real tricky part, because we'd get these little badges that the tribes would put out that would have your picture on it and things like that, so that if you were caught on the Reservation, they would let you go.

But they had a lot of hard feelings at that time between the tribes and local townspeople and things like that, over things like hunting rights and fishing rights and multiple licenses and, you know, things were always going on between them. So, as a regular Caucasian person, you didn't get caught on the Reservation without doing things the way they wanted. And even if you thought you had everything that you were supposed to have, they changed the darned tribal chairman and the tribal board so often that you might have a card with your picture on it that was signed by some chairman, and in a week he was gone. And so you'd be out there and these Indians would pick you up and say, you know, you shouldn't be on the land and you'd show them this card, and he'd say, "Well that guy isn't in power anymore," and he was the guy that was here last week. Some of our people were pulled into the tribal jail and, you know, the boss had to go out there and talk them out of it, and all of this stuff. So that was kind of an interesting part of what was going on. (laughter) As just the lower graded workers we never knew from one day to the next, you know, what it was going to be like out there, and so you were always real careful where you'd have lunch, because you didn't want to spend a lot of time in one spot.

Getting Support for the Central Utah Project

But we also had, back then, the process of convincing people that it was a good project. It was easier back then than it is now; you know, you don't do those kind of projects now. But I remember, one of the early assignments I had, and I was totally convinced that what we were doing was right for the world. And I mean, obviously people need water, and there's a city over there, and you can grow crops, and everybody should think this is the greatest idea in the whole world. You know, how can you find a problem with this?

And the supervisor gave me an assignment to go to Vernal, which was about sixty miles east of Duchesne, which is where we were building one of the big reservoirs there—it was Tyzack Reservoir,² I believe—and just talk to a large group of people in town about the project. He didn't give me any information on it or anything, and so I spent a lot of time, it was my first public-speaking engagement ever, and so I spent a lot of time on it, put some slides together, I did some stuff. And got about halfway through this talk and—there were maybe fifty people there—and this old guy stood up in the back and said, "What makes you *think* we *want* to give you all our water so that you can run it off to help some people in the cities who shouldn't all be in the cities in the first place?" And so I kind of tried to answer it. And then another guy asked another tough question, and another guy asked another tough question, and man, it turned into a real hot meeting, and I didn't have any answers for any of these people, other than to say, "Gee, it sounded like a good idea to me." (laughter) And so I barely got out of there with my skin.

And [I] got back to the supervisor and I said, "Gee, that was a heck of a meeting you sent me to!" He says, "Yeah, I figured that would be pretty bad." He said, "That's why I sent you in the first place," because, you know, if you've got a high-level person there, he's *expected* to have all those answers. But, shoot, there's nothing that they would expect *me* to know.

So that was an eye-opening thing too, that whenever you *do* something like this, that there are maybe winners and losers in this thing, and oftentimes, you know, there are immediate benefits to locals and a lot of times these projects are sold on those immediate benefits like, you know, jobs and all this other stuff that might be

2. Tyzack Dam and Reservoir were the primary features of the Jensen Unit of the Central Utah Project. Prior to construction in 1977, the dam and reservoir were renamed Red Fleet. Red Fleet Dam and Reservoir are constructed on Big Brush Creek about 3.5 miles downstream from the crossing of State Highway 44 and about 10 miles northeast of Vernal, Utah. The dam is zoned earthfill with a structural height of 144 feet above the bed of Big Brush Creek. The crest length is 1,670 feet long and 30 feet wide. Red Fleet Reservoir has a total capacity of 26,000 acre feet, of which 24,000 acre feet is active storage. For more information, see Adam R. Eastman, "Jensen Unit, Central Utah Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program 2006, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=100.

created. But there are permanent changes to those lifestyles that occur by what you do. And it really hit me that, you know, this isn't like working for some consultant like those other jobs that I went to look at for private industry, where I was designing a treatment plant for somebody or something like that. I mean, the things that I was doing were impacting millions of people and completely changing the lives of people forever. And it was a big deal. I remember that to this day. I even remember the looks of those people, you know, when I was talking. It was quite a thing for me.

Seney: That must have been going through your mind as you drove home.

Solbos: Oh, absolutely. And it changed the way I looked at things. I mean, a lot of times, when I'd look at, "Oh, I need a borrow area. Oh, it's on that guy's property," I assumed that I could get that borrow area. "I'll just talk to that guy and he'll let me have that. You know, maybe I'll give him a few bucks, but it's such a good idea," you know. Then I started to realize, "Geez, maybe that guy doesn't *want* to give me that property," or, "Maybe he's going to be pissed off as hell that I'm trying to get some right-of-way through his land." It *helped* me because it made me more thorough and it made me empathize a little bit with different points of view, which certainly is a way of life now. I mean, as a manager, different points of view is something, you know, that everybody, even a minority opinion is an important opinion now.

Seney: Let me stop to ask sort of a broader question that gets to what you're talking about here. There are a lot of engineers in the Bureau of Reclamation and a lot of the senior people like yourself, project managers, regional directors, come from an engineering background, though I expect that someone doesn't get to be a project manager or regional director unless they've been through the kind of experience that you've just described and (Solbos: It helps.) come to grips with the political realities of the impact of Bureau projects and the likely view people are going to have of them. But if you're able to assess this, in general, do you think that some of the Bureau's political problems and public relations problems have been maybe caused by too many engineers in higher positions and not enough of a political outlook and an understanding of the kind of things that you clearly appreciate, and for your own benefit, I guess, learned about early on?

Congressional Authorization

Solbos: I don't know. That's a tough one. One part of this that people don't realize—and sometimes I even forget it—but we had at that time very clear direction from Congress on what was supposed to be done. I mean, those were authorized projects. I remember my supervisor, if we were behind, that's why I was working six-tens, if

we were behind schedule on those things, I mean, congressmen were calling us to see why things weren't being built. And so the political realities then were far different than the political realities now. Back then it was, you know, you've been given a bunch of money and you better go out and do this. And our whole process of evaluating our performance was based on how well we spent the money.

And sometimes you get the wrong impression of that. I mean, there are other agencies, because of how their funding goes, leads them to doing things at the end of the fiscal year like, you know, "Well, we've got a bunch of money. We've got to spend it or we'll lose it so we'll buy a bunch of vehicles and we'll buy something." We don't have that situation in the Bureau. We can carry over money.

Seney: What is the difference? Why can the Bureau carry it over?

Solbos: It's just the way the funding, the whole funding process is different in different agencies.

Seney: Because of the expectation that the projects will pay themselves back, you mean?

Solbos: I don't know. I really can't answer that question. It's just that our funding, we have what's called carryover capability in our funding. If we don't use it one year we just carry it over to the next. With certain funding, with construction funding, that's true. Other agencies, if they don't use the funding—it's a use it or lose it thing—if they don't use the funding, it's gone. And so they don't want to lose it and so they do things.

So it wasn't a technical reason for us to spend our money, but it was a very easy way to tell, if you asked for, let's say, \$15 million, that \$15 million was based on a certain construction program. If you only spent three, then it was obvious that your construction program was behind. And so it became real obvious that that became a tool of judging performance. And so all the way through my career, it was always, you know, "How's our funding going?" You know, "How much have we spent?" you know, "Can we do something to get these projects going? Because we've got to get some obligations."

So anyway, that whole process just drove people to do things as fast as they possibly could. And the process that we're in now, really, with this consensus building and teams and either internal teams within the government, like self-directed teams, or external teams like, they've got Club Fed and all these activities over in California, for instance, where you're just bringing in all the environmental groups and consultants and various state and federal and local agencies. You know,

these huge groups. The downside of that, of course, is that it's slow, and you could *never* get projects built in the time that you could build them back then, by doing this. And they were slow enough as it was back then, because of design problems that you'd encounter. So it was virtually not even considered, to go through those kind of things. And so it's not like people are more sensitive now, it's just the demands are different. People were judged then on getting the job done. And the people that succeeded were people that did get the [job done].

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. AUGUST 10, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. AUGUST 10, 1994.

Seney: Let me start by asking a question. We're talking about how these projects are built. I assume something like this Central Utah Project would never even have been considered if the Utah congressional delegation hadn't wanted it and pushed for it and the powers that be in Utah hadn't been behind it. Am I right in thinking that?

Reclamation's Relationship with Congress

Solbos: Sure. That's exactly it. You know, the Bureau of Reclamation doesn't lobby Congress for bills, for work to do.

Seney: Does it work the other way around?

Solbos: It's totally the other way around. I mean, and these bills usually won't even say that the Bureau of Reclamation is going to build them. It's just that we were the agency that did that sort of thing, and so the Secretary of the Interior would be authorized to spend certain amounts of money over a certain number of years to build a project. And then, since we were the construction arm of Interior, we would have that project. So we didn't get into the political process of it, to any great extent. Now, sometimes we would know what was going on, certainly, and we would help to frame the bill so that they had the right information to put together a correct bill, in other words, the numbers and the time and the locations and all of that. But the process of actually getting it sold was the local people who wanted it. And in general, that was a large powerful agricultural interest, or the cities, or both. And of course, a smaller community where the water was coming from didn't have a whole lot of power under that circumstance, and so consequently those projects zoomed through, generally, especially during those years. And I'm talking about post-Depression kind of years. A lot of the jobs like Hoover and some of the other ones were almost "make job" projects as much as they were to provide water and power. But by the time I came into the Bureau, that wasn't really an issue any more—it was much more of developing the West, and still using water as a resource for growth.

And that's pretty much what was going on.

Seney: You mentioned Club Fed, is that a term that the government uses, or is that kind of a slang term?

Solbos: ~~No, that's just a little slang term.~~ [It is a formally established group.] Right now one of the stickier problems in the Mid-Pacific Region, which is out of Sacramento, is relative to the Delta, and all of the things that are going on. And I'm talking about the Bay Delta Estuary in San Francisco.³ There are a number of endangered species that live there, the water that goes into the Bay-Delta is a lifeblood of tremendous agricultural-municipal complex in California. Fisheries too. That both the state taps with the State Water Project,⁴ and the Bureau taps with the Central Valley Project.⁵ But the problems have gotten quite vast, so they've got a group called Club Fed which is a number of federal agencies that meets on a frequent basis to go over issues. One of the things that has spawned that is that our agencies have got such separate goals. For instance, if you want to take two of them, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Fish and Wildlife Service. I mean, two totally opposing

3. Referring to the delta of the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers—often referred to as the Bay-Delta. This is located on the northeast quadrant of San Francisco Bay (San Pablo Bay). The water from the Delta exits to San Pablo Bay through the Carquinez Straits. “The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) is a part of California’s overall water management portfolio. It is being developed as a 50-year habitat conservation plan with the goals of restoring the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem and securing California water supplies. The BDCP would secure California’s water supply by building new water delivery infrastructure and operating the system to improve the ecological health of the Delta. The BDCP also would restore or protect approximately 150,000 acres of habitat to address the Delta’s environmental challenges.” See baydeltaconservationplan.com (Accessed June 2014).

4. “The California State Water Project is a water storage and delivery system of reservoirs, aqueducts, powerplants and pumping plants. Its main purpose is to store water and distribute it to 29 urban and agricultural water suppliers in Northern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, the San Joaquin Valley, the Central Coast, and Southern California. Of the contracted water supply, 70 percent goes to urban users and 30 percent goes to agricultural users. The Project makes deliveries to two-thirds of California's population. It is maintained and operated by the California Department of Water Resources. The Project is also operated to improve water quality in the Delta, control Feather River flood waters, provide recreation, and enhance fish and wildlife.” See California Department of Water Resources, California State Water Project Overview, <http://www.water.ca.gov/swp/>. (Accessed 10/2017).

5. The Central Valley Project, one of the Nation’s major water conservation developments, extends from the Cascade Range in the north to the semi-arid but fertile plains along the Kern River in the south. Initial features of the project were built primarily to protect the Central Valley from crippling water shortages and menacing floods, but the CVP also improves Sacramento River navigation, supplies domestic and industrial water, generates electric power, conserves fish and wildlife, creates opportunities for recreation and enhances water quality. The CVP serves farms, homes and industry in California's Central Valley as well as major urban centers in the San Francisco Bay Area; it is also the primary source of water for much of California's wetlands. In addition to delivering water for farms, homes, factories and the environment, the CVP produces electric power and provides flood risk reduction, navigation, recreation and water quality benefits. For more information, see Eric E. Stene, "Central Valley Project Overview," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=253.

viewpoints, yet we're both in the Department of the Interior. The Secretary of the Interior would be responsible to appear in court over some issue, the Bureau would go and Fish and Wildlife would go, so Interior would be saying two exactly opposite things. So the judge or the lawyer for the other side would say, "Well, what *is* it? I mean, we asked Interior to respond. What's the answer here?" And it became obvious that Interior wasn't speaking with one voice, and then you could expand that outside of Interior to other federal agencies like E-P-A [Environmental Protection Agency].

Seney: Is that what you were talking about when you mentioned before, Club Fed, the internal groups that get together and meet? This would be maybe even B-L-M [Bureau of Land Management] and Bureau of Reclamation and Fish and Wildlife?

Changes to Reclamation's Management Style

Solbos: Yeah, I think when I talked about it earlier, I was talking about the way we do things now is, we do it with internal teams and external teams, and when I was talking about *internal* teams, I was talking about more of the office itself. In fact, we're looking at fairly revolutionary—I don't know if "revolutionary" is the right term—but at drastic changes in management styles for the Bureau of Reclamation now. And the concept is we really don't have this pyramid-type hierarchical structure with supervisors and people underneath them, but we're going more towards what are called self-directed teams, so that when we have an assignment to accomplish, and I get the assignment because I either come up with it, or someone passes it down to me. The old way would have been to figure out which supervisor was more appropriate to do that; you give it to that supervisor and he does what he does and does part of it himself, gives it to some of the people that work for him or whatever, [and] gives you a product back. Now what you would be looking more towards doing is recognizing there's a product to be done, there are people within your organization that have expertise needed. You put them together as a self-directed team with a team leader who doesn't really supervise those people, he's just a team leader.

Seney: These people might come from various divisions in the organization?

Solbos: Yeah, they might come from a Regional Office or Denver, they might come even from another agency at some time, basically, it's matrix management, and you bring together those people that can do the job the best. And they direct themselves. They then give you a product. And they rate their own performance. We're just starting to get into this thing now, and it's scary to a lot of us, because from a management perspective, you're always trying to find clear accountability: "Who can I blame for

this thing going to hell?" Or "Who can I give an award to if worked out good?"

Seney: You feel like you're losing some control with this?

Solbos: Yeah, you are. And again, if no one is totally responsible for it and things aren't going too well, how do you then jump in to save the day? Before you could just get rid of the boss, get rid of the supervisor, or reassign him or get somebody else in there, but now you've got a whole group that is somehow responsible. But then again, it allows those people to feel more a part of the product and to feel more responsible for the outcome, rather than leaving it all up to the supervisor, if it doesn't work out, it's *his* fault.

Seney: What is the theory behind this as you understand it?

Solbos: Well, it's being used in a lot of other agencies. I don't know, "agencies" isn't the right term—other companies, private industry. It's part of the attempt within the federal government, and Reclamation has really grabbed onto it, to reinvent the way we do business, to provide better customer service, and also to provide an environment for employees where they feel more a part of the process and have more job satisfaction by doing it. It's a grand experiment, I would say, really, to be honest. One of the parts of it is getting down the supervisor-to-employee ratio, to one supervisor to every fifteen employees. Our office, for instance, is about one-to-four, so that's a big change. Another thing is to have no more than a certain number of layers between any person in the organization and the Regional Director. Now, there are often many layers before you get to that. The concept there is that things are lost in the translation as you have to bounce through certain things. And also a lot of people are handling the same piece of paper. What do they call it? The "male dog syndrome," where you need to leave your mark on every piece of paper that goes by. The more people that review it, the more changes that are made that often aren't important. So that's the whole concept of it.

All over the Bureau, there are offices that are trying in their own way to implement some of those concepts. Our Commissioner, Dan Beard, is very much in favor of it, and a supporter of it.⁶ And so we've all been asked to try to adapt those concepts to our own organizations. And every organization is going to be

6. Daniel P. Beard was Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation under the Clinton administration from 1993 to 1995 and participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Daniel P. Beard, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, from 1993 to 1995, in Washington, D. C., edited by Brit Allan Storey, 2009, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

different—certainly a totally different concept looking at the Denver Office with a couple of thousand employees, and looking at us with thirty. A lot of things that you have don't fit a team very well, because a lot of our things are very individual kind of responsibilities. In an office our size, you've got one person to do one thing, if you're *lucky*. Most of the time, you have one person doing multiple things. So you might have one contract administrator and one procurement person and one repayment specialist, and one environmental specialist. That's what we *have*. So if an environmental issue comes in, you're going to give it to the environmental specialist. It isn't obvious how a team could come in there. Whereas in Sacramento, they're much more split up into smaller units. They have a little *piece* of the environmental document—maybe they're the editor of it. Another person is responsible for collecting certain biological data; another person is responsible for actually doing the writing; another one might be involved with public involvement. In our office, that one person does it all. So it doesn't quite fit, and we have to modify it, I guess. But the bottom line is, I'm certainly a believer in trying to get employees [to be] more a part of the product, and make them feel happier and more interested in what they're doing. So we're playing with it and we're trying to do something.

And that's what the Club Fed concept is in a lot of ways. You can look at it on a small scale like an office, or you can look at it on a bigger scale like a whole project where you're, like in that case, bringing in all the other government agencies around to look at the problem, rather than have the one agency, like Reclamation, say, "This is how we're going to do it, by God!" and then have Fish and Wildlife say, "No you're not, by God!" and all of that. Now they're all on the team, and they've got kind of nobody to blame but themselves.

Seney: And I guess in that later case, you're trying to circumvent some of the quarreling and the kind of vetoes that go on when you have all this shared responsibility.

Solbos: Sure. The worst thing that could happen—and it happened thirty years ago, and it still happens now, even with all this consideration—is to have a high priority project in *one* agency—and it can be in Reclamation, like the temperature control device on Shasta [Dam], for instance—or in another agency like Fish and Wildlife where they're trying to get through an environmental impact statement for buying water rights for wetlands out here. The worst thing you could do is put lots and lots of staff time, *years* of staff time into it, build it up to some level where you think you're done, and then at the very last step at Interior, where it has to be surnamed off by the various head of Reclamation, head of Fish and Wildlife Service, whatever, to have one of those guys shoot it down, and to "go back to the drawing board," let's say. A terrible thing. And that happened a lot! And it was happening more all the time, because way back when, maybe that one agency with that authority had more power than

those other guys, and they could run it over them. Now, you don't really have that. I can't say that Fish and Wildlife can ramrod something through Interior, and we can't do it either—we've got to agree.

Seney: There was a day when the Bureau of Reclamation could, though, ramrod things through. (Solbos: Absolutely!) For instance, the Bureau of Indian Affairs would not have been a player twenty-five, thirty years ago, and today they really *are* when the Bureau of Reclamation makes a decision about something.

Solbos: Sure. If we have an impact on Indian trust issues, they have to be a player, and they have to buy into it.

Seney: I think agencies, bureaus are different, they vary a little bit in terms of their culture: some are a little more flexible and open, and some are a little more rigid and difficult. I think, for example, the F-B-I [Federal Bureau of Investigation] is known as a pretty tough culture and organization to change. How is the Bureau of Reclamation in that sense?

Changing Agency Cultures

Solbos: I guess it depends on where you sit, really in that, and how much you're being changed by the change and affected by the change. We've just gone through a major buy-out, and also gone through some major RIFs [reductions in force] within certain offices like Denver. We've also closed regional offices entirely as part of reduction procedures.⁷ So people that are directly impacted by that obviously are having a very hard time with the concept. But I think that we're—at least in upper management, and maybe it hasn't been so clear in the past as it was now—we've been in a transition almost for ten years, to a different kind of agency, with a different kind of goal, and a different mission—more from a construction-oriented organization to one more in tune with people's values, maybe, current-day values and water management. And managing things we have, better, rather than building and coming up with structural solutions to problems. It's taken us a tough ten-year transition period to get where we are now, where I think everyone virtually has bought into the idea that that is what we should be doing. And most of the people probably that were really having a hard time with it are gone, to be honest. Either they've retired, taken buy-outs or whatever, or were moved into positions where they weren't so much of an impact

7. During the late 1980s, the Bureau of Reclamation went through a period of downsizing that included closing down two Regional Offices. In 1985 the Lower Missouri Region, in Denver, Colorado, was consolidated with the Upper Missouri Region headquartered in Billings, Montana. In 1988, the Southwest Region, in Amarillo, Texas, was reorganized into the Upper Colorado Region and the Great Plains Region.

anymore.

But for some, certainly, it was very hard. And I guess you have to go back to the old goals of getting something done quickly and having a product. It's very easy to get satisfaction: I've had these things, I've had jobs where I was responsible for building a dam under my watch. And there's a feeling of pride that you get out of building something that's going to be there forever. There's a feeling of excitement about going out and looking at the equipment and seeing these huge machines ripping up and down the embankment and putting material around. And if you don't like something, you go over there and say (snaps fingers), "Take that out." And you've got that kind of authority, and you *do* those things, even though you get a lot of shit over it, because what you've done might involve a change in a contract and you might get sued over it, and all of those things, but you do those things because you look at that as *your* product in the end. I guess I'm talking as an Area Manager now, because I certainly know that many, many people had to do with that project: the designers and the inspectors and all of that, but the bottom line is, your name is on all of those documents, and you make the final decisions on everything that has to do with what goes on. And so you feel almost a piece of history that you've left something behind.

For people who have grown up in that environment—and I just got a taste of it with a few jobs—it's awfully hard to give that up. Right now, it's obscure to say something has been accomplished, oftentimes, as a manager. Probably some of the biggest things that I do out of this office now are sign contracts. But contracts are changed all the time. Another manager will come in, and ideas will change, and the contract will be changed. Basically that contract is good until someone else wants to do something different, that's all. You might get along very, very well with a group of people, these multiple agencies, and they might think you're a very clever and crafty manager, but if you look at oftentimes what that group has accomplished at the end of the year, it isn't very much. You sure haven't built a dam or left something for posterity. You might have cleverly handled some tricky political situation that really probably would have changed with the next administration anyway. You know, maybe I'm not explaining it too well, [but] it's very difficult to get the same kind of feelings of accomplishment out of a job now, that existed back then. I was only ten years of doing that, and ten years of doing this way, so it's kind of even up. For somebody what was *twenty-five* years of doing it that way, this would seem kind of drab by comparison of what you had in those days.

Seney: Well, as you speak it seems to me that it seems kind of drab to you, that if you had your druthers, it might be the other way, rather than the way it is now.

Reclamation Accomplishes Things

Solbos: Yeah. I guess I'd have to agree in some ways that that's true. One of things, if you asked, I think—and we did this through a survey, both an in-house survey and an out-of-house survey—of what people think of Reclamation and all of that: "What is the first thing you think of?" And overwhelmingly what came back from both inside and outside was that the people in Reclamation, and Reclamation in general, is an agency that accomplishes things, it's a *doer* kind of organization. If you wanted to get something accomplished, and let's say B-I-A was really the obvious lead, or Fish and Wildlife was the obvious lead, but you wanted to see something on the ground done, you call *Reclamation* to see how it could get done. They're the guys that have the knowledge, and also the mentality—and by "mentality," I don't mean the intelligence, I mean the *mindset* of, "I haven't accomplished anything unless I can *see* the damned thing."

Seney: Is this an engineering mindset too, do you think?

Solbos: I think it is! I think it is. It's an engineering and a construction-oriented kind of mindset. And that goes on to other things too, like doing contracts and doing other things. I look at doing a contract like I do at building a dam: I've got certain obstacles to overcome, I've got certain people to convince to do things, I've got certain staff and resources I've got to devote to it, and it's a (pounds table for emphasis) product that has to be finished. If you go through a long negotiation and you don't have a contract at the end of that, you've failed, you've *failed*. Even though people walk away and say, "Maybe the time isn't right," or something like that, I walk away feeling like I failed. And so in answering your question, I guess, you've got to take that same kind of feeling. I'll always *have* that feeling that I need to see a product, and I have to have a recognizable product. And so my job satisfaction comes from the ability to find that, and to be able to walk away saying that I've really done something that has *meant* something to somebody. We just had a contract here, that one of the few things probably in this new concept that I've felt really good about. It was with the city of Reno and Sparks and a water district to provide future water supplies, and do to it without building a dam or building a pipeline or doing anything. It's taking existing facilities and operating them differently, and getting a good return back; where the old project was you build something at a tremendous subsidy that the general taxpayer is paying for. And the concept now is you don't really want to do that anymore. If you're going to do something, then the beneficiaries have to foot the bill for it. And it makes sense.

Seney: If I can get you to [explain] this contract, how do you get more water out of an

existing project?

Rethinking the Utilization of Reclamation Facilities

Solbos: ~~What we've done is, we have facilities—and I'm talking about dams—there are for instance, the cities in Sierra Pacific, which is their water purveyor over there, have water rights, but they don't have facilities to store the water rights.~~ [We have a number of water storage reservoirs upstream of Reno. Sierra Pacific, which is the water purveyor for the Reno/Sparks area, has water rights that are only valuable if they can be stored.] So every year [during the flood season] the water just ends up running off down the stream. What we have is facilities that aren't fully utilized, but how to use them is very complicated with endangered species issues and recreational issues and water rights issues and permit issues, and it's a big, complex deal.

Seney: Are you talking about Stampede now, and Prosser Creek [dams]?

Solbos: Stampede and Prosser and Boca [dams].⁸

Seney: And Boca. So you're going to fill those up a little higher maybe, and ship the water down when it's needed, and that kind of thing?

Solbos: Yeah, and what we've done is, we've put together a contract that allows them put their water rights in those facilities under certain limits and certain requirements. Under certain circumstances, when we *need* the water, we get the water that they have put in our facilities for endangered species. In other words, if we've got a *cui-ui* run, and they do not need the water because [there is no] drought in the cities, we get the water and we use it for endangered species. *If* they end up in that situation where they are desperate and they need the water, then they use the water. And they also paid a fair market value for that storage, rather than some kind of subsidized thing. So it's a win-win; we get water for fish. We get money for the Treasury, and they get a drought supply rather than having to build a facility with all the environmental consequences associated with that, and the long-term maintenance of it.

Seney: So you found that satisfying?

8. Construction of Boca Dam, on the Little Truckee River, began in 1934 and was completed in 1937 and is the major feature of the Truckee Storage Project in northwestern Nevada. For more information, see Carolyn Hartl, "Truckee Storage Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 2001, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=200; Prosser Creek Dam and Reservoir are primary features of the Washoe Project. Completed in 1970, Stampede Dam is another major piece of the Washoe Project in northwestern Nevada. For more information, see Carolyn Hartl, "Washoe Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 2001, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=208.

-
- Solbos: That was a very satisfying—it took us five months to do it. It wasn't a trivial [exercise]. You meet three or four days a week for five months. And they would show up with their lawyers and their economists and their hydrologists, and we would have our people there. A very difficult thing. In the *old* days—and I'm talking about two or three years ago, now—you'd have those kind of negotiations in closed-door sessions, and no one would know what was going on. Now, everything's in a public session. I mean, we have tough negotiation issues that we go over with the reporters sitting here, T-V cameras sitting here, twenty or thirty people sitting around the outside that represent homeowners and environmental groups and everything else. At the end of that period we leave time for the public to participate, and so they'll stand up and tell you that you've been full of baloney the whole time, and you've missed the whole point, and the cameras will be right there to take it in and it'll be on the six o'clock news when you get home. I mean, it's a heck of a way to do business. So if you can get your way all the way through that, and not have an ulcer at the end, and have a contract, that you then have to get buy in all the way up the line, so you take it and you send it to Sacramento and they don't like certain things about it, and maybe they want to change it. Then it's got to go to the Commissioner [of the Bureau of Reclamation], and he has people that are looking at it from a different angle, and they don't like it. And it's got to go to the Secretary and he may not like it. And yet I'm negotiating in good faith with these people and basically giving them the impression that if they can convince me, they've got it. It's a terrible thing to have to negotiate the same contract with ten different people—it's not fair. And so I've got to get really good support from people above me at the same time, and that isn't a straightforward process either.
- Seney: But that part probably is no different. That is, even when you would operate behind closed doors, you'd still have to send it to Sacramento and then to Washington.
- Solbos: That's exactly right. The only thing was, then, it was easier to change your mind then, because it was just between you and the guys around the table. Now those commitments you make are on T-V, and they're with all these people in the room. You lose your credibility completely if you can't perform and get support. I've got nothing but glowing things to say about the people above me, because there were some things that we hammered heads on all the way up the line. But when you look at the goal, [and you] say the goal is, "We believe that the concept of helping the cities to do something nonstructurally is good," if you believe the goal of getting water for endangered fish is good, and if you believe that it's good to get a fair return to the Treasury—if that's your goals, then all the other stuff is details, and don't mess with me over the details if you like the accomplishment at the end. And people bought into that.
-

Seney: Can you give me a sense of how something might be decided by you? You have a perspective here on this, and you're authorized to do the negotiating, now it goes over to the regional headquarters and then up to Denver and up to Washington. Can you give me an example of how they might see some of these things differently, just on one detail that you can recall?

Multiple Perspectives on Complex Issues

Solbos: Well, I guess—and this'll be hard, the issue is so complex that popped into my mind, I'll do the best I can on it.

Seney: Let me tell you, it's okay if it's complex, and if it *sounds* complex, because we want to be able to convey that, that these are complex problems. So don't worry about that part. That's part of the story.

Solbos: Okay. One of the things in the contract that we spent a lot of time talking about was water conservation. Water conservation has been a real buzz word in Reclamation over the last few years, and we have a Water Conservation Office now in Sacramento, and special programs on water conservation, new legislation has passed on water conservation, so it's a big deal, and I believe in it. It's a good concept. You can't say anything bad about water conservation. In this particular contract, it was a minor part of the contract. And one of the tricky things about this contract was is that this is kind of a stepping-stone contract for another contract that is going to be foreseen in the future under this piece of legislation, this Public Law 101-618,⁹ that is kind of dictating all of these actions that we're doing out of this office, virtually. It's called an interim contract. The title of it even says "Interim." And there's this other negotiation going on for a Truckee River Operating Agreement, which will kind of fold all this stuff in. But it's going to take many years to do that. The needs of the cities are *now*, and so consequently we have to do this now. So there was always a

9. Public Law 101-618 became law on November 16, 1990. The law contains two acts: The Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribal Settlement Act and the Truckee-Carson-Pyramid Lake Water Rights Settlement Act. The main topics of the legislation are:

- Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribal Settlement Act
- Interstate allocation of waters of the Truckee and Carson rivers.
- Negotiation of a new Truckee River Operating Agreement (TROA)
- Water rights purchase program is authorized for the Lahontan Valley wetlands, with the intent of sustaining an average of about 25,000 acres of wetlands.
- Recovery program is to be developed for the Pyramid Lake cui-ui and Lahontan cutthroat trout
- The Newlands Project is re-authorized to serve additional purposes, including recreation, fish and wildlife, and municipal water supply for Churchill and Lyon Counties. A project efficiency study is required
- Contingencies are placed on the effective date of the legislation and various parties to the settlement are required to dismiss specified litigation.

Source is: http://www.usbr.gov/mp/lbao/public_law_101-618.html (accessed December, 2011).

concern that we had during negotiations that if we accomplish so much in this negotiation, that the cities got everything they wanted out of it, that there would be no incentive to have them continue the negotiations for the broader overall operating agreement that is *critically* needed to be done.

Seney: It has to do with Westpac Utilities?

Solbos: Yes, Westpac representing the cities of Reno and Sparks. For instance, they have already committed in what's called the P-S-A, Preliminary Settlement Agreement, to a major water conservation program, which has to do with water meters and education programs, and doing all sorts of things to reduce the consumption of water. There was a strong feeling that we should lock that into this contract, but if we did that again, then like I said, that incentive would be gone. Also, we have to do an environmental impact statement [EIS] for that operating agreement. We also had to do an environmental assessment for *this* contract. We want the E-I-S for the operating agreement to clearly show that *this is a benefit*. If we use all the benefits in *this* contract, then there won't be benefits in *that* E-I-S, which is going to be a harder thing to sell. *But*, the administration wants benefits *now*, and the operating agreement is going to be passed perhaps when there is a different administration in there, [a] different president for all I know. And so they're much more inclined to say, "I want this stuff right now." Long-time people within Interior at high levels that are career people are saying, "No, we don't want that *now*. We want to make sure the long-term goal is getting the agreement."

Seney: Because the long-term employees have had experience negotiating things on the Truckee River watershed.

Solbos: And they know they're going to be *around* in five or six years. Sacramento is caught right square in the middle. They've got long-term people that agree with the long-term concept and they've got the high-up short-term people that report directly to the administration. So you can see now what goes on.

Seney: A perfect example, right.

Solbos: So I put together a package: it's got the money, it's got the help for endangered species; the Indian Tribes love it, which is the hardest thing in the world to do; all the things that we want out of it. And so then it goes to Washington, who says, "Hey, we want them to guarantee that Reno will have water meters in it in five years." No way we can get that. First of all, there were laws passed in the state of Nevada, because it was such a volatile issue, that precludes it. And I say, "Well, then we

ought to then start negotiations with the state of Nevada to get them to change their laws." So obviously now, this has really gotten big. And again, like I said, Sacramento's right in the middle of it.

Seney: This water meter issue is very emotional in Reno.

Solbos: Oh, and it's not only here, it's at other places too.

Seney: Sacramento too.

Solbos: Sacramento too. A great example of it is the Trinity River Program up in Weaverville, for instance, they've got a dam up there, the Trinity Dam.¹⁰ They've got a restoration program for salmon. The Trinity River runs right through Weaverville. They have water meters in Weaverville. Water is very expensive in Weaverville, when they've got more water than they know what to do with. That water is dammed, sent over the hill, sent down to Sacramento where they have no water meters, and water is extremely cheap. Drives the people up there nuts! And the same thing [is] going on here. I think it's a fairly proven fact that water meters save water, and that when you can have a direct correlation between your bill and how much water you use, it makes you use less water. It would work with me, I think.

Seney: But you want to save the water meter issue, obviously, for this other agreement because you've got to have some leverage on Westpac.

Solbos: That's right. So what we did in this contract is, we accelerated the water meter program, and we did some things to have them develop a trust fund so that when it kicked in, they'd have the money to do it immediately, instead of waiting farther down. So we try to compromise our way through. But it was a very difficult issue, and really looked at totally differently from different sides. One thing I can say, though, is that all those people that looked at it differently, after they had their say and became more involved with the issues, bought into the solution.

Seney: You were able to convince them that what you were doing tactically made sense.

Solbos: Yeah, and [in] reality, they made the product a little better, because they came on

10. Trinity Dam on the Trinity River in northern California that stores, regulates, and diverts water through a system of dams, reservoirs, tunnels, and powerplants into the Sacramento River for use in water-deficient areas of the Central Valley Basin. Water is used for irrigation, power generation, navigation flows, environmental and wildlife conservation, and municipal and industrial needs. For more information, see Eric A. Stene, "Trinity Division Central Valley Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1996, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=108.

very hard-line, and now we've got to get all of these things. Westpac was able to say, "Well, maybe we can give a little more."

Seney: Maybe we'll set up a trust fund.

Solbos: Yeah, so in negotiations they then said, "Okay, I've got this thing with Ed, and I'm kind of ticked off that the deal he made isn't good enough for you guys, but I'll give you that. What do you think?" And then they backed off and said "Okay." It gave us a little better product.

Seney: Do you come to them and say, "Look, I've done everything I can and these S-O-Bs upstairs just won't go along, you got to give me more"?

Solbos: Oh, no, no, I don't play the "good cop/bad cop" thing. No, I don't do that at all.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. AUGUST 10, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. AUGUST 10, 1994.

Seney: August 10, 1994. My name is Donald Seney and I'm with Mr. Ed Solbos, Jr., in the Bureau of Reclamation office in Carson City.

Solbos: Do you want me to finish that thought?

Seney: Please. Go right ahead.

Solbos: I told them that whatever they negotiated with me, as far as I was concerned, was a deal, and that I would then do *everything* I could to convince the people above me that that was a good deal. And so if they wanted to come down and if the people above me wanted to change drastically that contract, then it would have been a bad deal for me, like I said, and I would have lost credibility. I don't think that I could have ever negotiated another contract. But on a couple of small issues like that, they were major to them, but the concessions were relatively minor—I don't think there was a problem with that. Also, there was a desire on the part of Westpac and then also the other signatories, and the Pyramid Lake Tribe signed onto this also, and Washoe County Water Conservation District, to really market this as a success. And Senator Harry Reid here had a lot to do with the legislation, and this was a key part of the legislation.¹¹

11. Harry Reid served as United States Senator for the state of Nevada from 1987 to 2017 and participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Harry Reid, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of (continued...)

And so they wanted to market this as a success, so they didn't want to have a situation where, let's say, I thought it was a good contract but Washington didn't like the contract. You know, they wanted Washington to say it was a success also, so they were willing to do a little bit to help that in that regard. And so when this thing was finally signed, it was quite a signing ceremony, I mean, the senators and the congressmen for Nevada were there, Dan [Daniel P.] Beard came out to sign it, even though Roger Patterson¹² [the Regional Director] had the signatory authority, Dan basically took that authority back, came out and signed it under a big fancy signing ceremony along the Truckee River, in front of all the cameras and everything.

Seney: When was this?

Solbos: It was about a month ago. And it was a very nice wrap-up of a major effort that had taken place.

Seney: Am I right in thinking that there had been so many frustrations in terms of settlements among the parties on Truckee River that the powers that be all over the place were anxious finally to make some settlements here and get something accomplished?

Making a Success on Truckee River Issues

Solbos: Oh, for sure. Yeah.

Seney: The psychology is right.

Solbos: It really is. And a lot of it is the part of the fact that the government is having less and less people, less and less resources. I mean, we can't spend all our time in litigation and fighting over the same issues over and over again. I mean, we've got to finally put some of these things to rest. And also, there are things that just can't be ignored anymore. In other words, when you've got endangered species issues and things like that, you can't just kind of do the best you can for a while, because you

11. (...continued)

Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney, edited by Donald B. Seney and further edited and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, 2013, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

12. Roger K. Patterson was Great Plains Regional Director from 1988 to 1991, and went on to become Mid-Pacific Regional director from 1991 to 1999. Mr. Patterson also participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See, Roger K. Patterson, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation oral history interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, from 1994 to 2000, in Sacramento, California, and Lincoln, Nebraska, edited by Brit Allan Storey, 2012, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

might lose the species, for crying out loud. So when you've got wetlands out there that used to be 200,000 acres and now they're down to 600, you can't turn your back on that anymore, you've got to make decisions and move quickly. So there was really this feeling of urgency. And there also was a feeling, for political reasons as well as others, that we want to show some accomplishments. But everything, as I've said, is *so* complex, that it's hard to show accomplishments. That's why something like this is elevated to maybe even a higher level that it deserves, because people are really looking for it.

Seney: Well this is part of the Clinton administration's view too, is it not, trying to make government function? And does this attitude play a little into making them a little more willing to go along at all?

Solbos: Yeah, I think so. I think it does. You mean, making the high management in the Bureau go along and that sort of thing?

Seney: Right. In the Department of the Interior, at the top, Vice-President Gore certainly is pushing this kind of thing.

Solbos: Yeah. It's almost like, if you can come up with an agreement that all the parties agree to, then by definition it has to be a good agreement, because it's so darned hard to get all the parties to agree to *anything* that it must really be something! And so that's kind of the issue. And if you can go out, then, with that agreement and sell it to others *outside* the agreement as well, and the document that you sell it with is an environmental document: in other words, if you put out an E-A [environmental assessment] or an E-I-S [environmental impact statement] and you don't get called to task on it in the courts, then by definition, that's a *good* thing. Because, really, what the government should be doing is facilitating solutions. It shouldn't be dictating solutions.

Seney: What's the difference between an environmental assessment and an environmental impact statement?

Environmental Compliance

Solbos: It's more the degree of public involvement and detail. We can do, basically, three things. On any action, virtually, we have to do NEPA compliance, National Environmental Policy Act compliance. If it's something where we feel it has virtually no environmental impact, we do what's called a categorical exclusion, and it's just this list of things and it'll say, you know, "Are there impacts to wetlands?"

"No." "Are there impacts to economic stuff?" "No." You know. "Are there impacts to Indian Tribes?" "No." So you just go down it. And then there might be little explanations on each one that says, "Well, maybe a little bit, but not very important." And so you just sign it and it goes to Sacramento and they sign it off. The archaeologist signs off on it, and the historian signs off on it, and all the people, (pounding table for emphasis) the cultural resources guy signs off on it and it's done. And you do the action.

If you can't get away with that, by definition, because there *are* some things that people are going to be concerned about, then you go to the next level, which is an E-A, an environmental assessment. That can be relatively simple or it can be four inches thick. The one we did for this contract, for instance, was about three inches thick. You had to analyze where the water was coming from; you had to analyze what the impacts would be relative to where the water wasn't going to go now. In other words, water that they're storing under this contract before used to go down stream, other users used to have access to that. Where did it go? Some of it went to users in the Truckee Meadows, some of it went to T-C-I-D [Truckee-Carson Irrigation District], some of it went to the Pyramid Lake Tribe. When did it go? You have to do model runs on all of this stuff, figure it out when it is, figure out the economic impacts then associated with that, figure out the biological impacts associated with that, how much of it ended up in a wetlands, how much of it ended up with fish? It's a major, major process.

And then of course the actual items themselves are open, the contract that you want to sell then becomes the preferred alternative, which means you have to have other alternatives, which means that if there's some kind of key item in the contract—[for example] water conservation, you had to describe why you did that—and then other people would have other alternatives, like the people in Washington, "Well why didn't you do this? That should have been Alternative 'B.'" And then the Sierra Club has Alternative "C" and all of that. So, depending on how many people are involved and what the level of concern is, then dictates what your E-A explodes into. Like I said, the E-A might be five pages long and it might be five inches thick.

This thing had enough complexity to it that we felt that people needed to have a very clear understanding of the impacts. Because most of the time when you get called to task on an environmental document it isn't because you put in something wrong, it's because you just missed something. In other words, you know, this is going to impact this whole group that you didn't even consider. This has an impact on water quality and you didn't even talk about water quality. So we had to talk about water quality too, and, I mean, all this other stuff. It ties into the growth, the

future growth of Reno and Sparks. But it has, let's say, a limited public involvement part associated with it. In other words, we had to do a couple of workshops where we told people what was going on and how things were going. We then had a draft that we sent out for review, that sort of thing.

The next level is an environmental impact statement. That is the highest level of documentation. That requires a much higher degree of what I would call "public involvement." Then you put together a cooperators' group, and those cooperators—for instance in this case, if this was an E-I-S, the cooperators might be the Indian tribe and federal and non-federal partners that actually have a *say* in what the document says, and you can then have, minority opinions and all that. You also have to have (pounding table for emphasis) a *great* number of public involvement sessions where you have sessions building up to the creation of a draft, which are workshops and other things. Then you put out a draft, the draft is out for review. It takes a year to review the draft, then you have to have a record of decision by the Secretary. (pounding table for emphasis) A *much* more involved process. You can't do an E-I-S in less than three years, minimum; and mostly, if there's any complexity to it at all, five. Alright.

We're, for instance, working on this operating agreement E-I-S. We started in '91; they think that it might be done in '96.

Seney: The Operating Agreement for, with T-C-I-D?

Solbos: For the Truckee River. This is the big one that I was telling you about. This document [the environmental assessment on the contract] we did in a couple of months, working six-tens. We didn't even send it out in draft. It just went to the Regional Director as his environmental documentation so that he could see that the issues had been addressed and the questions had been answered.

Seney: This is the environmental assessment for the contract.

Solbos: The environmental assessment. And so then, when he signed it, that document then was *sent* to all the interested people, as the final document. Like I said, the big difference, if you had to put your finger on what the big difference between the E-I-S and the E-A is, it's the level of public involvement and this reviewing of drafts and formal process leading up to a record of decision by the Secretary.

Seney: In this case you could opt to do the environmental assessment rather than the environmental impact statement? That was somehow your decision?

Solbos: Yes, it was. And it was based on my perception—and it apparently was accurate—of the level of controversy. If you've got everybody around the table and all the people sitting around the outside that have bought-into what you've done, if you can look around and not see where the problem is coming from, then there's no sense in moving up to that other level.

Seney: But if I'm one of those people sitting around the table, if I'm the Pyramid Lake [Tribe], if I'm Sierra Power, whoever, if I don't like it, then I'm going to press for an environmental impact statement (Solbos: Right.) just to delay the process.

Solbos: Sure. And then I have to assess how likely they are to be successful. And that's a judgement call. And of course, if you're on a track like this contract was, where everybody is expecting it to be done by a certain amount of time, and then there were a lot of reasons why it had to be done at a certain amount of time that I won't go into.

Time was a Factor in Determining the Environmental Document

Seney: Why not?

Solbos: And all of a sudden you build up to that point where you're sitting there to sign and all of a sudden somebody puts an injunction in court because the environmental documentation isn't done. That, again, is to be my definition of failure.

Seney: Why won't you tell me, or why don't you want to say why?

Solbos: Oh, I feel like I'm talking too much here.

Seney: Oh, no. This is what a tape recorder's for.

Solbos: But there were reasons, from a situation with Sierra [Pacific], I mean, we've been in a drought for six years, so the water supply situation was starting to become critical.

Seney: This is Sierra Pacific Power/Westpac?

Solbos: Yeah. Also, there were certain times in the relationship between Sierra and the [Nevada] Public Service Commission—that's another whole group here that—Sierra can make a decision here about this contract, but relative to money, since I'm charging them under this contract, everything I do is making the people's power bills and water bills go up. In fact, my water bill is going to go up because of the contract I negotiated. Okay? (laughter) Because I'm in the same boat as everybody else. So they, in theory, have to get approval from—not in theory, in *fact*, get approval from

the Public Service Commission.

Seney: Of Nevada?

Solbos: Of Nevada. And so just like I have somebody above me that could shoot the contract down, they have, theoretically, somebody above them also. So that also made it kind of fair on both sides. In fact, the contract says that if the Public Service Commission doesn't buy-into this thing and doesn't vote it as approved, then the contract is null and void, which is, you know, an even bigger club for them. And so a lot of times, just like I might say in negotiations, "I could never sell that to Washington," they equally said, "I'll never sell that to the Public Service Commission, because it's got a direct impact on the users and, you know, they're not going to buy that."

Seney: Were they anxious to get it done because of the make-up at the moment of the Public Service Commission, those people might be amenable to the agreement?

Solbos: No. It was more of when they had to submit an annual plan on all the things that were going to happen in the upcoming year. And it had to be done, in fact I think it was July 1, and the contract was signed on June 30.

Seney: So they could get it in as a final document.

Solbos: So they could get it in. So that when it was submitted it wasn't a draft, it was a signed document, because they had to have something that wasn't just maybe will happen, it was something that *did* happen.

Seney: Has the Public Service Commission gone along with this?

Solbos: It hasn't acted on it.

Having Support Up the Line

Seney: Let me ask you a couple of other things about this contract. One is, my understanding is that Roger Patterson, the Regional Director, is a sort of up-and-coming person in the Bureau of Reclamation. I've heard that said. Is that helpful to you? That is, if Roger Patterson is on your side in this contract, for example, does that make it easier for it to be sold up the line if you've got a Regional Director who is well-regarded up the line?

Solbos: Yeah. I don't think there's any doubt of that. The Commissioner is the key player,

probably, in being sold on this. One of the complexities of what we do out here, that they don't have so much over in Sacramento, is that we have such a close relationship with Interior as well. Betsy [Elizabeth Ann] Rieke, for instance, has a very close involvement in what we do out here.¹³

Seney: She's the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science.

Solbos: For Water and Science. The implementation of 101-618 is actually the responsibility of a coordinator in Washington with Interior—his name is Bill Bettenberg.¹⁴ I could say this is probably true, if you talk to the other Area Managers in Reclamation, and specifically in Mid-Pacific Region, and say, "When's the last time you talked to Betsy Rieke?" the answer would probably be never. I talked to her last week and I've talked to her ten times just, you know, in the last few months.

Seney: And she'll be out next week.

Solbos: And she'll be out next week and I'll be meeting with her then. So our relationship is very close. So most people would say the *only* guy they have to worry about is the Commissioner and the Regional Director. I don't have that luxury; I've got to really get a buy-in by this coordinator and Betsy also.

Seney: So it's a little more complicated for you.

Solbos: So it is harder.

Seney: Not because she doesn't have authority over these other projects, but because she's interested in this one.

Solbos: That's right. Yeah, that's right. And it's just, just the logistics is harder because it's just more people to convince. But also it creates a degree of awkwardness for me, because they have a very clear—"they" meaning Interior—has a clear idea of how they want the whole legislation to go, whereas Reclamation has certain components like water conservation, let's say, that they consider extremely important. And so when I

13. Elizabeth Anne Rieke served as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water and Science under the Clinton administration from 1993 to 1996, and participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Elizabeth (Betsy) Rieke, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation oral history interview conducted by Donald B. Seney, edited by Donald B. Seney and further edited and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, 2013, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

14. William Bettenburg participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See, William Bettenberg, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney, edited by Donald B. Seney and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, 2009, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

was mentioning the water conservation issue, I had *no* problems with Interior at all, because they liked the contract. They thought it accomplished the goals of the legislation. It was the people *beneath* them in Reclamation that had a harder time with that concept, because they don't have a responsibility for the overall goals of that legislation. They have responsibilities for the things that this office and they are responsible for.

Seney: When you say "legislation," you're talking about Public Law 101-618?

Solbos: One-oh-one-six-eighteen, that's right, yeah. And so that happens in a lot of things that we do. Oftentimes I get relationships or agreements between myself and Interior, this is how we're going to do things, and then I have to go back and make sure that the other people, like the Commissioner and Roger, have bought into that. In some cases, there are things that have been done between the Region and Interior that I have not agreed with, and I have basically changed them, and convinced the Regional Director that it was in the best interests of the program to change them.

Seney: Because you've got Bettenberg and Rieke to worry about up here.

Solbos: That's right.

Seney: Now when Assistant Secretary Rieke comes out and you meet with her next week, will you write a memo addressed to Roger Patterson and to Commissioner Beard to say, "In my meetings with Assistant Secretary Rieke we discussed these matters"? Does protocol require you, in other words, to keep Mr. Patterson and Mr. Beard informed of what's going on?

Solbos: In the case of other offices, where they're doing it very infrequently, I would say that would be the protocol. In my particular situation, I don't, to that degree. What I will do is, we'll have these discussions; I will then use my judgment to determine what was talked about that might be of interest to them. What I will then do is, is call Frank Dimick¹⁵, who is my direct supervisor—he's an Assistant Regional Director under Roger Patterson—and just talk to him on the phone about the issues that we talked about. If Frank wants more documentation or maybe copies of letters that we were talking about or something, he'll ask me and I'll give them to him. If not, that will be good enough. Roger sees and talks to Dan Beard a lot, and so Frank will then

15. Frank Dimick participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See, Franklin (Frank) E. Dimick, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation oral history interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, from 1994 to 1995, in Sacramento, California, edited by Brit Allan Storey, 2011, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

pass that on to Roger and if Roger thinks there's something Dan is interested in, he'll pass it on.

Empowering the Area Offices

One of the things that the Bureau, *way* more now than *ever* before, is doing is empowering the Area Offices that they are indeed responsible for the items under their jurisdiction. And the items under their jurisdiction is everything in their areas.

Seney: And for you, this is the Lahontan Basin Project: (Solbos: Area Office, right.) Newlands, Truckee, Washoe Project, Boca.

Solbos: That's exactly right. But this is very significant to me and if you haven't picked up on it yet from talking to others, you need to, is that we used to be project managers. That meant we had projects, just like the ones you've mentioned: Newlands and the Truckee Storage and Washoe and Humboldt. Our world was those projects; we viewed everything as to how it impacted those projects, and we protected those projects from the world. I mean, we really did. If there was something going on, we would review what was going on based on [how it would affect the project in our area]. If there was a pipeline going in nearby or these big mines that are going on near the Humboldt, we'd look at that saying, "Now is this going to take the water supply out of the Humboldt Project?"¹⁶

Now we're *Area* Managers and that means we are looking at all of the water and power resource issues in an area. And that might mean that if it has nothing to do with the project or anything that we have ever been legislated to ever be involved in, if we are interested in it and believe that the government, through our agency can provide a benefit, we then pursue those things.

A marvelous example that's going to happen here is Walker Lake. I don't know if you know about Walker Lake, but Walker Lake is another terminal lake just like Pyramid, it's smaller and it's fed by the Walker River system. It is a couple of years away from having the fishery wiped out because we've been in a drought and agricultural diversions and, you know, all the common things.

Seney: My understanding is there are more water rights claims than the water that goes down the river, 130 percent or something like that.

16. The Humboldt Project is located in northwestern Nevada on the Humboldt River. Rye Patch Dam and Reservoir is on the Humboldt River about 22 miles upstream from Lovelock, the county seat of Pershing County. The dam stores river flows for diversion to irrigated lands. For more information, see Robert Autabee, "Humboldt Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1993, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=124.

Solbos: Sure. There's an Indian Tribe involved with it, there's endangered species, there's all the same stuff, you know. But the Bureau has had no ties to it. We don't have a project on it like Newlands. No dams, nothing at all. We have become involved, out of this office, just because of our expertise in that whole thing. And now legislation is going through Washington to have Reclamation do a study and actively really become funded and involved in a procedure to try to, if possible, save Walker Lake. So that's a good example.

We are very intimately involved in water conservation in Reno, even though that isn't a project or ours, that's a city. But it affects things that we do and also we think it is *right* for the West to have that a consideration for them. So we're involved in all of that. So it's really a totally different concept. I feel *completely* free to look at things in my area and decide what is worth spending my resources on.

Seney: If you see, for example, something in the newspaper that strikes you. I'm thinking, I don't know that Mound Hill would be. (Solbos: Mound House?) Mound House.

Solbos: Where they don't have enough water?

Seney: You know, they've got tanks up there. I mean, I don't know that you would be, but conceivably you could become interested in that if you wanted to.

Solbos: Absolutely, yeah, absolutely. Water quality problems in Lake Tahoe, I could go after that. There are mechanisms for grants and things. I can get funding for those sort of things. But I'm a small office, you know. I've got thirty people, we're spread pretty thin already.

Seney: That sounds kind of exciting to me, (Solbos: It is!) and when you talk about it, you seem excited about it as well.

Solbos: It does a couple of things. How we started talking about this, is the feeling of authority that I have. I *feel* now—and what Beard *and* Roger Patterson have made us feel—is that we indeed can make these decisions. And I almost consider—and maybe they wouldn't like it when they hear this tape—but I consider Roger and Frank advisors, I don't consider them supervisors. I know full well that if they don't like what I'm doing that they could make things hard for me and get rid of me. I understand that. But virtually, there's never a situation where, you know, I do something and they just overturn it.

Seney: So they *act* like advisors.

Solbos: They *act* like advisors to me. And even Dan Beard acts like an advisor to me, in a sense that he makes it very, very clear what his goals are, but he doesn't look at an individual issue and say, "This is how you should decide this." He'll say, "I just want you to know that I really believe in this concept of doing things. And maybe under this particular situation it won't work, and maybe the thing's too complex or all of these other problems associated with it, but I would like to see these things happen." And he's made that clear verbally and he's also put things out like a *Blueprint for Reform* and things like that.¹⁷ We have very clear direction as to what the general goals are. So I feel like I can do what I need to do, and that is an exciting feeling. And I think when you look at this thing about, you know, trying to get a feeling of accomplishment and things out of your job now, that was a very, very necessary thing to do to make people like me be excited about my job again.

Seney: It's a big motivator.

Solbos: It is a big motivator. People are coming [in], for instance people on the upper Carson [River], you know, we haven't been dealing with the upper Carson much, most of it's the lower Carson and the Truckee, but the upper Carson obviously takes water that would have gone to the lower Carson. But it's really a politically tough one because we don't have anything up there, any facilities up there. We can manipulate the lower Carson, but we've got to *subtly* work with the upper Carson to bring them into this whole unified watershed management.

Seney: When you say "upper Carson, lower Carson," where's the dividing line?

Solbos: Above the project, above the Newlands Project. Above Lahontan Dam.¹⁸ Well, it's a little more than that because there's some federal project out there, but it's generally above Lahontan Dam. And so, you've really got to kind of pussy-foot through the upper Carson issues because, again, we don't have any authority there, although we can always take people to court for non-beneficial use of water and things like that, but we don't like to do that. (Seney: Abandonment and forfeiture.) Abandonment and forfeiture, all of that stuff. But it's a whole lot better to work with these people.

And so what we've done now is that, recognizing my ability to do certain things now, and my authority, they have come in and—these are the Conservancy Districts in

17. Reclamation published Commissioner Daniel P. Beard's *Blueprint for Reform: The Commissioner's Plan for Reinventing Reclamation* in 1993 as one of the vehicles for his reorganization of Reclamation in 1993-1994. Another vehicle was the "Commissioner's CPORT team report—"Report of the Commissioner's Program and Organization Review Team" which Reclamation also published in 1993.

18. Completed in 1915, Lahontan Dam is the primary storage reservoir on the Carson River for the Newlands Project in western Nevada. For more information, see Wm. Joe Simonds, "The Newlands Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1996, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=142.

the upper Carson—are meeting with me to try to bring them into this unified watershed management concept, and to get them doing the same kind of conservation things that other people are: not because we can beat them over the head with it, but because it's just good sense to use water efficiently as we can. And it's neat to be able to do something like that. Prior project managers never could touch the upper Carson, because we had no authority to do it. Now we do.

Seney: Let me go back some little distance because I want to ask about, again, the negotiations over the agreement that was just signed, and you were commenting on how now, instead of doing it here in a closed conference room, it's done in public, the public is out there, the T-V cameras and reporters and all. I know that must be annoying and is kind of a change in the way things are done. But do you see any virtues at all in opening that process up to the public?

Public Participation

Solbos: Oh, absolutely! I'm a total believer in that concept. All I think I probably said was it takes a long time and it's very hard, but I'm a total believer in it, and for a couple of reasons. First of all, we obviously know, the people that are actually negotiating, know more about that issue than all those other people, that's a given, so it's hard for the public to come in and make, let's say, constructive additions to the contract. But what they *do* is two things. One thing is that if people are excluded from the process, then they dream up all these subversive things that are going on behind those closed doors, and those people are going to come up with all kinds of problems for you, relative to the press, relative to selling it to congressional people, relative to political people, elected officials. If people are concerned about what's going on there, then it's going to dictate problems for you. What happens is, when you meet three times a week for five months, you know, the first meeting has fifty people, the second week has forty, the third week, you know. By the time you're down to it at the end, you've got a couple of diehards in there that have very specific things that they want to see in the contract. But that's good, all those people *know* that the option is there. And we put them on a mailing list, we send them drafts, so they know what's going on, and it makes them feel like [they're involved]. And that is tremendously valuable. I can't over-emphasize this.

Seney: Because you're heading off this difficult opposition.

Solbos: The other thing is, is that every few weeks somebody will *say* something that, even though what they've said isn't anything you can use *specifically*, but it triggers a realm of thought that you totally missed. And it also lets you understand the

concerns that some people may have that you might have never concluded in the environmental documentation, because you've got to cover all the impacts. So if somebody says, "I don't want you to do that because it's going to impact my cattle," you say, "Oh, shoot, I never thought about cattle." And so then immediately, even though it isn't going in the contract, I walk back to the environmental specialist and say, "Make sure you cover cattle," and she writes it on her list, "Cover cattle."

Okay, so things come up. One of the things that the Bureau, the biggest mistakes probably the Bureau had was thinking that they knew everything about these issues. And it's easy to do that. I mean, if you're the guy that's doing power generation on Shasta Dam, you know, it's very easy to say, "How could anybody come and tell me—I've been doing this for twenty years—how to generate and maximize power out of Shasta Dam?" And yet you start having a bunch of fisheries meetings and things like that and you find out maybe you can't generate more power but you might be able to generate the same amount of power, and still accommodate these other people, and you would have never thought of that. Because it's just totally—it's a group think. I mean, it's totally out of your realm of thinking. And so those things are tremendously valuable.

You can only have a signatory who has an obligation under the contract, you don't put just impacted people on as signatories; they have to have an obligation, they're giving up something, they're getting something, they're paying something. There are a lot of people that were extremely knowledgeable about issues that didn't fit into that giving of something up or getting something, and so they were very qualified people sitting around the table. So oftentimes they were able to give us ideas that directly ended up in the contract. So I'm a believer in it.

But it's a bear as far as time. And when you have people above you that are saying, you know, "The time's running out here," the feeling always is, "Well, I've got to get the public out of here." You know, "I've got to sit down with these guys. If you'd only give me five minutes by myself with these guys, I could figure it all out." But you can't do it, because then the people feel like they've been excluded and that five minutes that you spent is going to get wiped out anyway.

And there are things going on in the government that still don't have it. And there are other agencies that still don't have that philosophy, and it's wrong. The Fish and Wildlife Service, a great example is how they do recovery plans for endangered species. That's a closed process. They develop a recovery team, nobody can be on the team, you don't have input to the data. We have tried in some things, like the *cui-ui* recovery team, to get on that team. We've written letters all the way to the Regional Director, we've got biologists that are every bit as qualified as the people

they have. But they don't want to do that. And what it's done is, it's created a lot of bad feelings. It's okay if you treat another agency, maybe, that way, but for instance, when they tried to manage the flows this year for *cui-ui*, we ended up in a public hearing in Truckee that was called by Congressman [Wally] Herger, to "find out what the heck was going on down there," because nobody *knows* what's going on.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. AUGUST 10, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. AUGUST 10, 1994.

Seney: The consequence of what you're saying about the *cui-ui*, that the Fish and Wildlife people won't let anyone else on those teams, is a lot of people don't believe the *cui-ui* is endangered..

Cui ui Recovery Plan

Solbos: And everything that the layman can see with his eyes tells him that. In other words, they do a study, you know, initially it showed that there were 200,000 fish in the lake. Now they've done a five-year study, a fairly detailed study, that shows there are 1.2 million in there. And they go out with a press release. Well, that makes people say, "Well maybe they're not endangered any more."

Well there's all these reasons why they don't want it de-listed, but nobody knows all that. All they know is that there's ten times as many fish as there used to be. And there's other things too. You know, it used to be that a good run was 10,000 or 15,000 fish. We had 70,000 fish this last year run up there. Now, that's all people know, and even the Fish and Wildlife comes out in the paper saying, "This is the most successful run we've ever had."

Well if you go and call Fish and Wildlife and you say, "Well why don't we de-list it, because it's the most successful run they ever had?" The average person can't get any information; me, after fighting for *years* to try to get input into there, you know, I find out, "Well, of those 70,000 fish only 17,000 were females. Of the 17,000 that are females they had a real low egg-to-fry survival rate, and so only a small amount actually out-migrated into the lake, and because of the conditions in the lake most of them are going to die." And when you go through that whole process, then you really can't tell how good it is until you wait for six years to see how many enter into recruitment, you know, recruitment into adults so that they can have their own kids. Until you go through all of that, you find out, well, maybe it wasn't a great run after all. But nobody knows that. All anybody knows is there's ten times as many fish out there and they had seven times bigger run this year than they ever had before; how

the hell could they be endangered? And so they've created this feeling of mistrust. And to me it could easily be dispelled by opening up, to some degree, that process. And that applies to *all* these other processes too.

Seney: This is kind of typical, is it, of the culture of Fish and Wildlife, is to play this close to the vest?

Solbos: I don't know. I hate to, I guess, go into that kind of thing. I would say that Fish and Wildlife—any office—is only as good as the people that are in it at that time. Fish and Wildlife is, I know, handling recovery plans different in other places. So you've got some people over here that are trying to keep this under wraps and as long as those people feel that way, then it's going to be that way. I just had a meeting over there yesterday and we hit them pretty hard on this again. And I'm saying, basically, "You know, there may be times when you need to have closed-door sessions with your group. We expect that. But if you're just going to have a discussion about how good the run was last year and what the problems were and what do we need to do to fix the fishway and all of this stuff, we should all be able to participate in it. And it's much to your advantage to let us do that."

Seney: Make any impression on them?

Solbos: I don't know. (laughter) They sure didn't make any commitments to me, but I'm not going to give up either. You know, there's certain things that I'm a "dog with a bone," and on this, I just believe that it's right. I believe it is right.

One of the things, too, that *this* job has really instilled in me is that I work for Interior. You know, I'm a Reclamation employee, sure, but I really work for Interior in general, and that means I'm just like the Fish and Wildlife and the B-L-M and the B-I-A. You know, when I see them doing something wrong, that I think is wrong, and I think it's going to hurt Interior, it's my obligation to go after that, just like something that's going to hurt the Commissioner or something that's going to hurt Roger Patterson. And I'm doing it. You know, I believe that they are on a road to disaster, and I'm going to do everything I can to try to convince them. Now I'm not going to go public with that. You know, you'll never see me in the paper saying the Fish and Wildlife Service is a bunch of bozos. But the meetings that we have internally between just us and them, I'm going to be as aggressive and ignorant as I can be to try to convince them that what they're doing is wrong.

Seney: Well, I'm sure that publicity wouldn't accomplish anything, in your view.

Solbos: No. No, you know, we want to handle our problems—it's the "dirty laundry" concept,

and you want to keep it internal as best you can. But on the other hand, there's all these other entities—maybe you could call them, almost, my constituents, like T-C-I-D, the people in Truckee, anyone who's impacted by demands for water down there in Pyramid Lake—who call me all the time saying, "What do you think about this part of the recovery plan?" And it leaves me in a very tough situation. I can't say, "Ask the Fish and Wildlife," because they say, "They won't tell me nothing." And so what I've got to say is, "Well my interpretation is this." And they say, "Well, geez, isn't there any way we can get any data?" And all I can say is, "I can't get any." And you know, and then *they* may talk to the press and say, you know, "I've tried to get data and I can't, and even Reclamation can't get it, for crying out loud." And so I'm kind of making my own press releases, but I don't know how else to do it. I'm not going to lie about the situation, but I'm not going to go public and advertise it either. If people want to extract the truth and then use it for whatever, I guess there's nothing I can do about that. But it's a fine line. Obviously I may get told to "lay off" and if I'm working on the Fish and Wildlife I obviously don't have enough work to do myself, so consequently, you know. (laughter)

Seney: Well, I can understand why you'd see this as something that you ought to be legitimately interested in. I can appreciate that.

Solbos: Well, for the reason of "it's right" and that we need to, as an agency, Interior needs to just be open on this stuff—that's why we have a National Biologic Service now, because of this kind of junk. We're going into these negotiations here in September, and that is based on a number of goals; one of the goals is 25,000 acres of wetlands in the Stillwater. One of the goals is drought protection for the cities and rural water supplies. And then one of the goals is trying to maintain an agricultural base in the Lahontan Valley, although we don't know what the size is. And then the number one at the top of the list is *cui-ui* recovery. And so the first question is, obviously, how much do we need for *cui-ui* recovery? And so it's the crux of everything we're doing. And it's really the hope of having a viable agricultural base in Lahontan Valley. And by that I mean, the Act specifically says, "25,000 acres of prime wetlands." So that means you've got to get enough water to do it, and the water's coming from the project and it's going to gobble up half the project to do it.

Seney: Half, you think? They're going to go from seventy to thirty-five [thousand acres]?

Solbos: You know, there's a wide range there, but at least half.

Seney: Some of that could be benchland, which will take a little more.

Solbos: They're looking at 150,000, 160,000 acre feet of water and there's 320,000 on the project. So that's half. And then the other big unknown is up to 110,000 acre feet for *cui-ui*. Well if you take a 110 and a 160, it's 270. That doesn't leave you anything.

So the only hope then, is maybe *cui-ui* doesn't need so much. You know, if I was them, if I was the negotiators for the other side, I would be saying, "You prove to me you need 110!" You know, "Why don't you let us come to the recovery team meetings? Why don't you show us that this is what you need? Why do you keep it a secret from us? Why do you expect us to negotiate away our future on figures that we have no part of even calculating or knowing how to understand?" That's what I would say. (laughs)

Seney: I guess someone who didn't know better would think that maybe Fish and Wildlife was pretty close to the Pyramid Paiute Indians, and might even be considered to be representing their interests, in terms of the way they're behaving about keeping the recovery level secret and what's going on here? Would a cynic think that, do you think?

Heightened Awareness of Native American Needs

Solbos: Well, I don't know. You don't have to be a cynic, I think. I think we all, all of the Interior agencies, and us included certainly, are being asked to give a greatly heightened awareness of Native American needs. And, you know, when you talk about going to the Commissioner and him giving you these broad goals, certainly that is a broad goal.

Seney: He's said this to you, has he?

Solbos: Sure. And it's in the *Blueprint for Reform* and all of that. You know, we need to do a better job of fulfilling the needs of Native Americans. And in cases in the past, where maybe, you know, we'd worry about economic impacts to agriculture, we'd worry about some other things, we've got to basically say to ourselves, "Is this impacting an Indian trust issue?" And if it *is* impacting an Indian trust issue, we can't do it, and we've got to do things that we can to enhance it. So they [Fish and Wildlife] have that same message, and so we've all kind of got the same message. And the same is true with endangered species and the environment, we're giving that greatly enhanced consideration, even to the point where our traditional interests, the agricultural interests, feel like there is nobody that is looking out for their interests anymore. I mean, I would have to say, if you asked me, and I was trying to be totally honest, what my biases are now.

Okay, that's another thing about the Recovery Team, they say they don't have any biases, and it's pretty funny, you know. We all have biases. And Reclamation *certainly* has biases. Five years ago my biases were very strong. I would have [to say that now], even though I know I'm biased because I work for an agency that has, and I get direction of what to do on certain things, it would be very hard for me to describe what my bias is anymore, because my bias is to try to do what [the public] wants, if I don't hurt somebody too bad. And if I hurt somebody, I've got to see if the benefit of it is as bad as how much I'm hurting the other guy. And if I think the benefit—and benefits are environmental, Indian, you know, economic, all of these things and if the benefits are better than the hurt, I'm still going try to do it. If something is equal, let's say the agricultural interests want to do something and the tribe wants to do something it's a loser if I take the agricultural interest. If I got this thing elevated, which it will in two seconds if I do that, and it goes up to the Commissioner or Interior and it was a wash, I could have gone either way, I better go with the tribe. And that's just how it [is]. And that's very awkward.

You know, like I said, the farm interests don't feel like they have anybody supporting them anymore, and they feel like we've abandoned them. It's worse than non-support, it's like they've gone to the other side, and in some ways we really have. You know, there's a real feeling that we are also trying to make up for wrongs of many years past and the only way you do that is to maybe go a little bit more to make their side. And we do that. There's no doubt about that. And that's different than a lot of other things like the affirmative action programs and all those other things. They are an attempt to [right] things that have been done in the past. We do that.

Role of the Press

Seney: Let me ask you about the press. You mentioned that the press will be at the negotiations and then if someone calls you about recovery matters and you won't go to the press directly, but you'll say, "Well I can't get information," and that may end up, as you describe it, *in* the press, "Even Reclamation can't get information." (Solbos: Yes.) How would you evaluate the press as you deal with them on a variety of grounds? One, do they know much about the water issues? Do they ask the right questions? Generally when you see the T-V reports or read the newspaper articles, you say, "Ahh, they've got that," or "They haven't got it"? How do you use the press yourself? I mean, what use do you make of them and what mischief do they cause you?

Solbos: Yeah, I would have to say that I am just enormously impressed with the press in this

area, and I'm talking about the Reno papers, the Tahoe papers, the Fernley and Fallon papers. I have had a lot of experience, I would have to say, with the press in previous jobs, and I have not done real well, a lot of times, with the press, to where we were pretty much adversaries and I did not give them any information and when they asked me questions I would specifically answer their question and that's all they ever got from me.

But that isn't the case here, and I guess the difference is that they *really* make the effort to understand the issues. And one way they do that is they assign the same person to the thing all the time. I've been here for three years, and in all of the papers that I've dealt with, and we're talking maybe five key papers, and two T-V stations, the same person has been involved in these issues all three years. In none of those areas have they changed a single person, which is amazing. And these people have become very, very knowledgeable and they've taken the time to sit down with me in my office and talk about issues, and I've pumped them full of data and, you know, I give them all our reports and everything and I say, "You'll never understand this unless you read this thing," and they'll get halfway through and they'll call me back and they'll say, "I've got to ask you some questions. I don't understand this stuff." They'll come over and do that. It's flat-out amazed me as to the detail that they do.

And certain papers, like the Fallon paper, has done in-depth stories on, for instance, OCAP [Operating Criteria and Procedures] and recoupment and issues relative to that. The Reno paper has done in-depth, multiple-part stories on the Truckee River Operating Agreement [TROA] and the environmental impacts that are being done, and the contract that we've negotiated. A really impressive group of people. When I want to get out a story that I think is just something that would help people understand what I'm doing, I can call any of those reporters and say, "Hey, would you be interested in running an article on this. I think people would be interested and it would help me to get the word out." They'll do it. They've all done it.

Seney: Do you kind of rotate that; so that if an article appears in the Reno *Gazette* and I'm in Fallon, I'm going to be reading that and I'm going to say, "Ah, Ed Solbos is talking to So-and-So," so next time you . . .

Solbos: Yeah. Sometimes. But mostly the issues really relate more to one paper than another. The only ones that are really close is Fallon and Fernley. But even there you've got different issues and different water problems and that sort of thing, so most of the time it's not an issue. Sometimes I'll call two of the papers and do the same thing. Another thing that the papers will do for me, which is *revolutionary* in

my dealing with these guys, is they'll send me a draft. And, you know, if I'm giving them something real technical and I'm rattling off a bunch of terms, you know, that I don't think they have a good chance of getting right, in the right context, I'll say, "Hey, would you give me a draft of this?" And they will, depending on their deadline. Sometimes they're right up against a deadline and it doesn't work. And I certainly respect that.

Those people, they've got a hell of a job, you know. Especially these T-V people that'll drive out here, they've got to be on T-V at six o'clock, they're here at four-thirty interviewing me and then they drive like a maniac back there. I know they can't have more than five minutes to walk in and get behind the camera and be live, and all of a sudden they've got that thing on that they just did with me half an hour before. It impresses the hell out of me.

But anyway, they'll give me these drafts, and I consider that an honor, almost. And I only change technical things. You know, if they've got a twist on this that I don't like, I'll tell them, "I wish you hadn't have done it that way," but I never try to get them to change it or anything like that. It's just the technical stuff. And if they've got quotes in there—because they love quotes and I, maybe you can tell by talking, I'm fairly quotable; I throw out stuff all the time—sometimes they'll put in a quote, and it's happened a couple of times, I say, "If you put that in there, I'm really hurt. I mean, Washington gets these clips and they're going to look at that and I know what I said and you know what I said, and that's what I said, but I didn't really mean it the way they're going to take it." They'll pull those quotes. And that's really something. Whereas in other places I've been, they put in quotes that I never even said, and totally out of context and very malicious. But I have not had that here. I don't know why it is.

Seney: You don't know why? I was going to ask you to account for it.

Solbos: I don't know if it's because I've matured with my dealings with them, maybe a little.

Seney: A little better cultivating the press, maybe?

Solbos: Maybe. Or maybe just because I was going into areas where the press was one hundred percent or that the community was one hundred percent anti-Bureau and the press had to sell papers and the only way they could sell papers was to write anti-Bureau articles. And so I just was a loser as soon as I came in. And there was a lot of that.

- Seney: But, certainly in your position, this is one thing you have to be able to do, is to cultivate the press and deal with the press and to use the press.
- Solbos: Yeah, absolutely. They could be a tremendous asset, and man, no way can you get in trouble faster than public relations; T-V isn't so bad because most of the people don't see it, but Roger Patterson and Dan Beard get every press release from these papers. Every article gets cut out by my people, sent to Sacramento, and FAXed all over the country. (laughs) So they know.
- Seney: So they're not going to see the video of the T-V report but they're going to see the newspaper article.
- Solbos: They're going to see the newspaper article, yeah. And that's good because T-V is much more theatrical, you know. And also T-V has only got, what, ten seconds?
- Seney: Thirty seconds, sixty maybe.
- Solbos: Thirty seconds, yeah.
- Seney: A minute-and-a-half if you have the lead.
- Solbos: You think it's a big story. And, they'll come over here for half-an-hour, take fifteen minutes setting up their stuff, and you're on there for twenty seconds, thirty seconds. And it's just a little piece, you know. You might have said, "Let me explain this to you," and the whole "explain it to you" is gone and all you've got is the thing at the end that nobody really knows what. So it's really tough. And if you were judged by how well that T-V thing came across—a lot of times you say, "Oh, shit," you know, as soon as you see that. But it doesn't really get anywhere. The newspaper stuff really does.
- Seney: Since the newspaper stuff does get to Roger Patterson and up to Washington, D.C., is it ever possible that information might be given out by you knowing that it's going to reach that destination and hoping to form an opinion or get some information across?
- Solbos: No, I guess I'm not smart enough to do that. I've got a relationship now where—and it really is amazing; this is such a change—but in sixteen years with the Bureau, I *never* called a Commissioner, I never called an Assistant Secretary—maybe a couple of times in big ceremonies I happened to be able to shake their hand. But I'm in a situation now where I can call Dan Beard and I do. We have e-mail on our computers, you know. I can just say, "Hey Dan, this just happened. What do you think?" And virtually he'll, in a couple of days I'll get it back on my computer,

"That's pretty interesting. Why did you do that?" It's really an amazing relationship with people at that level. I don't know where they get the time. So I don't do tricky stuff like you're talking about. It's a lot easier for me to pick up the phone and try to convince them of something, rather than by the newspapers.

Seney: You were talking about in the reorganizations, how you're trying to eliminate the levels in the Bureau, and it's been suggested to me by Bureau people that one of the ways it's going to eliminate these levels is this e-mail system. Apparently anyone in the office here can send something to Mr. Beard. Is that so?

Opening Up Communications within the Bureau

Solbos: And it happens.

Seney: And will it go through you?

Solbos: No.

Seney: It will go right up.

Solbos: Yeah. A lot of times he'll go out to all employees and say, "I put out this particular document. What do you think about it? What do you think about these issues? How does it affect you?" They don't send it to me, the employees that are responding. They respond right back to him. That's why, like I said, I don't know where he gets the time. But that kind of stuff goes on.

For instance, I talk more to Beard and Betsy Rieke than I do to Roger Patterson. When I deal with the Region I talk to Frank [Dimick]. So it's interesting, you know. That's why I get some of this feeling that I do that I really have a lot of authority and ability to do things out here. Because I know that those people recognize that they don't know enough about the issues to be able to make a real material impact on day-to-day actions that I take. And that's a real realization.

I mean, the big quote that Beard uses all the time is from the *Wizard of Oz*, and you might have heard this from other people, where he, he's just like the guy behind the curtain, where Dorothy throws open the curtain and there's this guy running all these buttons, you know, and making this big voice. And he looks back and sees her and he says, "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain." Well, that's the way he feels; he says, "Pay no attention to me," he says, "I'm the guy up at the top and I've got to do all this political stuff, but I can't know how your project runs. Don't

expect me to have the answers. You've got to have the answers. If you don't, who the heck does? And who am I to say that you've done it wrong. All I could do is look at these overall goals and make sure that you consider other people's stuff."

Where he'll get mad is if somebody talks to him and calls him, and they tell him that, "I tried to talk to Solbos but he wouldn't listen to me." Now that's where I'm going to get in trouble. If an Indian tribe says, "He wouldn't return my calls," or, you know, "He didn't give me the time of day," then I've asked for it. But I try not to do that.

Seney: Obviously you've got to exercise your own judgement in what you trouble the Commissioner with. What kind of things do you bring up to the Commissioner?

Issues Important to the Commissioner

Solbos: I bring things up to the Commissioner that I think other people are going to bring to the Commissioner. Another thing you don't like up there is surprises. And if I make a decision—and I've got a real tough one right now, for instance, relative to the Newlands Project and the Fallon Indian Reservation. The Fallon Indian Reservation basically gets water from the project. They're part of the project. In general, they get treated in every way like a regular farmer. This particular year, because the drought is so bad and the deliveries are so low, they're asking for some special things that other *farmers* have asked and the district turned it down. Then when the tribe asked, to be consistent, they also turned them down. I've looked at it on my old criteria, like I said, where if I can do something, it doesn't hurt anybody too badly and it fulfills their needs, then we ought to be doing that. And so I'm in a process now of probably sending a Letter of Direction, which I try not to do, to T-C-I-D, saying, "You *will* do it this way." And it's going to cause me considerable problem. For instance, Ted de Braga¹⁹, is meeting with Betsy Rieke next week, and it's going to go, whoosh, right there.

Seney: You know he's going to talk to her about that?

Solbos: About that. And so, I'm going to have to tell Dan about that, that that's coming down, and I'll get it through to Betsy too, that that is going to have an effect. I'm writing an issue paper on it so that she'll have it on the plane Monday.

19. Ted de Braga participated in the Newlands Project Oral History series. See Ted de Braga, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Donald B. Seney, Bureau of Reclamation, August 5 and 11, 1994, in Fallon, Nevada, edited by Donald B. Seney, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

Seney: So she'll have a packet from you of things that she needs to know before she touches down here in Reno or Sacramento or wherever she arrives.

Solbos: That's exactly right. And once she reads that stuff, if she has questions, she'll get on the phone and ask me about them.

Seney: What are you going to be doing here, directing T-C-I-D to give them a little more water out there?

Directing TCID to Deliver Water to the Fallon Tribe

Solbos: It's not more water, it's how they give it to them. Basically, the T-C-I-D is ending the irrigation season on a certain day, sometime early in September. That has to do with losses that you incur in the canal. For instance, if somebody wanted to take it after the irrigation season ended, and it was a little amount of water and you had to run it down all these canals that were now empty, it wouldn't get down there.

Seney: And the Fallon Indian Reservation is at the end of the canal.

Solbos: Is at the end. So what we want to do is we want to take a big allotment of theirs now, that they want to use later in the year, and run it and put it into a regulating reservoir and then feed them from the regulating reservoir. It's a nifty idea, it will work real well for them, if you calculate the losses and make sure that they aren't getting any more water than they're entitled to. It's just that lots of other farmers would like to do exactly the same thing. We don't have the facilities to do it for everybody, and also it's a pain in the butt to the T-C-I-D to have to account for all of these little tiny blocks of water in these reservoirs, whereas the tribe is a big block and it's easy to handle. But again, if everybody wanted to do it, we don't have the facilities to do it. So we're giving some privilege to the tribe. That's flat all there is to it. But for me to go to Washington and say, "The only reason we're not doing it for the tribe is because we don't want to make them look like they're any better than anybody else," from Washington's perspective they *are* better. They're a sovereign nation. Those farmers aren't sovereign nations.

Seney: So the politics of it is—if that's the right term from your point of view—is that if you can accommodate them, you better accommodate them.

Solbos: Then I should do it. And again, in this particular case, I believe it's the right thing to do. I can help those people, the people on the reservation, and it doesn't hurt anybody on the project. It's only a philosophy deal. And so I'm going to do that.

Seney: But you're going to stir up a hornet's nest in the project.

Solbos: Oh, yeah, I'm going to get all kinds of crap out on it. I'm trying to do it right. I'm saying, "District, do you want me to give you a Letter of Direction so that you can make us the bad guy? In other words, you can tell the farmers, 'I'm trying to be consistent, but I can't do anything about it. The Bureau's directed me to do it.' Or, do you want to get some P-R [public relations value] with the tribe because you know you're going to get this Letter of Direction and it's a loser anyway? Do you want to, in this special session that you've got called, change your decision? And for all the reasons that I'm going to give you in this letter, do you just want to say, 'After reevaluation of the situation, we think we're going to do this,' and try to convince the farmers that it's the right thing to do?" And I've laid that out to Ted de Braga and he's thinking about it. I'll do it any way he wants, because it's the result that I care about. If he wants to make me look bad or whatever, I don't really care about that. I have decided in my own mind that it's the right thing to do. So how it comes about, I'll try to do it so that it's less painful for everybody else.

Seney: Very politic of you, may I say, to lay it out to them in this way.

Solbos: Yeah, there's this procedure you go through. Like I said, the first thing is, can I do it without hurting anybody? The second thing is, even if I hurt somebody a little bit, how much trouble will I get into by not doing it? And then if, I'm going to do it, now you're in the damage control. What do I have to do to make this as smooth as I can? The guys that I'm hurting the worst, I contact them and say, "This is going to happen, guys. What can I do to make this as easy as I can for you?"

And then there's a press angle. Is this going to come out real bad in the press? And then should I call the press and grease the skids on it? And I will do that in this case, but I want to see what Ted comes back with, because there's a whole lot of difference between writing a letter that says, "I think you ought to consider this at your next meeting," and saying, "You are directed to do it."

Seney: And his judgement will have to be, "How much grief am I going to get from the farmers?" versus "How much good will do I get from the Indian tribe which will be helpful in the upcoming negotiations?"

Solbos: That's right. He wants them on his side in the negotiations because they're a valuable asset to T-C-I-D. In fact, it surprised me quite a bit that they had made the decision that they did.

Seney: Which was to . . .

-
- Solbos: To not give the water to the tribe.
- Seney: The tribe made the request [to TCID].
- Solbos: The tribe did. I showed up at three o'clock in a meeting, at a board meeting. This was an agenda item at two o'clock; I wasn't there. The tribe made the proposal, the board voted on it, they voted them down. By the time I got there at three we had a bunch of ticked-off Indians walking out the door. And then the next day I got a call from the tribal chairman saying, "You've got to do something about this. This is baloney." And then I got involved.
- Seney: Did you say to the tribal chairman, "Geez, couldn't you have let me know ahead of time on this? Next time can you give me a little warning maybe?"
- Solbos: Well, you know, in reality, no. Because I want them to work out their problems with the district. It would have been nice if maybe they didn't force the board to come to a vote. In other words, if you walk into a board, any board, and say, "I've got to have an answer today," the board's almost always going to vote no, because it's just too much risk, you know.
- Seney: It's the easiest thing to do.
- Solbos: Yeah. Or they'll table it. (Seney: Yeah.) In this case there had been enough farmers who had already been asking for special privileges, that they had turned down, it's, "Shoot, we're going to get screwed if we do this," and so they just voted them down. I'm losing my voice. But that's another example of this. There's a lot of subtleties to this stuff. (laughter) And you've got to explain that to people like Dan and Roger when the shit hits the fan, basically, that you went through this process and you did the best you could.
- Seney: So this, again, is an issue that you're going to be letting the Assistant Secretary know about, and the Commissioner know about and Mr. Dimick and Mr. Patterson know about, because you *know* this is going to float to the top.
- Solbos: A complicating factor is that there is another division. There's two divisions on the Newlands Project, Carson and Truckee. Carson is getting about a fifty-seven percent water supply. Truckee's getting about twenty.
- Seney: And they're through for the year.

Solbos: And they've *been* through for the year, whereas Carson is going to get water until September. The problem is that the Truckee doesn't have storage upstream, whereas the Carson [does].

END TAPE 2, SIDE 2. AUGUST 10, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 1. AUGUST 17, 1994.

Seney: Today is August 17, 1994. My name is Donald Seney and I'm talking with Edward Solbos, Jr., in the Project Office in Carson City. Good afternoon, Ed.

Solbos: Good afternoon.

Seney: We talked last time, before we verged onto more contemporary topics, about your first job in Duchesne where you spent six years, wasn't it? (Solbos: Five.) Five years. And I wanted to ask you about it. You mentioned one aspect of it, of course it's in Utah, and Utah is a Mormon state, and Duchesne, I would take it, is pretty much a Mormon community.

Solbos: It certainly was.

Seney: Was there also a large contingent of Mormons in the Bureau Office in Duchesne?

Make Up of Personnel within the Duchesne Office

Solbos: Right. In general, the people that had applied for that job knew what the area was like, and knew that that was the predominant culture there, and so consequently most of the people in the office, as well as the town, were of a Mormon persuasion. As I told you before, the job that I'd applied for had been open until filled for a couple of years, and so they had a hard time filling people and so they were just glad to get me. And I didn't know what I was getting into.

Seney: Did it affect the office that there were a high proportion of Mormons within the office?

Solbos: I can't say that things were done in a prejudiced manner. I think one of the things, though, is that people have a tendency of *thinking* alike; not only were they all largely of that religious orientation, but they also were from the West, local universities, you know, everybody went to Utah State or B-Y-U [Brigham Young University] or something like that, of the professionals. So to have someone come out from an Ivy League school on the East Coast and move into that, I brought a totally different, I think, way of thinking on certain things. So it was an interesting

go of it for awhile. We got into some pretty major differences of opinion, let's put it that way.

Seney: There can't be a big Ivy League club within the Bureau of Reclamation, is there?

Solbos: No, no. There certainly isn't.

Seney: You must be one of the few Ivy League graduates, I would think, within the Bureau.

Solbos: I don't know of another one.

Seney: Because it is a Western oriented organization. There's no question about that. You know, I would also, I guess, if one were characterizing Mormons, you'd say they were conservative as well.

Solbos: Certainly. And also, I guess another thing would be, my perception is that there was never any question that taming the environment for the use of man was the right thing to do. You know, since the time when Brigham Young came out, you know, all the early dams and manipulation of river systems and all of that to aid the development of previously undeveloped areas was what they were all into. And so, it was kind of a natural progression for someone of that persuasion to get into the Bureau of Reclamation and begin building dams and doing that sort of thing. And, as I said, I think the biggest thing was that there was never a thought at all that this was the right thing to do. That the water was there to be used and if we've got to dam it or divert it or move it somewhere else 150 miles away, let's do it.

Seney: I know you mentioned last time that your boss sent you off to a meeting to explain a project. You went very hopefully and eagerly and ran into a sort of a hailstorm of criticism. But even excepting that, would you say that Utah was a particularly easy place for the Bureau to get approval for projects and to operate? I guess that's what you're saying.

Solbos: I think in those days it was. There wasn't a lot of regard, I think, for the local concerns in a lot of ways. The thought was, you know, this is what Congress wants us to do; we've been directed in a piece of legislation and we need to do this work. And we need to do it on a time scale that everyone has dictated and we really have got to get by these concerns as quickly as we possibly can and move on. I had a number of supervisors, obviously, during those five years, and depending on, I guess, personal styles, they had more or less regard for taking the time to try to explain to people why we were doing things and to convince them that this was the right thing

to do. Some of them, it just flat-out wasn't worth the effort and , wouldn't even answer phone calls and just *do* it. Some of them would take the time to at least try to explain it, but in general, if they didn't buy into it real quick, you never went back to those people again. (laughter)

Seney: You know, we talked about the press here last time and you were very complimentary in terms of the way in which these people tend to understand the project and get things right, whether they agreed with you or not, at least they knew what they were talking about. (Solbos: Sure.) Were you in any position to assess how the press viewed these projects in Utah, or was that way above what your level of interests were at that time?

Press Relations in Duchesne

Solbos: Yeah, at that time I wasn't very cognizant of the press. I know locally, in Duchesne itself, the economics of the town was so closely tied to the government folks that were there, that they were generally always complimentary of us being there and the work that we were doing, because, heck, all the money in the town was really provided by the government. When the government moved out many years later, the town has pretty much dried up and blown away. It's basically gone. You know, the one gas station, the one general store, they're gone now. So I think from that perspective even the newspapers were politically tuned in to the value economically and they weren't going to bad-mouth the projects that were going on. There was too much politics behind why they were good in theory. So someone that didn't agree with the project probably had a hard time getting anybody to listen to him, to be honest. And they were always a very small minority.

Seney: What were the years that you were in Duchesne?

Solbos: From '76 to '81.

Seney: To '81. And where did you go in '81?

Solbos: Okay, in '81 I put in for a job in Boulder City, Nevada. After five years in Duchesne . . .

Seney: That's a long time there, in Duchesne.

Solbos: It's a long time.

Seney: Explain that to me. How you—and your wife is not, she's another Connecticut person

(Solbos: Correct.) and she's not going crazy either?

Reasons for Moving West

Solbos: There were—I think some of these things I might have said before

Seney: The money was good.

Solbos: Yeah, the money was good. We were just starting our life together; we were trying to basically decide what we wanted to do. I wasn't smart enough at the time, really, to know the advantages of living in one place or another, almost. It was just far better from what I had left because we went through kind of a hard time after I graduated from college. In Rhode Island I didn't have a job and I was working for Manpower and my wife was a temporary Kelly Girl kind of person and we got robbed twice in a span of about two weeks.

Seney: Mugged kind of robbery?

Solbos: No, our apartment was broken into.

Seney: Burglarized.

Solbos: Burglarized. And the first one, they got all the good stuff, and then the second time I had finally gotten this job, we were moving out, we had everything boxed up on the floor, the moving van was coming the next day, we went out that evening to celebrate with some friends and came back and the whole place had been cleaned out. [There was] virtually nothing at all left. So we called the moving folks and said we don't need a moving van, and so I then came out in an old Chrysler. Everything I had was able to fit in the trunk of a Chrysler because everything was gone. In fact, our whole front door—we were in a real rough part of town in this kind of tenement thing—and when we came back our front door was down. Somebody had broken the whole frame out and the door was laying in the room. And of course when you walk up and you see that, you know things are bad. But like I said, everything was gone. So we were, talk about starting with a clean slate, I mean, everything was brand new.

Seney: This is a no-crime town, Duchesne, I'm sure, so you didn't have to lock your doors.

Solbos: Oh, yeah, absolutely. So we were ready for a little small town and to get away from people. And also my hobby was fishing and the fishing was fantastic, the environment was beautiful, you had deer walking through the yard all the time,

which I had never seen one where I had been from. So it was not hard to stay there for five years. What made me want to move was just an understanding that I had at that time that moving was desirable in the Bureau..

Seney: From Duchesne, you mean? To move on from Duchesne?

Diverse Experiences Important within Reclamation

Solbos: Well to just move in general and to vary your experiences and to try to do something different. The demands, as I said, when I first got there, I immediately went on six-tens and I was on six-tens for five years and I was just in design and my future was *still* just in design. And in the Bureau, as a design engineer, if you're going to stay purely that way, you've got a real ceiling there at about the twelve level that you just can't get out of. And so there was, again, I recognize as a need to diversify a little bit. And you have two options usually—at least at that time you did. You could either go to a Regional Office and learn about the things that occur in the Region or you could go to Denver. And the fear that I always had was that the people that I knew in Denver were too specialized and that they'd either be a dam spillway specialist or electrical power plant expert, and once they were that, that's all they ever were again. And I was very fearful of doing that.

Seney: You were obviously looking the Bureau over pretty carefully in terms of what was the right place to be and to do and what were the right mix of experiences, I take it. Had you set your sights on some, *have* you set your sights on some position in the Bureau that you're shooting for and had you at that time done that?

Solbos: At that time I certainly had no idea what I might become. I guess I was just much more interested in a couple of things. One, just doing something different, because six-tens for five years was tiresome; and I also recognized, like I said, that trying to get some new experiences was significant.

One of the things, too, about the education, having an Ivy League education, it was interesting, the engineers that I associated with that, that were in the office had a much more—I don't know how to describe it—but they had courses that were very, very specific to actually doing on-the-ground work. And by that I mean they took a course in designing roads, they had a course in college on being able to calculate earth quantities and moving them to other locations and things. They were very nuts-and-boltsy courses.

An Ivy League education doesn't have any courses like that at all. You'd have general engineering courses that would be very theoretical, nuclear engineering and,

you know, things like that; maybe in a lab you'd have some hands-on type stuff, but I came out with a much more theoretical education than any of the people that I dealt with.

And so the people that I was with were much more inclined, I guess, to want to design a better road or design a better dam. I was much more inclined, after designing a road or a dam, to want to do something else, and to say, "Ah, that was very good and I learned a lot from that and I want to do something else now." And that's pretty much why I moved.

Seney: What was the job flier, the description in Boulder City?

Applied for a Position in Boulder City

Solbos: Okay. I was an eleven, that was the highest level that I reached in Duchesne.

Seney: Was that pretty good, to get to eleven in Duchesne?

Solbos: Well I got it, I went in as a seven. I had a chance to go in as a five or a seven and because of the grades that I was able to attain in college, I was able to come in at the seven level. So I went up a grade a year, [and I] got up to the eleven level and stayed at that point. There were no opportunities, there were no twelves at the office at all that I could get into.

So then this vacancy came out in Boulder City. It was in Operation and Maintenance Branch.

Seney: So that's different than what you were doing?

Solbos: It's different. See, what I was in at that point was designing and constructing. Now I was in operating and maintaining things that had already been built. So it was a logical progression to move on to.

Seney: Let me ask you, does the Bureau want you to do this, or did they say, "Wait a minute, Solbos, you're a design guy, why are you applying for this job?"

Solbos: In general, Duchesne was very sad to see me go because they knew how hard it was (chuckles) to fill that position, so they didn't have many aspirations of getting someone else in there. Also, of course, I had experience after that. So you lose a good experienced person in design, that hurts. So I can't say people were

encouraging me to go.

Seney: I'm talking about at the other end, when they're looking at your application and they're looking for someone in Operation and Management and here comes a guy who's admittedly worked hard, but has been in design all the time. Does that represent a problem from the Bureau's point of view?

Solbos: Apparently not. In fact, it was kind of interesting. I had thought that I had done a very, very good job for those five years, and when I put in for this job you go through this evaluation that your supervisor does for you. Back then you never heard what it was; now it's a little more open process. But you never heard what was going on back then, and so when I put in for this job, a little while went by and apparently they either didn't have a lot of applicants for the position or they didn't like the people they got. I don't know, one or the other. But the guy that was filling the position called me and said, "Hey, I want to talk to you a little bit more about this position." And so I spent a half an hour or so on the phone with him and I guess I perked his interest about what potential I had, I guess, down there. And then he was really honest with me. He said, "Well, why I haven't called you all this time is that I got a bad reference from your supervisor, and so I just discarded you, basically. And somehow through the process I decided to give you another shot."

I'd had a hard time, basically, for a little while, with the supervisor who was a Mormon, and I guess where it all boiled down to was he was trying to hire another guy from the East Coast, and I had gone through some pretty tough times at that time, relative to the community. For instance, I couldn't get into anything at all in town because you had to be Mormon to do it, the Church ran everything. So softball leagues, basketball leagues, all the things that I liked doing at that age, I couldn't get into without being in the Church. So I ended up joining the Church to play in the leagues, but then they caught on after awhile and they kicked me out. And so I kind of went through a tough time.

Seney: They couldn't have liked that much.

Solbos: No, not a bit. And also, my supervisor was the bishop, and so consequently he was intimately aware of my behavior in both the office and church. And so this person called in, he was interviewing a person from the East Coast to come on out, and he, for whatever reason said, "Well why don't you talk to this guy? He's from Boston and so maybe you can talk this guy into coming out."

Well I talked to this guy on the phone, and he wasn't at the age that I was when I came out, he was in his early thirties and was fairly established and they were into

very cultural things—his wife liked to go to concerts. And I just listened to this guy over the phone about all his hopes and dreams and what he did for his spare time, and I says, "There's no way in the world this guy's going to like Duchesne." (laughter) And so, my boss was sitting there, this individual, the whole time when I was on the phone with him, and so I started trying to be honest with this guy. I said, "Well, it's a good job that you're coming out here for, but you've got to realize that there's a certain environment here that you've got to recognize, and if you're not willing to do that you might not be happy here." And my boss was very, very upset about that; and this guy did not take the job. So he really held a grudge over that.

Seney: You know, I might think, by the way, if your boss had given you a bad recommendation, it was because he wanted to keep you. In the academic world of which I'm a part, if we've got somebody we don't like and somebody else wants him, we say, "Oh, please don't take him. Please don't take him." (laughter) Hoping they will, of course. This didn't work here?

Solbos: Well there's some integrity involved here, I guess. (laughter) These guys were honest, you know, and I'm the same way now. I know of that, but I have never done that myself. I've never given anyone a good reference when they didn't deserve it, because throughout your career with the government there are a number of times, and it's certainly happened to me, where you really need quality people, and you really rely on the network of the people you trust to give you information on those people. It's difficult to get rid of people that don't work out, and so sometimes your whole ability to perform in a certain area is just that one key person that you get. And if you do get a dog from somebody because he's recommended him, if that guy ever comes to you for help, you'll just never do it again. And so you've got to have these people that you trust. And he was a very honorable individual, and at that point we weren't getting along, and he somehow turned that into a performance thing.

But anyway, this individual that interviewed me for the job told me all about it and said it sounded like, from what he described to me, it was more of a personality problem than a performance problem, and he was right on with that. And so I really thanked him for seeing through that.

Seney: That was a lucky break, wasn't it?

Solbos: Yeah. And I was able to then convince him, I guess, that I was worth the trouble. Another thing that really helped me, probably, was that while I was in Duchesne for five years you really needed, in Duchesne, to get out now and then—and the winters

were brutal—and so we'd take vacations, of course. And you very seldom went north on a vacation because it was just getting colder to do that, so you usually went south. And where you went was Las Vegas. And so Las Vegas, of course, is where the Boulder City Office was, and so I was quite familiar with the offices. When I drove down there for the first time, imagine a guy from the East Coast went to Duchesne with nothing but sage brush, he drives into town, there's palm trees everywhere, you've got a beautiful lake with people in bikinis out on the beach. I mean, I'd never seen anything like that in my whole life. And the Regional Office down there is a gorgeous old white building surrounded by palm trees and it looks like an oasis in the desert. Boulder City *is* an oasis in the desert; that's flat out what it is. So I really wanted to go down there.

So I made some contacts down there. In fact before this job even came up, I walked in and I introduced myself to the head of engineering and all of that. So this person who called me and gave me this second chance remembered me from having gone down there and talked to him. And that also might have had something to do with it.

I remember when I finally got that job, he did call me back a while later and notified me that I had it, and of course we took the house-hunting trip and all those things associated with it. And when we cut the deal and bought the house down there, I remember just sitting in a little bar on the beach down there at Lake Mead with my wife, and I still remember the feeling that I had, that I had really done something to enhance all the things that I wanted to do. There was a feeling of satisfaction there. You know, I had moved to a new spot, I had a new job, I had a grade raise, I bought my first house. It was a really tremendous feeling that I had, that I had really accomplished something and done something for my family and progressed.

Seney: How old were you at this point?

Solbos: That would have made me about twenty-seven.

Seney: So you're fairly young and feeling pretty good.

Solbos: Yeah. I was pretty jazzed.

Seney: I can't blame you.

Life in Duchesne

Solbos: Up in Duchesne, you know, we had this little single-wide trailer that, you know, you almost had to turn sideways to go from one end to the other. The trailers had come from Southern California when another job had closed down. They didn't have any kind of a protection, you know, insulation against the cold. I remember the first big winter we had, we got up in the morning freezing. You know, you walk out, there was about two inches of snow in the living room because the wind would blow so hard that those crummy little doors would bow out and the snow would just pour around the doors, and so you had to, basically, sweep the snow out of your living room and your kitchen. If you ever got more than two feet of snow, which happened a lot, I mean, it happened six or seven times a year, the snow would pile up on top of the roofs of your trailers and it would snuff the heaters because the heaters had to go through the vents.

And so you would wake up in the middle of the night—and we always could tell when something was wrong, because we had a cat and the cat would wrap itself around your throat because it was freezing to death (laughter). So you'd wake up, you'd walk out, you'd know what happened—the first time I did it I didn't know what the heck was going on. I opened the door and looked out and everybody, the whole trailer court was like a city at night, everybody had a little lantern on their roofs and at two in the morning everybody's sweeping their roofs off. You know, and I yelled to a guy, "What the heck are you doing?" He says, "Oh, your heater went out because there was too much snow on the roof." So we got up and climbed on the roof. In fact, the first time I did it I ended up in the middle of the night backing right off the roof and falling into this big pile of snow, but it was so deep it didn't matter. So anyway, you get from a situation like that, pretty damned Spartan.

To going down to Boulder City, warm winters, buying your first house. It was a little house, you know, 1800 square feet, but it had a little garage and a little piece of land and it was a big deal.

Seney: Did you have kids by this time?

Solbos: No, no I did not. We ended up adopting a son while I was in Boulder City. And that was another thing that was kind of interesting. We tried to adopt the entire time we were in Duchesne, and in Utah the adoptions were handled by the Church. And knowing the Mormon religion, if you do a little bit, procreation is extremely significant to them and it's significant not only for your time on earth but also for your possibility of getting into an after-life situation. And so for a Mormon person to not be able to have children was a tremendous—I don't know if disgrace is the right term—but it was a tremendously psychologically difficult thing to go through. I was

just blind to it and just beat my head against the wall for years trying to get somewhere with the agencies, the state agencies until finally someone told me that, "Man, you're never going to get anybody through those, because they're always going to give higher priority to Mormon people because they *have* to have kids. You're just doing it because you want to, but they *have* to." And so I for five years, tried to get a child through an adoption agency and never could. I was in Boulder City for about seven months and we received a child through the adoption service down there. So it was kind of funny, we had really been trying to get a child for, then, six years and virtually had given up.

Seney: You obviously knew you couldn't have children yourself?

Solbos: Yes. And so consequently, you know, you decide, you go through various levels of emotion and you finally decide, well we're just not going to do this and we're not going to worry about it. We'll go on with our life and everything will be fine. And so when you first get into it, you know, you're buying cribs and you're doing things. After six years you've gotten rid of all that stuff a long time ago and you just move on with your life and you buy a boat instead. And I remember at work, getting a phone call from the adoption service and saying, "Oh, your baby boy is here. Come down and pick it up." And it just, you know, it just totally floors you. And I went to the other office, picked up my wife, went down to get the child and—we were driving down to Las Vegas where we had to pick him up—and we realized we didn't have a name, we didn't have anything. And the last thing she said was, you know, you'll need to give us the name of the child and everything when you pick it up. And we didn't have one. And as we were driving into town there was a big billboard for Paul Anka, he was at Caesar's, and I thought about that and I said, "What about Paul?" and my wife said, "Fine," and his name was Paul and that was the end of it. (laughter) So, you know, other people have nine months to figure that stuff out; we took about fifteen minutes to do it.

Seney: That's a great story. Does he know that he was named for Paul Anka?

Solbos: Yes, sure does.

Seney: That's great. I like that. So what did you do at Boulder City?

Operations and Maintenance Office in Boulder City

Solbos: Okay. My first job in Boulder was making sure that Bureau projects that had been built and turned over to water districts were maintained properly. And this is something that *is* a big deal, always has been with the Bureau.

- Seney: Well let me ask you if I could. That sounds like a pretty big job all of a sudden. Is that a pretty big step up?
- Solbos: It's a totally different group of people. O&M [operations and maintenance] and Construction and Engineering are, almost never the twain shall meet. I mean, you have totally separate organizations that do that type of thing. I virtually never saw the people again, when I went to O&M, that I had dealt with for five years; all the people in Denver were totally different people now. So I really had some learning to do. I started, not at the head of that office—I was at a twelve, the head of it was a thirteen—and basically, I had to learn what it took to properly operate and maintain a project. And [I] went on a lot of trips because that's basically what you did; you went to all the places where you had project facilities and met with those individuals and basically tried to convince them to do a better job of maintaining them. Most of the time they didn't have the funds to do it so you were always trying to help them.
- Seney: Out of the Boulder City Regional Office. Which projects were these?
- Solbos: Okay. Most of them were Central Arizona Project²⁰ [CAP] facilities; some of them were more local relative to what they call the Southern Nevada Water Project²¹, which was the project that is right on Lake Mead there to deliver water to the Las Vegas-Henderson area. It also allows you to be much more diverse, I mean, you've got to know about power plants and pumping plants and canals and laterals and buildings, and all the things, all the aspects of a project, you had to make sure that they were maintained properly. So it was a great opportunity to learn about that.

Small Reclamation Projects Loan Program

Another thing that I quickly became responsible for is we had what was called a Small Reclamation Projects Loan Program, and that was an opportunity where other

20. Authorized in 1968, the Central Arizona Project is a multipurpose water resource development and management project that delivers Colorado River water, either directly or by exchange, into central and southern Arizona. The project was designed to provide water to nearly one million acres of Indian and non-Indian irrigated agricultural land areas in Maricopa, Pinal, and Pima Counties, as well as municipal water for several Arizona communities, including the metropolitan areas of Phoenix and Tucson. For more information, see Jennifer E. Zuniga, "The Central Arizona Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 2000, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=94.

21. The Robert B. Griffith Water Project (formerly Southern Nevada Water Project) was constructed as a single-purpose project capable of supplying 299,000 acre feet of supplemental municipal and industrial water annually from Lake Mead to the service area of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Henderson, Boulder City, and Nellis Air Force Base in southern Nevada. For more information, see Jediah Rogers, "Robert B. Griffith Water Project (formerly Southern Nevada Water Project)," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 2006, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=181.

entities, non-federal entities, could get loans from the federal government to build things like treatment plants and water systems for cities. Basically it was an M&I [municipal and industrial] program. And so we had a loan officer, basically, that set up those loans. But once the loans, the process of getting the loan approved, which meant you had to come up with an engineeringly feasible project, and then the problem of making sure that they were built correctly became my responsibility. And that opened up a whole different area, because most of the loans came out of Southern California. We didn't have any [Reclamation] projects there but Rainbow Municipal Water District, Eastern Municipal Water District, and Metropolitan Water District; they all had small loans with our Region. And so I then became the person to monitor construction and make sure that the projects were feasible.

Seney: These were water quality projects?

Solbos: Quality and quantity. Water development projects for cities. Another thing that that did for me that I had never had a chance before, was to work with and relate to consulting engineers, because they were all basically designed by consultants and then reviewed and checked by me.

Seney: How important is that, to get experience with consultants?

Solbos: Well it turned out to be very important for me from a career standpoint, because it really became significant a little bit later in my career [when] we had to work in a more cooperative fashion with consultants. And also there was this ground-swelling, I guess from about the 80s on, of the costs of our projects. People before were just basically paying them off over long periods of time, and the costs were never seemingly an issue. In the 80s, though, it started to really become an issue and you heard terms like, "the Bureau gold-plates their projects," and things like that, and it became quite fashionable for water districts to go to consultants and say, "Can you do this cheaper?" And of course consultants would always come back and say, "Yes," because they weren't worried about operating it and maintaining it and all that. I'd heard, coming out of Duchesne, all this talk of gold-plating projects. When I went to the O&M part of it in Boulder City and learned what happens to projects thirty or forty years down the road, I developed a tremendous respect for building a project right, and basically a "pay me now or pay me later" kind of concept.

Seney: So from your point of view it's not gold-plating, it's sound construction and.

Solbos: It's sound engineering. But it *was* valuable. A lot of those ideas, though, were appropriate to debate. Do you need four inches of concrete or can you get away with three-and-a-half, and you know, all of this stuff. And when you work with

consultants all the time, you realized that some of those people were very top-notch designers and they were as concerned about long-term operation and maintenance as you were. So when you met those type of individuals, you learned a lot from them, and I was able to then interface with Denver and actually get some things changed that we were requiring.

Seney: That made sense to you.

Solbos: That made sense to me.

Seney: But let me just stop you. I want to ask you, when you went around to these projects, in the Central Arizona Project and what not, to oversee them and to make sure that they were running right, what kind of problems did you run into and what kind of action did you need to take to get them, maybe, to do something differently?

Problems Associated within O&M

Solbos: Okay. Most of the projects, I guess, that I was associated with out of that office were relatively new projects. The Southern Nevada Project was not that old; the Central Arizona Project was still being built, so they hadn't turned over a lot of facilities. We never got into a lot of very difficult problems relative to O&M.

Seney: Let me turn this over.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. AUGUST 17, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. AUGUST 17, 1994.

Solbos: So, what you'd really spend most of your time on, sometimes a facility would be built, and for whatever reason, problems would develop with it. One of the things, for instance, that happened in Arizona all the time was you had the ground subsidence that was taking place in a lot of areas. You had a real ground-water overdraft situation all through the Phoenix-Tucson area and north of that. And so oftentimes you'd be designing projects, guessing where subsidence would occur, and generally whenever you had large amounts of subsidence, you'd have cracking and other associated features that would go with it.

Seney: In the canals?

Solbos: Canals and whatever you built. It could be a power plant. You know, if you happened to build it across a subsidence zone, you could really have some severe

problems. And so anything that was concrete, generally, of any size at all, you were really worried about that. The Bureau, in fact they were the forefront of design technology in that regard, relative to doing geological up-front analyses and really predicting where subsidence would occur and where the cracks would even develop based on different substrates that were in the ground. And in general, [they] got them mostly right. Whenever you knew that an area would be highly prone for that sort of thing, you'd have to go in and you'd put a lot more design effort into that, and you might design it so that, for instance, if there was a pipe going across there you'd have flexible couplings in the pipe so that the pipe could actually shift around without breaking. If you had canals that way, you might tremendously over-excavate there and replace a lot of the material, or even provide some kind of joints in them that would actually be flexible. Everything that you did that for was tremendously more expensive, so you didn't do it all the time. But the areas that you knew were bad, you know, you'd do that.

Seney: Because it was cheaper to do that than come back and repair it?

Solbos: Well, not cheaper from just a construction of that particular area, but from a water-supply standpoint. In other words, if you've got to shut down a whole canal because of fifty feet of lining, it might not be that expensive for the lining, but it sure was expensive for the down time you had. And in other words, you might have hundreds of thousands of acres of land that were relying on that water, and so the economic loss was tremendous compared to the cost of the lining.

Seney: Crop damage.

Solbos: Crop damage, sure. Or M&I water supplies. So, anyway, ~~a lot of times~~ [occasionally] though, you would design something that did have cracks that would develop in it, and so you would have to go in there and do something about that. And so oftentimes, you were then deciding whether or not to do some kind of a remedial type repair, or whether or not you wanted to go in and really do a major [repair] now that you knew that the cracks were going to form in this area, should you put a lot of money into it? Since you'd already turned over those projects, our general philosophy was, you're going to keep doing this, you're going to keep having these kind of problems, so you ought to do it right.

Seney: By turning them over you mean some entity was now operating them.

Solbos: The districts were now operating them, right. And any kind of repairs came right out of their budget, that they had to fund. Now we could fund it under emergency-type repairs, but then they would have to pay us back with interest and that sort of thing.

Seney: Well this must have caused conflict with the operators, then, the districts, that you didn't really want, [and] would rather avoid. (Solbos: Absolutely.)

Solbos: First off, you always wanted to do it right, of course, but in those cases where it didn't work out you were always trying to convince the district to go ahead and fix it right. And they were always of the mind, basically, to band-aid it, because they had a budget that they had to stay in every year and that's what they were trying to do. And of course, then you'd get into arguments about, "Well if it was not designed right in the first place, then the government should be responsible for it and we shouldn't be responsible." So there was a lot of liability issues that you had to weed through too. And that was part of the job.

Seney: Sounds interesting. Was it?

Great Opportunity to Diversify Experiences

Solbos: It was great! You know, I really, really enjoyed it. And again, it was a tremendous advantage to be able to start off in design, basically at the bottom level of a project, determining where do you put the pipe, what do you build it out of, you know, doing all of those things, then finally constructing it, and then going on to a job that actually was to maintain it. Because, a lot of times you'd say, "Geez, if I'd have realized this when I designed it, I'd have done it different." I'd have provided access, for instance. That's a big thing that you don't do. You finish a project and then you find out later on, "I've got to get down there to that spillway to *clean* it somehow." Well you never thought that you had to get a darn dump truck down in there. And if you'd have known that during design you'd have put a ramp in. But you don't think of that sort of thing. And there's always has been that lack of understanding between O&M and Design, and the best people in the Bureau were always the people that had the opportunity to be in both. And when you then would get on to reviewing specifications, which I got into, those people became very valuable because they had that ability to bridge between Design and Operation and Maintenance and Construction.

It then was a pretty easy jump for me to go on to my next job in Boulder City, which was what they call a construction liaison. It was a new position. It was a thirteen position for me and it was a real advancement. And it was a non-supervisory thirteen, which from a classification point of view in personnel you had to be, in fact it says right on the classification standards, that you have to be renowned in your field to get it. Well, at the age I was at, which was about thirty at that time, I certainly wasn't renowned in my field. But when the job came out I had

been in enough things—again, I had been in Design, I'd been in Construction, I'd been in O&M, I'd been in the Small Loan Program, so I'd had input, different ideas from consultants and all that—I was able to look pretty darned good on an application. And this was a construction liaison largely for the construction of the Central Arizona Project, down in the Phoenix-Tucson area. And so the emphasis was on canals and pumping plants.

Seney: Let me ask you, in the Boulder City Office, did you have someone who was kind of looking out for you that you had a good rapport with, who was helpful to you in your career?

Wes Hirschi

Solbos: I would have to say that the individual that was the biggest, I guess, mentor for me back then, his name was Wes Hirschi. Wes was the Regional Engineer while I was in Boulder City. He then went on to be Assistant Regional Director in Salt Lake. He actually didn't have a really good relationship, I guess, with my supervisor when I was in Boulder City, who *he* supervised, and so he got into a mode, I guess, of coming to me directly on a lot of issues, and I remember staying after work late a lot of times to talk to him about things. I also picked him up as a mentor pretty quickly. In other words, I would talk to him about [than] just my job, I'd talk to him about my future and how he saw me relating to the Bureau of Reclamation and whether or not I was proceeding along in the career that would really be something that I wanted to do. And he was a marvelous man that definitely spent some time with me and made me feel that I was a valued employee and that my career was important not only to me, but to the whole organization. And he made me feel—every time I walked in there, I always walked out of there thinking, "Hey, this is where I want to be." And I really thought greatly about what he said and always gave it tremendous credibility.

In fact, he's the one that said I ought to put in for the liaison position, because I thought, "Shoot, I'm not renowned in my field. How can I do this work?" And he taught me at that time, and I was under the misconception that I needed to be able to *do* all these things in a vacancy announcement. You know, it always says "duties" under "vacancy" and there's always twenty-five things there and you can maybe do six or seven of them. And I always thought, "Geez, if I can't do at least twenty of those things, there's no way I can put in for that job." He said, "That's crazy. You've just got to be the best guy, and if you're the best guy they will take the time it takes to develop you. They may be a little upset that you weren't the person that they always dreamed you'd be, but that's the business, guy." And so I ended up putting in for that liaison position, even though I wasn't renowned in my field, and ended up getting it. And they did spend a lot of time (chuckles) getting me up to speed and I

spend a lot of time in Denver talking to people who were very good in their fields. (laughter) And that was the one thing about that job, [there] was tremendous travel associated with it. It was really a liaison between construction that was going on in Phoenix, the politics that was going on in the Regional Office in Boulder [City], and the design that was going on in Denver.

Seney: Tell me about all three of those.

Construction Issues with CAP

Solbos: They didn't connect up very well, oftentimes. And so what you'd do, basically, I would spend a lot of time in Phoenix learning about what their needs were, what their time schedules were and the problems with overlapping contracts and whether and all of those things that are important.

Seney: What were they building then?

Solbos: Oh, that's the Central Arizona Project. The project there was to take water from the Colorado River at Lake Havasu and move it about 390 miles through the desert to the Phoenix-Tucson area. It was *the* biggest, and has always been the biggest project. A couple of billion dollars to build it. The worst terrain that you could imagine, and I'm talking about relative to just the roughness of the terrain, mountainous, rocks, to the heat, the incredible heat, to the extreme difficulty for access, no roads through most of the areas that we were trying to go through.

Seney: You've got to build a road before you can build the conveyance?

Solbos: That's right, yeah. [An] extremely difficult job. Basically, at the forefront of engineering for almost all of that. For instance, you know, putting concrete in, we had to keep it cool with liquid nitrogen. You had liquid nitrogen injectors in the concrete so that it just stayed under a certain temperature. You can't place concrete over a certain temperature because of shrinkage that occurs within it and you get shrinkage cracks and things like that; so very tight control over temperature and how long it's mixing in trucks and things like that. For instance, if you do a job in the city, you just get concrete from a local supplier and you give him some specifications, you tell him, you know, what you want, you tell him what the temperatures are. He just drives it over and dumps it wherever you need it. Out there you don't have any supplier that can provide concrete. Everything you've got to do you've got to batch on site.

Seney: "Batch on site" meaning you build a concrete mixing plant?

Solbos: You would build a mixing plant, and you would put your gravel and your sand and your cement in various silos and you'd have all the scales there and you'd put it together. You'd inject various admixtures, treatments, to the concrete to be able to adjust to certain [conditions], like for instance, you air-injected for improved resistance to freeze-thaw, you put this liquid nitrogen in it for temperature. And so you do it all out there.

For instance, in certain parts of the canal you had to bridge across rivers, and the way you would do that, you would either put it on an overshoot, basically a bridge, or you'd go under it in a siphon. The siphons were huge; they were twenty-six feet in diameter. So, you know, you could walk through them and you're dwarfed by these things. That kind of pipe was never made anywhere and there was never any need for it in the United States, so it had to be manufactured on-site, special. And then you end up building it, then how do you get it to the spot, how do you even put it in place? How do you compact around it? None of these things have ever been done before. They built a machine, for instance that was a special machine with jacks in it, that would be very low, that could drive into the pipe and then the jacks would lift it up. It would lift the pipe off the ground, the pipe-mobile they called it, would drive then into the invert excavated area, the pipe would drive into the last piece of pipe that had been placed, jack itself down again and drive back out.

Seney: Leaving the pipe there.

Solbos: Leaving the pipe where it was. It cost many, many millions of dollars just to build the machine to deliver the pipe, let alone the cost of making the pipe. So all of these things, tremendous, tremendous logistical problems in working out there in the desert.

Seney: It sounds fascinating. Was it fascinating?

Solbos: Oh, absolutely. It was really marvelous. The only thing was, the travel became a drag. Every week we were putting out a specification on a new length of pipe or a new piece of canal, a new pumping plant someplace. I had to review all of those specifications and I had to go through what was called a spec review in Denver, where you would meet with all the designers to make sure that they understood what you did last time that didn't work and what needed to be improved or what was good that you wanted to continue to do. And so, I virtually spent three weeks out of every month, at least, sometimes *all* month, in either Denver or Phoenix.

So it was a pre-design and the design part that I did relative to the specs. And then also problems would develop, [and] I also had to come up with ways to fix those. And again, since I wasn't an expert, coming up with the ways to fix them was basically getting all the right people together, making sure that everybody was heard, and then looking at our constraints of money and constraints of time, looking at what the politics was doing to us, and then going ahead and coming up with a solution and getting it done.

Seney: When you're talking about, when you say "politics" in reference to a project like this, what are you talking about?

Politics Associated with a Project

Solbos: Probably the two obvious items of politics is time and money. Any time that you built something that had a problem, that was a political problem. People who would put "X" number of hundreds of millions into that particular feature, and now it had a problem, had a hard time understanding why that occurred. (chuckles) This concept of doing something that had never been done before, you know, we certainly were well aware of that, but for somebody that was paying the bill, they wanted it done right the first time. And so we bent over backwards and really did everything we could, but some of that stuff was flat-out new technology and some of it, as it turns out, needed to have been done a little bit differently.

Seney: So whom did you have to convince to go back to and say, "Listen, this looked good on paper, but it's not working out"?

Solbos: The water district, basically, that was involved with it, and of course the Regional Director, sometimes congressional people. At the level that I was at, I still did not have direct contact with congressional people. That would basically be through the Regional Director in Boulder City, who I would then report to.

Seney: So you'd go to him and say, "Listen, here's the problem and you need to talk to Senator or Congressman So-and-So."

Solbos: And of course one of the worst things, from a Regional Director's standpoint, is surprises, and so you know, you didn't want to be called by a congressman about something you didn't flat-out know anything about. And so I would have, basically, weekly meetings with the Regional Director, which was quite a thing for a guy my age to be able to do. Again, you know, you're always fearful of getting pigeon-holed in some place where you never get access to upper management. This job had access

to upper management, which is always a good thing to do for careers. And it also is exciting.

Seney: So long as it's going well.

Solbos: As you do it right, yeah. And it's also very exciting. I mean, to sit after hours, seven, eight o'clock at night talking with the Regional Director and the Construction Engineer from Phoenix hassling out some particularly difficult problem, for me at my age and my grade was a thrilling thing to do. And I loved it.

Travel Demands

Again, the travel kind of got weary. A lot of times I would come back from a trip to Denver after a week, and there would be—and it happened all the time—there would be tickets on my desk. The secretary would just get tickets for me and lay them on my desk. I'd walk in, pick them up and they'd be either for that same night when I got back or the next morning. So I'd call my wife from the office, sometimes saying that I wasn't even coming home, you know, that I was just going down to the Boulder City airport and flying out someplace else. And having just adopted a baby, that was hard.

Seney: Was you wife pretty understanding about it? Pretty supportive?

Solbos: She did quite well. You bet. Those are hard times, at times. You know, you go through all those changes. I remember describing to you how great we felt about moving and all of that, and then I switched jobs within a year of when I was down there, into this other job, and suddenly I was gone all the time. And it wasn't as good for her, for me to be gone so much. And of course, in Duchesne we were like "two people against the world" kind of thing, and you know, you really had a close relationship there. Being gone all the time is hard. And it expects a lot, you expect a lot from your wife when you have that sort of thing. Fairly or unfairly, I don't know, but it's what I wanted to do and she was willing to put up with me, I guess.

Seney: Well it doesn't happen to everyone in the Bureau, but it's not unusual in the Bureau, is it, to have these kind of travel demands?

Solbos: Yeah, absolutely. Especially in construction. You know, that is the nature of construction. You move into a particular location, do it until it is done and move on to another one. Inspectors, materials technicians, all of those people live that nomadic life all the time. When you've got a big job, like Central Arizona Project, you've got a degree of uniformity there that's unusual, really, in the Bureau, because

they've been there, there are people there that started their career and ended their career on C-A-P, because it's so huge. But that's unusual. Usually you're building a dam or something, it takes three years and you're in and out and you're gone.

Seney: The home you bought was in Boulder City?

Living in Boulder City

Solbos: Yes.

Seney: So that's kind of a Bureau town.

Solbos: Well it certainly started out as one. It's the only city without gambling in Nevada, because it was a government town and the people voted that they would keep it out. So yes, it was developed solely for the purpose of building Hoover Dam.

Seney: So what I'm asking in pointing to that, because I expect your wife would have some support, then, from the people she knew, the other Bureau wives and be a little bit a part of the Bureau culture there too?

Solbos: I can't say that that's true. Boulder City was certainly not a, like Duchesne was, relative to where everybody knew what everybody was doing and that the government kind of ran things. There were plenty of other things going on in Boulder City where you wouldn't say that the government activities dominated the local culture. We had some friends, I guess, but probably most of them were outside the government. I've always tried to keep myself separate from the people I work with and the people that I do things outside of work with. As I have moved up through the ranks, it's just kind of stayed that way. You generally get yourself in trouble sometimes by doing things with people that you work with. You know, some people can do it, I've not felt comfortable doing it and that's pretty much how it's been. And that's kind of been hard for my wife too, because, you know, you go out with some Bureau wives and they're talking about husbands and things at work and all that, and generally I was supervising those people all the time and so it's just uncomfortable.

Seney: I understand. How long did this job last, the construction liaison job?

Solbos: Okay. I was there about two-and-a-half years in Boulder City. Another thing that that job evolved into, because of some of my other expertise—I mentioned about how cost was suddenly becoming a big issue and one of the parts of C-A-P that was just

starting out was called the C-A-P distribution system. What I've talked about, the general C-A-P, this huge 2,000 cubic foot per second canal or pipeline.

Working with Consultants on the CAP

Seney: I was going to ask you about that. That's how much it transported?

Solbos: Yeah. That runs all the way down to Phoenix-Tucson. But also you had to take water from that major canal and basically deliver it to all the areas, mostly agricultural lands, that needed the water. So those were major systems also. Sometimes they were 1,000 c-f-s [cubic feet per second], depending on what was going on. So it was also a half-a-billion dollars just to build the delivery systems off of C-A-P.

When we started that process, an awful lot of the districts were starting to really question the costs associated with it, and they became really interested in going to consultants to have them do the work instead of the Bureau. It was a very controversial thing within the Bureau, because really it hadn't been done before where you'd have a section of, let's say the canal, that was done by the Bureau and then it would be attached to a section that hadn't been done by the Bureau. And you've got all that coordination and all associated with that. Nobody wanted to mess with that and it was a tough one. And of course, the consultants, like I've mentioned before, talked about how the Bureau gold-plates it; "we could do it twice as good for half the money; you ought to be dealing with us." And so it became very attractive to consultants to go with them. We, of course, were very concerned about quality, because the consultants have a tendency of building something, they leave, and we're the ones that are there to make sure that [it lasts]. We had the same old O&M responsibilities that my old job had. You know, I've got to make sure that they're keeping the project working, that it maintains at least a viability until it's paid off, which is fifty years. So you've got to have at least a fifty-year life on it. So we really got into a big political deal down there.

And eventually, what I was then responsible for was a precedent-setting Memorandum of Agreement that we would have, between ourselves and the water districts, that would allow them to use consultants to build these distribution lines. And it became a real tough issue to insure that, for us to get the feeling that the quality that we were getting was adequate, that we could live with it, and they were getting the reduced price that they wanted. At first, when they came to us with all the things they wanted to do, we just couldn't live with any of those things. When we finally told them, "Well these are the standards that you've got to build to," then when they went back to that consultant and said, "Okay, build to these standards,"

they're price came in at the same as ours or higher, so that they didn't get any advantages. So there had to be a happy medium, between what we wanted and what they were going to do initially, that saved them money and gave us the quality that we could live with. And the negotiation of that was at least six months long and was very, very difficult.

And I learned all about lawyers, and I learned about the difference between insure, assure, and ensure and argued for a week, I remember ten days writing the difference between insure, assure, and ensure, because of the different nuances of what that one little word had to do with. It drove me nuts, but I learned a lot from it.

Seney: That would be, I think, essential experience, wouldn't it?

Solbos: Absolutely. And it also taught me about how consultants pay people so much more money than people who work in the government. For instance, the Regional Director, one day, that I was reporting to about how our progress was going on, on that particular thing, the next day I went down to Phoenix and he was working for the consultant. And he quit his job because he could get so much more working for the consultant. And so that was very difficult for me, to have all these things that I had just explained to him as being so critical for us to get through the consultants, suddenly he *is* one. In fact, I even went through some things about ethics and whether or not this darned thing was appropriate for somebody to be able to do that. And actually it was elevated up a ways to where he wasn't in the direct negotiations any more, but was in the sidelines and it was just as good as being there. So I really had to adjust up my strategy, because now they really had some firepower, they really knew exactly what was going on.

Seney: They hired the guy you'd been reporting to.

Solbos: Sure. So it was a very enlightening experience.

Seney: Did they offer you a job?

Solbos: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. It was quite easy to get work down there, at about one-and-a-half times what I was making, with unlimited potential. I remember a number of times in my career, really agonizing over whether to take a job in private industry or not. And I guess the problem always was that I could see that my need for that particular consultant for a very specific slot of time, and then once I saw that slot of time being taken care of, it wasn't obvious what would happen to me. And I always felt that in the government, and during the time that I had gone, I could always see a

very clear progression and a very clear need above me for qualified people, and I just never saw that with the consultants. And so I always just said, "I'm not interested."

Seney: Is money not that important to you?

Solbos: At that time, yeah. And it still isn't. Money has never been that important to me. Once you get to where you can reasonably fulfill your needs, I've never been that concerned. I've never been that concerned. I think the security of the government, at that time, was important, although it's not much now. But back then that was something that was a selling point to me, and it always was. I always could go to consultants and talk to them and this was the fourth consultant they'd been working with and it was because they'd been released from their jobs; it wasn't because they'd chosen to move. They'd been done and had to move on. So that didn't sound too appealing to me and so I didn't want to do that.

Seney: What did you do next?

Solbos: Okay.

Seney: Unless you want to say some more about this?

Solbos: No, that's fine. That probably covers that. Once I had developed these M-O-A's . . .

Seney: These Memorandums of . . .

Solbos: Of Agreements, Memorandums of Agreements, and got an award for it. It was a big thing in the government to do that, and that was used in other places now, where it was starting to happen, up on the C-U-P, the Central Utah Project, and some other places. In fact I was sent to a number of offices to explain it and all of that.

Seney: That doesn't hurt a guy, does it?

Solbos: Not a bit. And then you had to administer them, we had the agreement signed, now it was going down to Phoenix where actually people would be using it to build the projects. Well they needed what they called a field engineer to monitor the compliance, basically, under this contract, to make sure that they were building things the way they were supposed to and all of this stuff, and that the relationship between the Bureau and the consultants were such that we worked together as a team and that we developed a product that we could live with. So it became pretty apparent that there was no better person to have for that job than the one who had done the contracts and who had been dealing with all the consultants. So that wasn't

even a position that was advertised. I was just basically detailed—"detailed" is the wrong term because I was permanently assigned to Phoenix to do that work.

Reassigned to Phoenix

Seney: Was this a promotion?

Solbos: No.

Seney: It was a lateral move.

Solbos: It was a lateral, at a thirteen. And I was very interested in that because I had never been responsible. I had been around construction in Duchesne, but I'd never been responsible for the product. And so it was, again, another piece of the work that I had not had direct first-hand experience with. And so it was another good idea to go ahead and do that. Everyone I talked to—if you go to Wes Hirschi or the people that I listened to—diversity was where it was at. And to maintain flexibility and to be able to adjust to changes in the way the Bureau was going, and especially it's important now with the way the Bureau's going, that was always the way to go. And so I went on down there.

Seney: Did you move down, take the family down?

Solbos: Yes, I did. I didn't buy a house down there because my feeling at that time was that this was going to be something that was not going to be long-lasting, that it was going to be something that I needed to get the process going, needed to get people comfortable with it, but once it was done, if it was done right, it would pretty well run itself. And so I could really see that I would be going somewhere else, although I didn't know then where it would be. So we just rented a place in Phoenix.

Seney: How did you like Phoenix?

Solbos: I did not. I didn't enjoy it all. I didn't like the climate, I didn't like living in the city. Boulder City is called a city, but it's not a city, it's a nice town. Phoenix is a megalopolis from my perspective. (laughs) I only lived about seven miles from the office, but it took me forty-five minutes to get there. Every morning you'd listen on the radio to where all the accidents were. Everything's square down there, square blocks, so you had thirty different ways to get to work, but you couldn't save a minute by going one way or the other. They were all exactly the same. So you'd leave and you'd just listen to the radio, where the wreck was, you know, at the corner

of this and that, Van Buren and something else there's a wreck and so you'd go another way, and you'd plan your strategy of getting to work every morning. (laughter) And most of the time you'd make it. So I didn't enjoy it there as a place to live. But my wife, she had better luck getting work down there and so she did not mind Phoenix so much.

I was not used to the size. I wasn't used to going to a place on the weekend and finding out that at least 200,000 people had the same idea that I did. You needed to be more social, I guess, than I was. For instance, they have something called a "float down the Salt River" that they do around Memorial Day, and so I thought that was kind of a fun thing to do. And the Salt River is a big river; it's got to be two hundred feet wide; and I had to wait because there was no room for the raft on the water. Not problems with launching it, I mean there was no *water* space and you had to wait for a half-an-hour to find a slot, that there were people lined up for. But it was a social, cultural event. It was like going to Woodstock. (laughter) And it took awhile to get used to that.

But I spent eighteen months down there, as it turned out. [I] was able to get a number of those projects going successfully. I worked for a man named Don Anderson, he was the Construction Engineer down there.

Seney: Let me turn [off].

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. AUGUST 17, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. AUGUST 17, 1994.

Seney: August 17, 1994. My name is Donald Seney and I'm with Ed Solbos, Jr., in the Carson City Office of the Bureau of Reclamation. Go ahead, Ed.

Opportunity to Manage an Environmental Restoration Project

Solbos: Okay. While I was down in Phoenix, a job offer, a vacancy came across the board, that talked about a Project Manager position in Weaverville, California. And it was a really interesting job in a sense that it was the first environmental restoration kind of effort that I had heard of with the Bureau of Reclamation. There was a lot of talk at that time of the Bureau needs to become more environmentally oriented.

Seney: This year would be?

Solbos: In 1986. And I've been a sportsman all my life, that's why I liked Duchesne, [the] fishing and that. This Project Manager position was to basically take a river that had

been impacted by a Bureau dam and restore it for the salmon and steelhead populations that were on that river. It sounded like just the thing that I wanted to do, *and* it was a Project Manager position, which was a definite step up, although it was a thirteen. Most project managers at that time were fourteens and they were very, very difficult to get, tremendous competition, lots and lots of people going for fourteens. For thirteens, you basically weren't competing with Project Managers, because there were so few of them. What you were basically competing with was a number of twelves that always wanted to be Project Managers. So [it was] a whole different type of person you were competing with; you had a much better chance.

Unfortunately it came out after a year of being down in Phoenix, and I did not feel comfortable with leaving that soon. And I went in and talked to Don Anderson about it, who was the Construction Engineer down there, about how much I wanted that job. And I just went in, I didn't go in to say, "I want it, can I leave?" I went in to just talk about it to see what kind of vibrations he would give me back. And he gave me some pretty strong vibrations about, you know, this is not the time to go. So I never even said I wanted the job, I just said that this looks like a good job, Don. And he never actually told me that I shouldn't put in for it, but we communicated what should be done.

Seney: You obviously thought it was important to get his feedback on this.

Solbos: Yes, I did.

Seney: And why was that?

Solbos: Well, for a couple of reasons. First of all, I respected him a great deal, and second of all, your reputation is everything in the government. You know, everybody always says that, no matter what position they're in, but I feel it's especially important with the government because I saw myself as being a long-term career employee, and I'd already been in enough high-level meetings where people's names came up for jobs and one out of ten of those people would say, "Oh, I heard he did this," and all of a sudden that guy was gone and his career was basically gone, just by what that person had commented on. And once that happens once, even though you don't even know what was wrong with that person, you have a perception that there is [something]. And I, under no circumstances, wanted to get cross-wise with anybody. And so that's why I did it. And again, I really felt good about that, because I did get the impression that there would have been a problem if I'd put in for it.

Seney: And he understood what you were saying, didn't he?

Solbos: He knew what was going on, you bet.

Seney: And he appreciated the fact, probably, that you listened to him and went about your business and finished up that job.

Solbos: I'm sure he did. Well, what actually happened was, they didn't like the applicants they got for the job, and it was a long time to do that. You know, it's issued and you get these applicants and then you look at them, and you reissue it, you still don't like them, and then you go through a phase of wondering what to do. Well, what they decided to do, out of the Mid-Pacific Region, was to call around and ask if there was anybody that they thought might be appropriate for this job that for some reason or another decided not to put in for it.

Well, that was six months after it had come out, when they gave a call to Don Anderson and Don Anderson remembered the discussion that I'd had with him and he remembered how it had been handled the first time. And so he said, "Yeah, I think there might be somebody." And so he came down and talked to me and he said, "Well this damned job that came out, they still haven't filled it. Are you still interested?" I said, "Yes, I'm very much interested in it. I've always felt bad that I didn't put in for it." And he says, "Well, the situation is different now than it was when it came up the first time, and even though I'm not totally enamored with the thought of you leaving at this point, I can see us doing it. And if you're interested in it, go ahead and put in for it." So all I did was send my application in and the Regional Director, whose name was David Houston²² then, called me over to Sacramento and I drove over and had a discussion with him and they ended up hiring me for that position in Weaverville. So it's an interesting study, I guess, in how things go.

Seney: But, you know, it strikes me, you have a good sense of judgment on what to do here on this. Would you say that you have, if I asked you to turn your mirror on yourself would you say that you've got a good feel for these things? That this kind of comes naturally? I mean, a lot of people would have gone in and would have said, "Geez, Don, I really want this job," you know, and, "Help me get it," you know, and would have blundered right at that point. And you obviously were sophisticated enough to understand how it ought to be handled.

Solbos: Yeah. I guess all I could say on that is that it seemed to be the right thing to do at the time. And one thing that's been interesting with me is that you see a lot of people in the government and they're putting in for jobs all the time. It's just a standard thing

22. David G. Houston was Regional Director of the Bureau of Reclamation's Mid-Pacific Region from 1983 to 1988.

that they do. I have, of all the jobs I've described getting, and the ones that I have now, I have never put in for a job, in eighteen years, that I didn't get. Every job I've gotten, it's the only job I ever put in for. And so I guess what that means is that I screen the jobs very carefully. I understand what it takes to get them and I work very hard to do it. Just like in the case of the Boulder City job, I came down, I talked with the people even before the job existed. You know, in the case of the liaison job, I worked into that one, in the case of the job in Phoenix, that was basically set up for me. And this thing in Weaverville, I handled it in a little non-traditional way. So that's pretty much what I've done. And it's worked for me, I guess. I feel like that I have been able to do the things that I want to do in my career for whatever reason, and luck probably has a lot to do with it too.

Seney: There's a lot of factors at work, right. (Solbos: That's it.) It's hard to know sometimes, whether it's you or the fates, I suppose.

Solbos: Yeah, that's right. You know, you could always flatter yourself by how sharp you are, but, as you get up higher in the organization, you see all the things. For instance, probably every job I ever put in for, except for maybe the one in Phoenix, they had someone else in mind that for some reason didn't do it. In the case of Weaverville, you know, they reissued it *twice* trying to find somebody that they liked. So that's a lot of luck. And the fact that my supervisor was nice enough after the second time, to say something about it and get me going—[that's] a lot of luck.

Seney: Well, there's an old saying that goes along with what we're talking about here, is that chance favors the prepared mind.

Solbos: Uh-huh. As I've tried to counsel people as to how to do things, I've used those examples. You know, if you can envision yourself—for instance at that time when I was in Phoenix, I was very well focused on being a Project Manager. I'd seen them operate, I'd been around them a lot, it's what I wanted to be. So I could very easily pick up an application for a Project Manager someplace and say, "What are the things that this application is asking for that I don't have?" And even though I'm not putting in for this job now, because I don't have it, I'm going to spend the next year getting it. And that's what I did. And so that when I did put in for that job, I was able to fill in every darn blank that I possibly could, and for the things that I couldn't do, they were just impossible to get. But even those things that say, you know, "What is your relationships with the community?" and all that, I always joined the Lions Club in every place that I ever went to. You know, I always was big in my church, not only because I'm strong in the church, but it was important.

Seney: Which is your church?

Solbos: Catholic. It's just important as well as you get higher up in the organization, to start becoming a part of your community, because the things that you do in your job have a direct bearing on the community. And it's just important to do that. You could be an engineer in design someplace and you don't have to interface with the community really at all, but if you're the Project Manager for a Bureau project there, that community is a big part of what you are.

Seney: And the Bureau is going to be looking at that side of you, isn't it?

Solbos: Absolutely.

Seney: So tell me about Weaverville.

Solbos: The Weaverville job was . . .

Seney: You burst into a smile when I said, "Tell me about Weaverville."

The Weaverville Job

Solbos: Well, the Weaverville job will always have a soft spot in my heart. It will probably be my favorite job that I ever had. It will probably be, in a lot of ways, the most frustrating job that I ever had. I don't know, there's a paper here that maybe I'll give to you, but when I was given the job by Dave Houston, he handed me an article, and it's kind of a long article. But the big problem up there is that there were a whole number of agencies. Usually the Bureau does things almost in a dictatorial role, and they always have done, and have gotten themselves in some trouble over it. This was the first one that anyone had ever heard of that was supposed to be done totally in a consensus mode. You had an advisory committee that had been developed by Congress and it even laid out all the people on the advisory committee. And you had technical coordinating committees and special advisory teams to the secretary and all this tremendous bureaucracy that had been developed. And it had been kind of struggling along without a leader for the office for about a year-and-a-half and everybody was bickering. And all the agencies were just trying to get a tap in on this money source, so that the Forest Service could do things in the forest, and the B-L-M could do things in the B-L-M, and the local communities thought that the project would never work anyway and all that they wanted to do was get money into the local economy because they'd been in hard straits. So everything was kind of going to hell.

And so this problem between a dictator and an ultimate consensus mode of doing business was really thought about. And I'll just read a little something out of this article that was handed to me.

"But as was the case in our prediction concerning the chances of a county-wide public utility district succeeding, the whole Grass Valley and Trinity Restoration Program is in dire need of landing a czar, or a benevolent dictator, if the term is more palatable. Such an individual will have to rule with an iron fist but back off just enough to still play ball with government when needed. The fact of the matter is, the job description set by the Bureau of Reclamation is rather narrow in its qualifications and it will probably be just pure luck if the man chosen Chief Engineer meets our expectations. That's because they don't make any Teddy Roosevelts anymore."

And I really took that to heart.

Seney: This appeared before you were appointed?

Solbos: This was an article that was written in the *Trinity Journal* in Weaverville.

Seney: As they knew someone was being selected.

Solbos: As they knew someone was being selected. And so I went up there with this concept of being a benevolent dictator, and that I knew what needed to be done. It had been very clearly stated to me by the Regional Director as to what he was wanting to accomplish up there. But it wasn't the kind of job, as it was in the past, where you could just walk in and tell people what to do. You somehow had to get their agreement that it was the right way to proceed. And so I went in to try to be Teddy Roosevelt and figure that all out. And it became, like I said, an unbelievably frustrating job for a number of things.

But one of the things that was most interesting about it—the project basically was that there used to be tremendous runs of salmon and steelhead on the river. You built the dam called Trinity Dam, you diverted that water, a large portion of the water, about two-thirds of the whole water supply, out of the basin into the Sacramento River to be used in the Central Valley in California. What that dam did, it cut off spawning habitat, rearing habitat, it cut off access to miles and miles of tributaries that had been used for spawning. It changed the water temperature in the river, it changed all the physical cues that the salmon used to even understand what river to return to.

So after about twenty years of operation, the runs had been decimated. A sad situation. The river had gone from a rather wild, rapids-strewn river to like a canal that had a lot of slow areas, moss floating down the river. It didn't look like a salmon stream. And so some things were obviously needed to be done; it needed more water. But a lot of other things needed to be done too. And then you needed to work with off-shore fishermen because you found out when you got fish out there anyway, that the Koreans were the ones that were taking them all and they wouldn't come back in. It became global in scope.

The interesting thing was that they'd had just a couple of thousand fish come back to the hatchery there at Trinity for a few years in a row, and then just before I got there they had thirteen come back, and the feeling was that the run was lost, that it was too late.

Seney: Thirteen fish, not thirteen thousand?

Solbos: Thirteen fish.

Seney: Thirteen fish!

Solbos: Thirteen fish. They had names for them. Okay. When you name all the fish in the river, you're in trouble. And so then, we had all these emergency meetings and all this stuff happened and of course you've got to grind through the bureaucracy. We want to do things real quick, we want to throw in spawning gravels and do all this, other people want to do things real slow because, for instance, the Fish and Wildlife would say, "All the problems that these river systems have is because people are doing things quickly and not considering the long-term genetic impacts and all of that." So you always had the head-butting of, "We've got to do something fast," for political reasons as well. I mean, people had been sitting around trying to save this, and people are thinking, "Geez, how long can we wait around if there's only thirteen fish left?" So there was always this fast versus slow stuff. Lots and lots of articles in the papers, many people, *most* of the people, I'd have to say, wanted something done rather than more studies and all of that.

Seney: Let me ask you, did you know much about this when you got there?

Solbos: I didn't know anything about salmon. When Dave Houston asked me what my qualifications were, you know, I said, "Well you've read all of my application, but I know everything there is to know about fish and I've fished all my life. Fishing is my hobby. I know fish. I know their habits, I know how they spawn, I know all the things about it." He kind of laughed and that was it. But in reality I probably got

more knowledge of what this project needed from fishing than I did from anything I did with the Bureau, other than how to get along with people and how to get work done. But I certainly didn't use engineering much anymore, or O&M, or power development, or any of the things that I'd ever been into before. So it was interesting in that regard as well.

We argued all winter long over these problems, and we really had a plan that we thought would work, and I was going to be the benevolent dictator. And it was time for the run. And for some reason, the run was huge. We had 35,000 salmon stack up against Trinity Hatchery. The whole Klamath River system, which includes the Trinity and the Klamath and a number of big tributaries, the previous year had something like 18,000 fish; that year they had 300,000 that came into the system. Unbelievable!

So immediately we went from a catastrophe mode on losing the species, to now the big catastrophe was we've got 30,000 fish stacked up against the hatchery. The hatchery only needs 2,000 adults to make their egg take. We've got about 28,000 fish that are trying to spawn with no place to spawn. And so what we're going to have, after years and years of no fish, we're going to have a bunch of fish dying, floating down the river without being able to spawn. It became national, I mean it was on the national news, potential catastrophe. What do we do with all these fish? And every day more would come in. They were coming in in huge rafts of fish, 5,000 at a time. They'd move at night, they'd move about twelve miles a night, and so bang, they'd be banging up against the hatchery. So we just went into this crash course of developing spawning habitat and making places to pull more eggs.

Seney: Do you have to net them and move them?

Solbos: Well, what we did was, we put bulldozers in the river in a number of locations, ripping up areas, then we put up a gravel processing plant, which is what you use in concrete building, okay, same kind of stuff, a little different specification. Now instead of worrying about the concrete temperatures and all that, now you were worried about sizes. What size gravel is appropriate? You know, in Alaska the fish are bigger, so you have certain size gravel. Here the fish are ten to fifteen pounds, so they have to have certain sizes. You've got to have a lot of different gradation in it so that the aeration of the small fish, so that the small fish can not only get access to oxygen, but the little fish can get out of the gravel once they've been buried by the adults. Whole different thing. But some similarities.

Crash Program to Save Fish

So we're out there in a crash program. We went out, we dredged a bunch of holes, we put up—within thirty days, you know—put up a gravel [processing plant], because you don't have time to wait. They've got to spawn, they've got to spawn. So we laid about 5,000 yards of gravel in the whole upper river. In the areas where we didn't have time to do it, we'd put rippers on the back of dozers and moved them back and forth across the river to stir up the gravel to make them good again, where they'd basically solidified and they weren't good for spawning anymore.

We negotiated with a local landowner to go onto his property and build a pond that was twice the size of the hatchery so that we could take eggs from females and actually rear them in those ponds. So we basically tripled the size of the hatchery. We did it in two weeks, went from nothing to a finished product raising fish.

It was a fascinating job, because we went around to Fish and Wildlife people all over the country to say, "Hey, we've got to raise about 10 million fish; we've got a week-and-a-half to do it. We've got no facilities; we've got a hole in the ground with water. How do we do it?" They came back, "Oh, you've got to build all the up-welling things and all this stuff and baffles and different water supplies and temperature stuff," and we don't have any of that, and we've got nothing to lose. They're going to die anyway. We had a guy with us with the Fish and Wildlife who really had a hard time with adaptive management, I guess. But eventually he caught on to the fact that we had to do something and there was nothing to lose.

So instead of doing all these fancy designs, we went out and we bought a bunch of cinder blocks, we went to a local cabinet maker who built us some frames, and then we got some cheesecloth, we put it between the frames, put them together, we went out and stacked cinder blocks three or four high with these frames between them. We took eggs off fish, laid them on the cheesecloth, put another one on top, another row of cinder blocks, and then we filled this whole pond full of these things. And then we waited to see what would happen.

And, you know, we had all these T-V cameras that were coming down, people from Redding were coming down. It was very scary because if it was a failure, it was going to be a very public failure. But it was a thrilling thing to do when all the work was done, because we didn't have any kind of procurement process that would allow us to do any of this stuff in time. We did it all with volunteers, and the people in town were so sick of nothing happening for so many years, we just had volunteers coming out of the woodwork.

The bulldozers were donated from the timber people. The gas for the bulldozers was just donated by local people that came at a hundred bucks a pop to pay for gas.

The dozers were operated, basically, by the fathers and sons of the people who had donated them. We had thirteen-year-old kids running the bulldozers. At home, previous to going out there, I had designed the ponds. The key thing was to get the velocity right going through the ponds, because if you didn't have the velocities then the eggs wouldn't hatch. And if they did they would have too much disease because they needed the moving water. So the velocities were critical. So, once I designed it, I stood up on a hill overlooking all of this, with two red flags, and I would just point to these kids that were running the dozers, I'd take them where to make the cuts and fills, because I didn't have time to put out a drawing, and they couldn't have read it anyway. And we didn't have any surveyors, and so you just cut it and then you'd take a shot with a survey instrument as to whether or not it flowed downhill. And then you ran the water through it, you found out that you didn't get the velocities that you designed, so you just ran the dozers through it again until you did.

And we started getting some problems downstream with water clarity, and so we would put a big berm in at the end of the thing. And so we'd do all our work all day long and then we'd pull the berm out at night so that people wouldn't see all the water going off down the river. And we did it!

And so we were waiting, you know, every day waiting for the amount of time that it takes these eggs to come out. And as it turned out, all the eggs in all the banks hatched, except the very top row. We were worried about the top row because of the sun. And so we were figuring out what we should do. Well, we figured we would put a sheet of plywood over it. Well the sheet of plywood had shellac on it and it killed the top row of eggs. But these were four rows deep and so it wasn't anything. And so basically we were trying to get 10 million eggs out of it; we got 9.2 million.

And we ended up, then, raising these eggs and these fish and we had the local Rod and Gun Club feeding them, and I went up and fed them. The whole office, you know, anybody you could get went up and fed them, and everybody loved to do it. We had the local politicians, you know, going up and feeding the fish and having their pictures taken. And so we went through that whole year raising the eggs to what they call a smolt stage, when the salmon start to smoltify and they have to go to the ocean. We tagged a representative sample of them so we could track how they did, and we released them. And so then this huge group of fish that went on down the river.

And then we ended up, the guy wanted his property back the way it was and we bulldozed it all back together again and, whoosh, it was done. A thrilling thing to do.

Seney: And here's the Bureau of Reclamation guy, right? He's raising fish.

Solbos: That's right.

Seney: That's now the job of the Bureau of Reclamation.

Funding Problems

Solbos: That's right, yeah. And got tremendous good articles about, "Well, we finally got somebody in here. Teddy Roosevelt has come after all." And another thing that I got out of that was how wonderful it is to have an office when you have no money. The first year I was there we had a big funding problem because the setting up of the office and the appropriations out of Washington was a year off. We'd taken so much heat about being slow, that we set up this office and we were hoping that the money came in, and it didn't. And so basically, I was up there all by myself, no staff. I set up the whole office. I mean, I found the office, I put in the telephone. We had power for awhile, but we didn't pay the bill, and I remember looking out the window and this big-armed lady shows up with these wire cutters and cut off our power line because we hadn't paid the bill. (laughter) So, I mean, this was really a small-scale operation here.

But anytime we needed anything associated with this was something else, we would just ask the public for it and they would come forward with it. In fact, I learned about regulations. I put an ad in the paper that said, you know, "We're trying to do all of these things," and then listed them, "and that we're broke and that next year we'll have money to do this stuff, but these are all the reasons why we've got to do it now, because the run is in a certain location and all of that stuff, and we need money." And all this money came in. A trust fund was developed and all this money came in to do this work. I then found out that I needed to get Washington approval to put ads in the paper and that the Bureau didn't usually put ads in the paper saying that they didn't have any money and that they needed money and that they were looking for donations. (laughter) So that kind of was awkward for awhile.

Seney: Did you hear about that from the Regional Director?

Solbos: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Seney: What did he say?

Solbos: And higher up. I learned about the procurement process. I never dealt with Washington at that point, but this is the first time that it had elevated to such a level

that Washington was interested in what we were doing.

Seney: Well the local congressman must have been happy.

Solbos: Everybody locally was delighted, and that's why I found out, virtually, that I could get away with a whole lot of stuff if everybody was happy. I mean, you know, you can break a lot of regulations if things work out. If things don't work out then they're looking for somebody to burn.

Seney: So they never bothered you about this?

Solbos: So they didn't bother me about it.

Seney: They just said, "Ed, don't put anymore ads in the paper."

Solbos: Yeah, just don't do it any more. That's right.

Seney: It was a good idea.

Solbos: But it was fine because the next year we had our money and that was it. And then we ended up, you know, we had plenty of money and then the cooperation kind of faded. People then expected us to do all of this stuff, and then the other agencies became, rather than all trying to look through their own creativity as to how to get things done, they were just looking for us to fund everything.

Seney: Well they must have blamed the Bureau for the fish problems to begin with, (Solbos: Oh, absolutely.) because you built the dam.

Solbos: It was our fault.

Seney: Did you, you think, restore some of the Bureau's reputation through your actions?

Frustrating Parts of the Job

Solbos: Um, for awhile. You know, I can talk now about the frustrating parts of that job. In other jobs, if you've got to build a dam, when you're done you've got a dam and they can never say you did a bad job, because there's the damned dam. All these other things, you're doing contracts, all of that, you've got a product there. The product on this job was fish and you can't build fish. You can put the situation there so that maybe the fish will restore themselves, but you could do a wonderful job, put in

miles and miles of gravel, double the water supply, do all these things that every biologist is telling you has to be done, and if the fish don't come back, you've failed. And that's just flat-out all there is to it. And they will pick your program apart because you've failed.

And what happened on this project, eventually, was that that year and the next year were incredibly unexplainable anomalies in the salmon runs. And, you know, they talked about El Niño, you know the warming trends in the ocean and all these things coming together; the planets being aligned to generate all these fish. But when it was gone, it was gone. And now the river is virtually back to almost as bad as it was when I first came.

Seney: But as long as you were there, did the fish keep coming?

Solbos: They started to tail off, but they were still tremendous when I left. When I left things really collapsed, and it was absolutely *nothing* to do with the manager. It was just the way the biology of the species was working out.

Seney: You're a lucky man, Mr. Solbos!

Solbos: Well, there's some luck involved. There's no doubt about it. (laughter) But anyway, so that was really tough. And so then we got into offshore stuff and fighting with the offshore fishermen to have them take less fish, and they'd say, "Well if the Bureau hadn't have done this in the first place, we wouldn't be in this mess." And so it became pretty nasty. And to this day, that project is struggling, and they're looking at extending it now and some other things, and it's before Congress.

Seney: Your charge, really was, "fix this fish situation." Is that what the Regional Director said when he sent you up there? Take care of this?

Solbos: Two things: "Get the locals off my back, and bring back the fish. Even if you don't bring the fish back and you get the locals off my back, that's the best thing, you know. (laughter) But if you can get the fish too, that's great."

Seney: Yeah. Did you succeed from the Regional Director's point of view. Did you get the locals off his back?

Solbos: For awhile. Yep. Well, again, when it started tailing off, then people started to talk again and everybody's all upset about what's going on. For a while, you know, when you get a bad article in the paper, it would tear me up. I'd be mad about it for days, and then be upset with myself for days, and I would just say, "I'm not working hard

enough. I've got to work harder."

Seney: Let me turn this over.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. AUGUST 17, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. AUGUST 17, 1994.

Communities Revolved Around Fish Runs

Solbos: [In] a job like this, that's so tied to the whole culture of the local community, it's impossible not to take things personally. I mean, you *feel* for these people. Just the time that I lived there, because of the things that I like to do, which was fishing, your whole life becomes tied to the fish runs. They have a tribe called the Hupa Indians down there, and it was for the first time I really understood Indians, in the sense, where everything they did, they didn't need calendars. The fall run of salmon came between September 10th and September 15th, every year. After the fall run was done, the silver salmon would come in and it was always the middle of November when they came in. And then toward the end of September, steelhead would start coming in, and you'd have the summer steelhead and the winter steelhead that would come in. Then you'd have the spring salmon coming in in June. They had lampreys that came in, that the actual Indians thought were a better delicacy to eat than the salmon were.

Seney: The eels?

Solbos: Yeah. And they became basically extinct in the river. So everything came in during certain periods of time. And they performed what was called a White Deerskin Dance, which was a celebration of the rhythms of the river, and so everything they did was based on that. And you didn't have to be an Indian to be that way. Everybody in town was that way. Those salmon runs, you know, all you ever talked about was, what are the weir counts? You know, the weirs were down the river where people were determining, you know, what kind of fish runs were coming in. And so you were always talking about the Willow Creek Weir, which was the low weir in the system, you know. If you got fifty fish in the Willow Creek Weir by September 15, you'd look back in last year and you'd say, "Well we got fifty this year, we had forty-eight last year, so that's a little better." Or maybe, "The run is a week early this year. I wonder why that is? Is it because the temperature was warmer?" You know, and then it would make us think, "Well, maybe we need to increase the water temperatures and get the fish in earlier," you know. It really was something, and so, like I said, you took things real personal. When the run didn't

materialize, the whole city was in a state of mourning when the run didn't come. That meant all the people that called into the fishing stores, you know, "How's the run this year?" "Well, the run doesn't seem to be showing up." Well they go someplace else. And all the hotels have vacancies and all the related industries that are associated with that are belly up.

The other big industry up there was timber and things were going bad with timber. The spotted owl was going on. They closed the mills in Weaverville, for environmental reasons as well as the spotted owl. So people started evolving out of those kind of environments and those kind of jobs into service jobs, and so you might have a guy that, last year he was a timberman, now he's a guide, and it's his first year as a guide. He sure wishes that there were some fish in the damned river. So it was really, really tough.

Bureau Frustrations because of the Ability to Manipulate Biological Systems

And I went away from that job feeling like I failed to some degree, because I didn't leave them with a solution, and it really made me understand the frustrations, now that the Bureau was going to have forever, with the ability to manipulate biological systems.

I mean, we can do everything for them. Right now [on] the Trinity, everything we know is perfect: water temperatures are perfect, the amount of water is perfect, we changed all the habitat so that the spawning and the rearing and the out migrants and the returning fish have all got perfect conditions. Nobody could figure out why they don't come back. We put out a lot of fish, they're healthy fish, we track them all the way into the estuary with tags, they go to the ocean, they don't come back. And we don't know why, and so the project doesn't work, by definition, in the eyes of the locals. And it doesn't work to me, in my eyes too, because the bottom line is that if the fishing isn't good anywhere over there, then we failed.

I still go over there once a year. I still talk to [people there], I still know people that I go to see. I had a great relationship with the press over there, but even at the end they were starting to turn, because they're clientele was unhappy and they couldn't side with the Bureau any more. And so even though they knew we were working as hard as we could work, all of a sudden you started getting articles about, you know, we should blow up the dam, we should secede from the Central Valley Project, and all those things that were written before I came, were starting to be written just when I was starting to leave.

Seney: When you were doing all these sort of imaginative and unorthodox things, did the

Regional Director want to know about this?

Issues with Doing Something Imaginative within Reclamation Culture

Solbos: Now, we've got this Area Office concept and you do a lot more staff kind of stuff now. But there wasn't a lot of interfacing [with regional staff]. In fact, in most cases, if I tried to talk to 800 to get some advice [it wasn't very productive].

Seney: Eight hundred meaning?

Solbos: Oh, meaning the procurement folks. Or if I tried to get anything out of design, everything was just too unorthodox that we were doing. And the time frame was ridiculous. I mean, you can't call anybody and say, "I've got to have a design in two weeks." You know, "I've got to put out something for bid in two weeks." You can't do that. And there was no place that people were using volunteers and doing things [like we were doing]. So, mostly, it was, "I know Ed's doing this stuff up there and I sure hope it works out for him," kind of thing.

Seney: But I don't want to hear it? Would the Regional Director say he didn't want to hear about it?

Solbos: No, he didn't want to mess with it.

Seney: I guess what I'm trying to ask is that, you're doing, again, imaginative and unorthodox things, and if I'm the Regional Director, I certainly want you to succeed because I want those two things: I want the people off my back and the fish back. But I know what Bureau procedures are. If you come to me and say, "Listen, this is what I want to do," I might have to say to you, "You know, you can't do that, Ed, because it's not going along with procedures." So was there any conversation where he said, "Listen, you do what you think is right, but don't tell me about it?"

Solbos: Yeah, absolutely. That goes on all the time. And I was young still, I mean this was the first Project Manager position I ever had, and I made some pretty big screw-ups in this whole thing.

Seney: For example?

Solbos: Uh . . . I guess I'd rather not go into it.

Seney: Okay. Fair enough.

- Solbos: Yeah, there was a political snafu that I made.
- Seney: Characterize it for me. Did you not clear something or?
- Solbos: Okay. One of the things that I learned on that job was, when things go wrong, they're your fault. And when things go right, they're someone else's. And we had some things go very right that weren't choreographed appropriately to allow certain people who were high up to benefit from them. And at the time, I thought it was kind of selfish and self-centered.
- Seney: Because you heard about this?
- Solbos: Oh, I certainly did! (laughs)
- Seney: How did you hear? Did you get a phone call saying, "I should have been there?"
- Solbos: It was a performance evaluation where it all came up, and things weren't going well for me. Largely because I became considered a rogue, and that they don't mind, like I said, when things are going, you know, you're just taking care of business, fine. But when certain things happen, mostly things that are very good are happening, you've got to bring in people to share in that. And, like I said, at first, when I first learned about that, you know, it was more of, "Gosh, these are a bunch of selfish people that had nothing to do with this."
- Seney: Somebody call you up and clue you in?
- Solbos: No. Like I said, [it was] this performance evaluation.
- Seney: You looked at it and you said, "Oh, oh. I should have . . ."
- Solbos: "I screwed up here." Now, though, I realize how important that whole process is to doing things like getting funding and getting the program the kind of recognition it needs and the Bureau the kind of recognition it needs to be successful in a whole lot of other areas that I have nothing to do with. And I *was* pretty much a rogue. I was feeling pretty good about myself and wheeling and dealing with the locals, and as long as those guys leave me alone in Sacramento, we'll solve this God-damned problem. But a little different now.
- Seney: Should have gathered somebody around for photo opportunities or press releases?

"We Put Out a Movie"

Solbos: (laughing) Well, we put out a movie, that was the big thing. The Forest Service had—you got me talking about it; you won—the Forest Service put out a movie about things that they were doing all over the place, and it was a great movie, and we saw it and all. And people said, "Geez, you ought to put out a movie about the restoration program because this is such a great thing that's going on. You know, and you're doing all these good things and the fish are coming back." We had all these fish that we didn't know what to do with. And so, "That sounds pretty good to me." So, you've got to realize this is the guy that didn't even know I had to get cleared to put an ad in the paper. So I didn't know I had to get cleared to get a movie, either.

And so I, first of all I checked to see what it cost to do a movie like this. It was, I remember clearly, it was \$300,000. And our entire budget that year was \$50,000, and you know, we had had all these people that had put in volunteer work, so we didn't have \$300,000 to do a movie. And so this was a stupid idea. Well, anyway, there was a local in town who wanted to get into that business, and he's—we had all our meetings in public meetings—so he heard about this. And so he came in and he said, "I'll do a movie for you and all I'll charge you for is what it costs me, in other words, the film, and sometimes when you finalize it you've got to go into a sound studio and to do the things right. And so if it costs something to rent a sound studio, I'll charge you that. But I can't imagine why we can't do this thing for less than \$2,000." And so I said, "Shoot, if I can get a movie for \$2,000, let's do it!" And that's all I told him was, "Yeah, we'll do it."

So anyway, he really latched onto it and there was a lot of history there of people who had been involved in that program for twenty or thirty years. Why there was a program at all was that there was a science teacher in Weaverville High School who, with his students, had done this study of it. And then they walked down the center of the street with a coffin with the representative last salmon on the Trinity River in this coffin. And it ended up getting on national T-V and then they put up this big billboard, as you drove into Weaverville, that said, "This is the site of the Trinity River," and it basically said that it had been destroyed by the Bureau of Reclamation. And so that's how the whole thing got [started]. Well, all these people were still around and so he went out, he interviewed them, interviewed all of the people that were involved in the new process, took a video of all these new facilities that we built and all these fish that were coming in and all these people that were so down before and how positive they were. And I thought it was a wonderful movie.

Seney: Were you in it?

Solbos: Oh, yeah, I was in it, as the representative of the Bureau of Reclamation, okay, and the federal government in general. And so this movie came out, and one thing that was so great about this movie was—I don't know if I can describe this very well to you, but sometimes movies are too polished. For instance, this Forest Service movie, you know, it sounded like it had Orson Welles in the background and, I mean, to talk about problems that the locals have, [it] didn't come across totally well with this. But this was a real grass roots movie. I mean, you had people, you know, with no shirts on that were talking on it and, I mean, it was a *terrific grass roots movie*.

And so I was really proud of this movie and so I brought it down, we had a management meeting in Sacramento and so I brought this movie down to show at the management meeting. And [I] showed it. And everybody loved this movie! You know, "We've got to do this everywhere. What a fantastic movie!" Well, as it turned out, they called me in afterwards, the Regional Director and my supervisor, "Did you get Washington approval to do a movie?" I didn't know we needed any Washington approval to do a movie. And as it turned out, there were all kinds of regulations you had to do to do a movie, none of which, of course, I'd even considered. And also, it was bad enough that I didn't do that, but what was *really* bad was that I didn't have any of the political people in the movie that really had brought about the legislation and all of that stuff.

Seney: Members of Congress and that sort of thing?

Solbos: Yeah. And the *real* powerful people that had an awful lot to do with it, obviously, a more important part than I did because they got the money and all of that—I was just the guy they hired—weren't in any of that. And so the thought was that the movie had to be killed. And to this day, it's never been shown. I have a copy of it and nobody else does, and it's kind of for my memoirs, I guess. But it's a wonderful movie. (laughter) So someday I'll will it to you, maybe, but it can't ever see the light of day. So that's the kind of things that you do.

Seney: Well there's another lesson there for you, obviously, another political lesson.

Solbos: Everything's a lesson, that's right.

Seney: And obviously this was not fatal to your career.

Solbos: No. But I went through a very hard time because of it.

Seney: Give you a little scare?

-
- Solbos: Yeah, it really was. The reason it probably didn't hurt me a lot more was that the Regional Director at that time left shortly thereafter. And so a new guy came in and I went from getting a very bad performance rating, the kind of performance rating where you've got to do something in a few months or you're out.
- Seney: What? Oh, you mean the bad one is you've got to do something within a few months or you're out.
- Solbos: Yeah. To getting a level five and being Engineer Of The Year. I went from being fired to being Engineer Of The Year in six months. And that's the difference of having different supervisors. So that's luck too. So, anyway, that's how that project went.
- Seney: How long were you there?
- Solbos: I was there for five years.
- Seney: Five years. So now we're up to '91. (Solbos: Yes.) And the Newlands Project job is open, right?

Coming to the Newlands Project

- Solbos: Right. I remember it was Christmas Day in 1990 that I got a call at home, and my supervisor then, said that the person who was leaving this job was going on to something that they wanted him to do.
- Seney: Was this Mr. Dimick?
- Solbos: Yes. And they wanted me to take this position as a lateral.
- Seney: What were you by now? What level?
- Solbos: I was still a thirteen, Project Manager. This was a thirteen position then. It's a fourteen now.
- Seney: What's the difference between thirteen and fourteen? Just salary or is there a big difference between a thirteen and fourteen? You know, I'm thinking, like the military, there's a big cut between Major General and Lieutenant General.
- Solbos: Yeah, it's really only money. Titles are much more significant in the Bureau than

money. There isn't enough difference between thirteens and fourteens or even fifteens to make or break anybody. It's really the title of being a Project Manager and running an office, not what kind of grade is associated with it isn't a big deal. At least it isn't to me and it isn't to most people, I don't think.

Seney: When it says, "Project Manager" on your business card in the Bureau, that makes the difference.

Solbos: That's the difference. Then you're actually responsible for a project, rather than working for someone else to do that. Anyway, I think I messed up on my story a little. Christmas Day in '90 I got a call and they wanted me to transfer to a position in Kesterson. Kesterson was a real tricky little project that they have in the Central Valley.²³ Basically, it was the first big project where agricultural drain water was causing very bad biological problems with migratory birds. And that's where you had the two-headed ducks and all of that stuff that was going on down there, and it just exploded on the Bureau and [they] had to do something relatively quickly. And there was a construction program that was put together to address that and they wanted somebody to go down and run that.

Seney: What would be your assessment of that job?

Solbos: Okay. I wanted no part of it for a number of reasons, some of which were very selfish, and others. First of all, I just loved Weaverville and, again, it was another lateral for me. I'd already lateraled twice; I lateraled down to Phoenix and over to there. I didn't want to lateral again. I didn't think it was good for my career. Also, like I said, I loved the area. It seemed to be a very one-dimensional job, just construct it, build it, move out. I didn't like any part of it.

Seney: Wasn't there a big opportunity to fail down there, too? Do you think?

Solbos: Oh, I suppose. But that has never bothered me.

Seney: That didn't enter into your thinking.

Solbos: Never even entered into my thinking at all that it would fail. It was a pretty simple

23. "Completed in 1971 by the Bureau of Reclamation, Kesterson included 12 evaporation ponds for irrigation drainage water. The reservoir, a part of the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, was an important stopping point for waterfowl. In the 1960s officials proposed a 290-mile drainage canal to the ocean known as the San Luis Drain. Only 85 miles were completed, however, and work on the drain halted in 1986 after scientists discovered bird deformities due to drainage at Kesterson." For more information, see Water Education Foundation, "Kesterson Reservoir," www.watereducation.org/aquapedia/kesterson-reservoir (Accessed 5/2016).

job. I mean, all you've got to do is fill a pond full of dirt and cover it over. I don't see how you could have failed in it. The job up in Weaverville was much more associated with potential failure. It represented a failure of the government, I guess.

Seney: I guess I'm thinking that in the context of the Central Valley Project and the Southern San Joaquin Valley, it's a pretty hot issue. I mean, the farmers are very angry, Westlands's Water District is very angry, the environmentalists are very angry. (Solbos: Yes.) Some very powerful people who like to hunt ducks are very angry about what it's done to the flyway. And I guess that would have been in my thinking as I say that it might have been, you know, kind of a pit for someone to go down there. Not much of an opportunity, really.

Solbos: Yeah, maybe. You know, I've always looked at the kind of jobs that people want the least as the ones you ought to go for. Because that's what's going to move you fastest. And they're also generally the most interesting. I think the big reason was I didn't see it as an advancement for me. I already thought I was doing a much harder job where I was. And I loved the area.

Seney: It's beautiful up there, isn't it?

Solbos: I feel right now that I'm going to retire there. Everybody I know that's been there is going to retire there. I mean, that just the way it is. It's a beautiful place. Eleven minutes from my office I could be catching salmon, and had done it. You know, so it's pretty neat. But anyway, this was another major thing for me in that it was the first time I'd ever been asked to take a job that I turned down. Also, I had just gotten this Engineer Of The Year thing and had a good relationship. So what I did was, rather than turn it down, I said, "I don't think I'm the right person for this job. I think I'm wasted down there. I think you need more of a construction-oriented person that's just going in there and do it, not become politically attached to it. I'm probably going to be more of a liability." Basically I tried to convince him to not do it.

Seney: Who called you about this? The Regional Director himself?

Solbos: The Assistant Regional Director. But I said, "If you direct me to go, I'll go, but I don't want to go, and I don't think I'm the right person for the job." So they said they would consider that. Well they ended up taking someone else and that person is now an Assistant Regional Director. So that was a good move for him. Maybe I should have gone, but I don't regret it.

Then a few months later, Frank left *this* position, and they did the same thing,

they called me up and they said, "We want you to go over to Newlands and run the project over there." Again I didn't want to do it. Again, largely because it was a lateral. I really believed that this position was woefully undergraded.

Seney: Did you know much about Newlands.

Deciding to Become Newlands Project Manager

Solbos: Yes, I did. Just from meeting with the Project Manager, meeting with Frank during various meetings and things like that, listening to what he presented, you know, as far as the problems and all. I was intrigued by the project and intrigued by the issues, but it was like the standard thing around the Mid-Pacific Region that the most undergraded person in the Region was the head of this office.

Seney: Why was there that feeling?

Solbos: Because it was totally separate, virtually, from the Mid-Pacific Region, totally different problems. No one over there even could relate to the problems ~~over here~~ [in Nevada]. For instance, when there was a problem ~~over there~~ [on the Central Valley Project], the Regional Director was always going to Washington. The Regional Director never went to Washington for a Newlands Project issue, the Project Manager always went to Washington. The Project Manager always dealt directly with Congress. Talk about autonomous, we might as well have been a different Region ~~over here~~ [in Nevada], relative to the input you got.

Seney: How does this happen? How does the Regional Director not have control over this project?

Solbos: Well, largely because his big issue is Central Valley. I mean the Central Valley Project dictates all those other offices: Shasta and Folsom and Fresno and, you know, all of those things. They're all Central Valley Project Offices and they all are involved in that one thing. The big politics are always California politics, not Nevada politics. So when he's got time to spend, he's *got* to put it over there.

I don't want this to come across as the fact that he's not doing his job over here. He's got a limited amount of time and his problems are California. And he's looking for somebody who can run this thing over here and just keep him informed and, you know, tell him what's happening and warn him of problems that are coming, but take care of them. And so that's intriguing to me. You know, from the old rogue perspective that I'm always trying to keep down, that's appealing. I certainly am not afraid to be in that situation.

But the problem was, I didn't like the grade. I didn't want to move for another lateral. I'd been telling my wife—you know, she loved it there too—I said, "We're not going to leave unless we get something out of it." And it wasn't clear again, that just from a career move it was a better move, because I'm a Project Manager there, I'm a Project Manager here. I get a few more people here and a few more headaches.

- Seney: Let me ask you, as I've read about this project and gotten a little bit knowledgeable, and I mean a *little* bit knowledgeable, it strikes me as a very complicated and complex project. Are there any in the Bureau that are more complicated than this one?
- Solbos: Oh, I wouldn't say one way or another. I will agree with you certainly, though, that's it's quantumly more complicated than anything I've ever been associated with.
- Seney: Did you know that? Was that part of the scuttlebutt about the Newlands Project, that you've just got *so* many things going?
- Solbos: I didn't have the comprehension of it (laughter) when this all went on, as to exactly what it was all about. But anyway, I was again called to take this position, and again I resisted it, and I basically resisted it somewhat the same way, but I felt even less comfortable because I was in the "three strikes, you're out" feeling right now. You know, these people have been good to me and I need to recognize that I have a place in this organization and I've only been in it for fifteen years.
- Seney: That you need to be a good soldier.
- Solbos: It's not like I can pretend that I've only got a year to retire and I can start telling people what to do. So it was difficult. And basically what I said was, this is what they told me and this is what you always tell people as a manager, when you say, "Is there any chance of this being upgraded?" the manager always comes back with, "Right now it's graded as to what it is, but when you get in this job for awhile, we'll look at it and we'll, you know, if you're really doing that kind of work we'll upgrade you." Well that almost never happens. If they're getting the job done, that's what you're going to be. And so I said, "We all know that that darned thing is undergraded and you need to grade it right." And I said, "If you grade that out as a fourteen, I promise you I will apply for it, and if you want to hire me at that point, fine. If you've got a better applicant, you're better off anyway." So then they thought about that and they made some overtures to direct someone else in there or to talk someone else into that. And I know some of the people they talked to, and [they got] no takers. So then it came out as a fourteen. And I knew that was going

to happen, so I started deciding in my own mind as to whether I really wanted the job.

Seney: But aren't you now, you're obliged, you promised, you said "if you make it a fourteen, I'll apply."

Solbos: Oh, right. But applying and getting it are two different things. And how you go after it, you can't fake things. In other words, you can't be sitting in front of an interviewer and say, "I really want this job," when you really don't want that job. You've got to build yourself up and convince yourself that this is what you want to do and then everything else will fall into place. A lot of people put in for jobs that they don't really want. It happens all the time. And they come across as not having a whole lot of integrity, to be honest. You know, and so I always figured if I could not convince myself that this was for me, that I would put in for it but I'd tell them once again that I don't want it. "If you want to give it to me, fine, but I don't want it."

So anyway, I did some things to see what it took to do the job. And the first thing I did was I called down there and I said, "I know that Frank is leaving and," I said, "I want to act over there for a while. I want to see what the job is like." And so they did that for me. They put me over here for a month to learn what was going on. When I was over here, I liked it. I liked the people, I liked the challenge of the work. The area wasn't Weaverville, but I realized that nothing would be.

Seney: How's the fishing here?

Solbos: Terrible. And if you do catch something you'd better not eat it because it's got some kind of chemical problem with it. But anyway, and so after spending the time here and all I convinced myself that it *is* for me and it's a grade raise and it's what I need to do to move on to the next level. Also it was my third strike, and so I really didn't want to say, "I don't want it."

Seney: How do you mean, it was your third strike? You'd turned down Kesterson.

Solbos: The first one was Kesterson, the second one was taking this for a thirteen, and now this would be telling them a third time about the fourteen. So I didn't want the third strike.

Seney: Because that's when you get your name mentioned in meetings, "Solbos wouldn't do this," and that's the end.

Solbos: That's right. Not a team player. So anyway, I didn't decide that I wanted the job

because of the third strike, I just decided I wanted the job.

Seney: It had to be in your thinking.

Solbos: It was in my thinking. That's why I tried so hard to convince myself. But in reality, after I went through all of those things I was totally committed to getting the job.

Seney: Now, once you were totally committed, did you give Mr. Dimick a call and say, "Listen, I'm, you know, I'm really interested in this. I'm not just applying because I said I would. Once I've had a look, I'm seriously interested in this job."

Solbos: Yeah. Dimick had nothing to do with it. It was my supervisor. But I just let it play out. Then they put it out and I did a great job on the 171.

Seney: Which means?

Solbos: That's the application for the job. Which means, [I] spent a lot of time on it.

Seney: Tailoring your experience to that?

Solbos: Exactly. That's so important. You know, in fact, it happens all the time. You put out a job, you get an application from somebody, you can't even tell that he put it in for this job, for crying out loud. It's just one that he sent to everybody else.

Seney: So they're going to know, here's Solbos' 171. This is careful; he's serious.

Solbos: Yeah. And every time I've ever done a 171, I completely rewrote it, even though it's twenty-seven pages long. Long hand, completely rewrote it. Even going back to jobs that I had fifteen years ago to tailor the things that I learned on that job to this new job. I don't know if that's why, but like I said, I never put in for a job I didn't get and that's kind of where we're at. But anyway, then [I] went down for the interview. And I prepared for the interview even to the point of rehearsing it.

Seney: With someone, you mean? Having someone question you, or just in your mind?

Solbos: In my own mind.

Seney: In your mind. Going, "so this would be a question, this would be my answer"?

Solbos: And the one I rehearsed the most was, "What can you do for this job?" and my

answer was going to be based on how much I really wanted it. Because I knew in their minds they would wonder if I really wanted it. And so that's the one that I really practiced, to come across as really wanting it and convincing them I [wanted it].

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. AUGUST 17, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 24, 1994.

Seney: Today is October 24, 1994. My name is Donald Seney, and I'm with Mr. Ed Solbos, Jr., the Project Manager of the Lahontan District, in his office in Carson City, Nevada. How are you this morning?

Solbos: Just fine.

Seney: Good. Well, why don't you continue with the story. The manuscript won't show that we haven't met for several weeks to talk.

Preparing for the Project Manager Interview

Solbos: (sigh) It's hard to jump in right after that.

Seney: Sure. Well, go back and start a little earlier, if you want. We can make the transition later.

Solbos: I guess eventually, I talked the last little bit about how hard I'd worked on the 171 and how hard I'd prepared for the interviews. So eventually, they asked me to come down and have another interview. There were a number of other applicants for the job, as there always are. Larry Hancock²⁴, I remember, was the Regional Director at the time, and he was the lead person in the interview. And my supervisor at the time, Dan Fults²⁵ was also in on that session. So those are the two principal people that were involved in making the decision.

We had a nice long interview, I was very comfortable with those people. And since I'd spent quite a bit of time over here—that's another thing that I did to help me prepare for the job; I knew that the person who had been in that job previously,

24. Larry Hancock had a number of high-ranking positions within the Bureau of Reclamation: Mid-Pacific Regional Director, 1989-1991; Principal Deputy Commissioner, 1991-1994; Lower Colorado Regional Director, 1994-1995.

25. Dan Fults participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Dan Fults, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, on November 17, 1993 and August 30, 1994, in Sacramento, California, edited and desktop published by Andrew H. Gahan, 2014, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

Frank Dimick, had left quite a bit earlier, and that they needed people to act in that position for a while. So I made sure that I was able to go over here under one of those acting assignments for a few weeks so that I was able to be well-versed on what the needs of the job were, and I would be able to then prepare for what I thought was significant. You know, one of the standard questions is always, "What can you do for this job? What difference can *you* make by taking that position?" And that's a very hard thing to do if you've never even been out there and looked around. And for someone that just applies for a job out of the blue, that's a very tough question to answer. But after spending a month over here like I did, and knowing all the people—I went out of my way to meet all the constituents over here during that period of time and listened to their concerns—it was pretty easy for me then to lay out a pretty good response as to what I would do for the job.

Seney: What was your response, can you remember?

Solbos: I think the biggest—and it's kind of funny now, now that I've been in this job for a while—my goals at that time probably have not been fulfilled very well. But at that time, I was really taken aback by how much pressure we were putting on the local agricultural districts: The Truckee-Carson Irrigation District, mostly on the Newlands Project, and they really expressed to me at that time how frustrated they were with the relationship they had with the federal government, and the fact that the Department of Justice and people in Washington seemed to be much more involved in dictating their operations on the project out here, than the local people were. So my real goal was, after being out here for a little while, was to try to change that, and to make the decisions more locally-based, and to provide them more of a conduit for input to those decisions. Like I said, I can't say that I've been successful in that regard.

Since I've had this job, I've been able to appreciate, I guess, more how this relates to other things that the Department of the Interior is working on, and that there really isn't a way that I can do that in a vacuum and not involve all those other people—especially with this piece of legislation that's been passed, 101-618, that requires us to maintain a certain amount of wetlands, that requires us to [achieve] recovery [of the] *cui-ui*, that requires us to develop M&I water supply systems. You just can't look at it as an agricultural project any more. And that's unfortunate for them, and that's something that we're trying to help them evolve, basically, into something a little bit different, and it's been a tough evolution.

Seney: And your own thinking, obviously, has had to evolve on this matter, too, as well.

Difficulties on the Newlands Project

Solbos: Sure, it really has. The situation out here is as difficult as any that I've ever been experiencing before. And the evolution is very painful, virtually in every step. I talked earlier in the interview about a situation whereby the Fallon Reservation had asked to get late season water deliveries, this '94 irrigation season. And at that time I talked about—and this was in [an]earlier interview, and it's evolved a little bit since then—I talked about how I'd met with the Chairman of the [TCID] Board and tried to convince him that it was in [the Board's] best interests to do that. And I tried to do it very informally, because I knew it would eventually elevate if we couldn't handle it ourselves. And he at the time listened to what I said, he talked to the reservation, but they never were able to come to an agreement between themselves and the reservation, and it unfortunately blew up into a pretty large issue that got to the point where we did have to direct them to do that action, to deliver water to the tribe. They refused to do that, so that I ended up having to take over that part of the project and make the deliveries myself out of this office. It was a very distasteful thing for me to do, I didn't want to do it. It's precedent-setting, I think, for future actions relative to the project, and I didn't want to get into that. I made it three years without having to take over a piece of the project, and it was never, certainly, a goal, even though people think, "Aw, it's just part of the plan," you know, here we go, taking over the project. I'm a real believer in, "You're better off doing things locally and letting the people that are most directly impacted by a project to actually be responsible for running it." I certainly have no aspirations of taking over the Newlands Project, but in this case, we took over a very small piece of it, "S" Line Reservoir, and the delivery system from there to the reservation, and made the deliveries that the tribe requested, because I believe it was the right thing to do.

Seney: The way it worked, did you just order Willis Hyde²⁶, their watermaster, to make these deliveries?

Solbos: No. At the very last board meeting, when basically the decision had already been made, we asked them one last time if they would do it, and they voted unanimously not to do it. So that meant that no employee of the district would participate in any manner, and so we had to do it entirely ourselves. And that's what the people, basically, out in our Fallon Office, Roger LeSueur who heads up that office, and his

26. Willis Hyde participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Willis F. Hyde, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney, Bureau of Reclamation, August 11, 1994, in Fallon, Nevada, edited by Donald B. Seney, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

staff, went to the reservoir, [and] made the deliveries.²⁷

Seney: They opened up the gates, let the water out?

Solbos: Did the things that needed to be done. Checked it up where it needed to be checked up. One thing that helped us a great deal is that releases out of the reservoir, and moving the water to the reservation is actually not that difficult. The hard part is on the reservation, making all the deliveries on the reservation to all the individual landowners. We were very lucky, in a sense, that the tribe became very much of an active participant in this thing, and that they basically took the responsibility on themselves to make all the deliveries on the reservation.

Seney: They did it to your satisfaction and their satisfaction?

Solbos: Yes, and did a great job of doing that. And also, they've had aspirations that they've expressed to me in the past of eventually taking over and running the project on the reservation. See, right now, it is operated and maintained by T-C-I-D, but under a contract with Interior, they could do that for themselves, and many other reservations do that. And so this was kind of an opportunity for them to see if they indeed wanted to get into that business and how difficult it was, and whether or not they had the expertise. So they looked at it as an opportunity to learn, and they did very, very well.

Seney: Do you have any insight into the thinking of T-C-I-D and being so adamant about this? I mean, when we discussed this before, it seems to me that we discussed on the tape, that there are these negotiations that as we both know are going on now, that you're taking part in, that T-C-I-D is not *directly* taking part in, but they are through the Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance, the Fallon Tribe is involved. Clearly the Fallon Tribe and T-C-I-D have the opportunity or the potential of being allies for some part of these negotiations. And it seems to me, you expressed to me the thought, I think on the tape, that this would have been a good opportunity for the T-C-I-D to get some points, in a sense, with the tribe. You must have expressed that to them and put it to them in those terms.

Opportunities Lost

27. Roger LeSueur participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Roger L. LeSueur, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation oral history interview conducted by Donald B. Seney, Bureau of Reclamation, November 4, 1994, in Fallon, Nevada, edited by Donald B. Seney, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

Solbos: Right, I sure did. I guess the best way to term it is that it just really saddens me as how the thing worked out. I think one of the interesting things that has always, at least up to now, has existed out there is a remarkably good relationship between T-C-I-D and the tribe. The tribe has been willing to work with T-C-I-D, they haven't made a lot of unreasonable demands on them. It just really surprised me the way T-C-I-D did this. I know their real problem was that this would be providing something to the tribe that other water users did not have an opportunity to do. And that was clear from the beginning. They looked at it as totally a fairness issue. And back in the spring when they asked if people wanted late season deliveries, and it was eventually decided by the district that there wouldn't be any, the reservation didn't make any request at that time. And so consequently, here we are at the end of the season, when all the plans had already been made, and all of a sudden, they're making this request. But from my point of view, it didn't hurt anything to make the request, and it actually enhanced the water supply, really, for the rest of the people. So there weren't any mechanical or water-related issues or anything that meant that it shouldn't be done, it was really a philosophical thing of perceived fairness. And of course the tribe thought what they were asking for was totally fair, and the district thought that if they went ahead and did this for the tribe, they would be perceived by the water users as not being fair. And I just was not able to persuade them, which I consider part of my responsibility, is to try to do that. So I feel like I was not successful in that regard.

The big thing is, I guess, in trying to understand this issue from an Interior perspective is that it isn't appropriate—you do it as long as people are getting along—but in general, it isn't appropriate for T-C-I-D to be making directions to the reservation on critical aspects of a trust asset, which is water. By that I mean, every year T-C-I-D sets the allocations for the tribe. In other words, it's a fifty-seven percent year, or a sixty percent year. They decide when the irrigation season starts, they decide when it stops. A lot of the decisions on how water is manipulated for the reservation, T-C-I-D makes those decisions. And that has been fine as long as they were agreeing with what was going on. But in reality, there is no obligation by the tribe to abide by regulations established by T-C-I-D. And now we've got to the point where they recognize that they don't want that situation any more—they want to work directly with the federal government to set those kind of critical pieces of work on the reservation. So I am sure that—in fact, I'm working on it right now—that for the '95 irrigation season, we will have a different arrangement, that basically T-C-I-D will be giving allocations and setting those kind of things for the *non*-Indian water users, but that the government will be setting those same types of things for the reservation. And of course we're going to have to work very close together, because it doesn't make much sense if we're at odds to each other. We don't want to do something that would decrease the efficiency of the project just because we're "not

getting along," per se. So we need to work through that and work in good faith to make sure that that doesn't happen. For instance, the issue of late season deliveries: If that's an efficient use of water, and the Indians get more benefit by doing it that way, we'll be looking to do it again next year. And I think what's going to happen is that T-C-I-D will be looking at doing it again next year too, and that's fine.

Seney: T-C-I-D has wanted to expand its board, to include maybe a tribal representative on the board, and I know there have been some discussions. Where does that stand at this point?

Having Tribal Representation on the TCID Board

Solbos: Well the T-C-I-D has made that offer to the reservation—they've made it to others too. I believe they've made it to the Fish and Wildlife Service, relative to wetlands. They might have made it to the state, relative to the wetlands too. I think actually the city of Fernley was offered [a place on the Board], because of M&I needs. But in general, there hasn't been, I don't believe, really any takers, except I believe the city of Fernley has offered to join them. From the reservation standpoint, they don't see it as an advantage to them to do that. They consider themselves a sovereign nation. For them to, let's say, have one vote on an issue when they're likely to get voted down by the board, they figure that that loses them some power. And they are in much better shape to come to the government and say this is how they want things done, rather than have to work through the system to get it that way. And they're probably right.

Seney: [They would] appeal to the Department of Interior, based on their trust responsibilities.

Solbos: That's right.

Seney: Which is essentially what happened in this case.

Solbos: Exactly. You know, it's likely, and I'm just speculating, but it's likely if they came forward in the spring—which is the big issue is that they hadn't—but if they had come forward in the spring and said, "We *do* want late-season deliveries," in all likelihood it would not have been approved anyway, and they'd have been voted down. So going the way that they went, which is directly with the government, they were able to get what they needed, and it worked out better for them. So they have not shown much of an interest to actually participate on the board.

Also, the board, different than other boards that I have been associated with, really makes a whole lot more of the day-to-day decisions of operation of the project than the average board. They're really a brutal thing to work on, to be honest. Many, many, long ten-hour meetings to cover *lots* of different subjects. I mean, if you look at their agendas [they are] amazing, [it's a] herculean tasks to go through their agendas. What people would really want to be on the board for is for policy issues. For instance, a tribal member doesn't want to sit on a two-hour meeting discussing whether or not they should abandon a piece of drain on a person's property. It's just not something that they're interested in doing. And that's the way a lot of others [see it] too, relative to the Fish and Wildlife and others. They're just not interested. And so I think the whole concept of changing representation on the board, or broadening it, is probably fading away a little bit—although there are still some people that think that that needs to be done.

But I think what we're much more likely to do is to develop some kind of an advisory group, that will really be a policy advisory group, that will have those kind of people on it, and it will be a much broader representation, even than you could ever get on the board: For instance, you could have Pyramid Lake on it, you could have Truckee Meadows on it, because we're all in an interrelated situation here with the Carson and Truckee river basins. So I think that's what's going to happen, if I had to guess. And we will be meeting then, periodically, to look at major policy issues, relative to how water is being used on the project. And also, possibly to look at things relative to how the contract is being done. In other words, if we develop a new contract with the irrigation district, there will likely be requirements in that for them to do certain things by certain times. In other words, performance checks in the contract. And to help us decide how that performance is being done, this advisory group could participate in that, and they might even be able to participate in developing the performance standards in the first place for the contract, so that's the way I see this evolving.

Seney: The time has kind of passed, has it, do you think, for people wanting to be on the T-C-I-D Board?

Solbos: Well, it just isn't obvious the benefits that it would have for the people that would do it.

Seney: I guess my question is—and I didn't get it out very well—is that T-C-I-D as an important entity, is kind of fading. Its political standing has been eroded over the years, and it's pretty low at this point.

TCID's Diminished Political Power

- Solbos: I wouldn't say that. They still have an extremely strong role in what's going on. I guess the two ways to look at it is that to this point, T-C-I-D has really been responsible for all the deliveries of project water. And in the past, that has been just, really, irrigators and a little bit of wetlands. And the wetlands have been basically an offshoot, a secondary benefit. But as things have evolved now, we've got, obviously, some M&I use that's going to be coming into it more and more. The big deliveries to the wetlands, the wetlands are the largest water user now on the project. And they've hardly got going. Pretty soon they'll be *far* bigger than anybody else on the project.
- Seney: When the 25,000 acres of wetlands are achieved, what will be the acre foot requirements?
- Solbos: E-I-S [environmental impact statement] has talked about using up as much as 120,000-150,000 acre feet of water, which is potentially half of the water on the project could go to wetlands. If we've got a situation where some of that water's got to go for *cui-ui* enhancement under certain circumstances, that'll be water that's going to endangered species and going down the Truckee [River]. So, more than ever, you've got very separate uses of the water. It's not just what is left after agriculture any more—they're on an equal par, or even a higher par, because of just the total volume of water that they're using. I guess if you're talking about their diminished "powers," if that's the word for it, it really comes from the fact that other users have come forward as much bigger users, and that they can't just be treated by an agricultural district—they need to be given equal footing with ag. And so instead of having the ag basically controlling everything, you now really have virtually four separate demands: you've got the M&I demands, the endangered species demand, the wetlands demand, and the irrigation demand. And so what that then leads to is some kind of a manager, and you can see the two different sides of this. T-C-I-D or the Alliance, perhaps, would say that the manager should be the watermaster, and so what he would do then, is that he would divvy up water between those four groups. From Interior's perspective, that should be the federal government—the federal government will divvy up the water between the groups. And that what T-C-I-D would do is, that they would be responsible for the water deliveries to the non-Indian irrigators. I left that out as a group—there's *five* groups. You've got the wetlands, endangered species, M&I, non-Indian irrigators, and Indian irrigators, and Indian wetlands. It could be six if you want it to. So that's why I wouldn't say that politically they've declined, I think it's just the fact that there are other users now, and they're just one of them, as compared to what was before, where they were just the only one.
- Seney: I want to just ask you maybe one or two other things about this current thing with the

Indian water users out on the Fallon Reservation. This seems to me—and maybe I asked this already—it seems to me not to be a very politic thing here, that T-C-I-D has done in this circumstance. I mean, it doesn't make sense. On the way home, driving back from Fallon, as you're thinking about your lack of success in convincing them that they [TCID] ought to see this in another way, what runs through your mind as you think about the way in which they make decisions?

Troubling Lack of Success

Solbos: To be honest, what ran through my mind when I left that meeting—and it was a terrible meeting, the last meeting. I mean, we had maybe thirty or so farmers there. The way I would look at it is that the district had taken such a strong stance *for* the farmers, that the farmers were really pumped up, basically, to support them. And so there were a lot of very tough statements made. There were things said like, "I wouldn't be surprised if you try to do this, that some kind of violence occurs," to the point where we actually had the Indian tribal police go with us when we went and made the releases out of "S" Line. It was very, very uncomfortable. And yet, when I walked out of that thing, it was pretty easy to get really mad about it, because there were things said; I had a guy stand up and say that if I had any respect for myself at all, I'd quit my job. So it was very easy to get very angry about that. But I didn't feel that way, oddly enough. And what I really thought when I was driving back was, I felt like Pontius Pilot, virtually. It was almost like they wanted to be martyrs. And it was really odd. And the fact that it was *unanimous* just meant that I wasn't even *close* to convincing them. There wasn't a single person on the board that said, "Hey, maybe we ought to reconsider or something." They was just total solidarity on this thing. And they have played that role for quite a while now, whereby the belief is that if they really stick to their guns, that *someone* will come forward and save them. And I don't see that happening, I guess. I just don't see it happening.

And I keep thinking that someday there'll be some kind of a new participant that comes forward for them, that allows a little bit of that kind of thinking to come into their decision-making process. But when you look at how it is, just logistically it's just set up very difficultly for that to happen. I mean, the water users want their rights protected. Anyone that comes forward with some kind of offer, is virtually giving away people's water rights. If the Project Manager doesn't agree with them, then he's not supporting them, which is probably what he was hired for, to come up with smart legal ways to support them. And so under those circumstances, it's almost like it'll never happen. And we're on this path where they will fight us to the end. We will do, I guess, what we feel we *have* to do, and none of that leads to a very pleasant solution. And it's really sad. That's why these negotiations are important in the sense that you've got the people there, maybe, that can look at it not

totally from the point of view of the irrigators, but from my involvement in the negotiations so far, I haven't seen that happen yet. The person that is willing to deal, I guess, in recognizing that something has to change, hasn't been evident yet, it just hasn't come out. And I can't say that the other participants really are any better.

Interior feels like we've got a good position, we've lately done what we thought was right. For instance the bench/bottom case and these transfers and all of that, and we have been able to proceed through the courts to get what we feel needs to be done, so we don't feel the pressure, I guess, to negotiate. And I think when you look at it, the pressure to negotiate, to me, should be with the irrigators. I mean, they're the ones that are being impacted the most from a lifestyle and just the cost of keeping the court cases going and all of that stuff. But of course, from their point of view, we're their government and we shouldn't be treating them this way, and so we're the ones that should change. It's a classic example. I mean, it's as bad as the [professional] baseball [players'] strike or anything else. It's just a classic example. One of the things that we have in these negotiations is a facilitator, but not a mediator. And the difference is really significant. A facilitator basically sets the meetings for us and makes things comfortable for us, and makes people understand what's been said, and takes minutes of the meetings and tries to put the meetings in a format where maybe something good can happen, but they don't *make* things happen. We have to do it ourselves. And it's obscure to see at this point how it's going to be successful if someone doesn't almost bang some heads to get people to say, "Alright, what you're saying *isn't* (raps table for emphasis) appropriate, or isn't fair, or *is* asking too much. You've got to move somehow. And I think we ought to do *this*," and then to get that discussion going. And maybe someone will step forward, or maybe the facilitator will take some more of that type of a role. But it's hard to tell at this point what's going to happen.

Seney: When you say that you're comfortable with the position that Interior has, what is that position? What's the government's position here?

Government's Position

Solbos: Well, we have a very clear responsibility relative to Indian trust. We have what we feel is a very clear responsibility to endangered species. We also have a piece of legislation that directs us to do things also. So when you look at, specifically, just flat-out laws like the Endangered Species Act, like 101-618, it *tells* us we have to do 25,000 acres of wetlands, it *tells* us we have to do a recovery plan and restore endangered fish.

- Seney: When you said you felt good about the bench/bottom case, and good about the transfers, that's because it furthers the objectives of 101-618, and furthers the objectives of the Endangered Species Act, to the extent that it frees up water to go in those two directions?
- Solbos: I don't think I said I felt good about those cases—I said we won them.
- Seney: I'm sorry, maybe I misunderstood.
- Solbos: It's tough. The government, because of our needs to fulfill our requirements that I've already talked about, is looking for every legal way to accomplish it. And a lot of these things would be far better off if they could be negotiated, rather than being litigated. It would have been nice if we could have come up with some agreement on bench/bottom, rather than go through the courts for many years on it. This thing with the transfers is a *terrible* thing that's going on. And it hasn't been resolved.
- Seney: Whether or not these [water rights] have been abandoned?
- Solbos: And what's particularly bad about it is, it's just a long period of unknown for people. Right now, like this letter said that I let you just read here, it said that an injunction has not been approved by the courts, and so the Bureau can continue to operate as they're operating, which is to not recognize those invalid rights. But there are court cases that will be addressing this in the future, and eventually they will be taken care of. The trouble is, all the things that we're doing now, until those court cases are resolved; so we've got people that are putting in for temporary transfers and permanent transfers. There are people that are ignoring us. We then have to charge that as a debit against all the other water users. It just generates tremendous amounts of work, tremendous amounts of dislike of the system, and some people have been forced by the government, two or three times over the years, based on new policy—and this is new policy—to spend a lot of their own money to try to satisfy us. And this is another example where if we lose this court case, a lot of people, very well-meaning people, will have put in a lot of money and a lot of time to do something totally wrong. And then they'll have to go back and do it all again. So that's what's unfortunate. You know, we're making what I guess you'd call "progress" from an Interior point of view, to free up water that we legally feel we should, but the process is not good, but it seems to be the only way, I will admit to that. Just like in the case of the Fallon Reservation thing—the powers of persuasion by anyone from the federal side who has participated in these things is not apparently up to the task of coming up with negotiated settlements for all of these things.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 24, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 24, 1994.

Seney: Apropos of what we're talking about here: I know the water users out on the project thought that when the Supreme Court decided that these water rights could not be traded around like bushels of corn, (Solbos: So many bushels of wheat, yes.) that they had really won. And yet here comes the bench/bottom stuff and the abandonment stuff and whatnot. I guess getting to the point of the uncertainty that still goes on out there as a result of these attempts by the Department of Interior to still reallocate water, despite that Supreme Court decision. I mean, I can kind of understand how they feel out there. I'm sure you can too. They thought, "Geez, we won a big victory here finally!" And the victory turns out to be Pyrrhic. I mean, it doesn't mean much after all.

Uncertainty of Water Rights on the Project

Solbos: Yeah, and I guess I'm a little uncomfortable responding to that, because these are such legalistic issues. But you're right, that decision has maybe changed our point of view a little bit on what a water right means, and what our power is relative to those water rights. It hasn't addressed so many other issues. We still have, as the Department of the Interior, the ability to take a very strong role, for instance, on efficiencies, and how that water is used and whether conservation is appropriately taking place, and that sort of thing, to do what we think is necessary to reallocate resources. And we'll continue to do that. We recognize we can't *take* water rights from people and we recognize we've gotta pay for them, but like in the case of the abandonment and forfeiture issue, our perspective is that those rights really don't exist any more. And so the old court case that you mentioned talked about how you handle those rights, but in this case we're saying that they aren't even rights any more.

Seney: The law is pretty clear, if you don't use them [water rights] for five years, they're abandoned. Isn't that right?

Solbos: I would have to say, if I could say anything, to say "law is clear," is not anything that you will ever hear me saying. You could spend half-an-hour as an intelligent person yourself, you could spend a half-an-hour with the lawyers for the district and walk out of there saying, "These guys are a hundred percent right." And then you could spend half-an-hour with the Department of Justice, and you'd walk away saying, "These guys are a hundred percent right." (chuckles) I guess the one thing is that you look at some of these things, and you can't imagine how a judge could ever resolve them. And they *don't* really resolve them. They, just from my perspective,

they look at very technical parts of the presentations, and rule on technical procedures like when was the thing filed, and whether you got your briefs in on time, and all this sort of thing, rather than an actual, "Yeah, this is the *right* thing, and here's the answer." You don't get a lot of answers from the courts. And any answer you would get, there'll just be an appeal, and so you're off and running again. I have just gotten a tremendous appreciation for trying to keep things out of court in this job. But like I said, we're just not doing very well at doing that.

Seney: You said that you didn't think the negotiations are going so well at this point, the Settlement II negotiations. Why don't you talk a little bit about the negotiations and how you see them. I know you've made a presentation at this point. What did that entail? And then tell me how you think the negotiations are going and why.

Settlement II Negotiations

Solbos: Yeah, and to say that the negotiations aren't going well now; (big sigh) I guess I don't consider myself smart enough to say that right now. What I'm saying is that we haven't, in my perception, accomplished much to date. But not being an expert facilitator, the facilitator out there keeps saying that we're doing a wonderful job, and given the differences of opinion that have been inherent for so many years, that we're far better than anyone she's ever seen before. Whether she tells that to everybody she works for, I don't know. It's rather funny, at the end of the meeting she'll say something like that, and then you'll see all these people looking around at each other, saying, "Is she seeing something here that we're not seeing?!" But there's obviously a process that has to be gone through, and there's got to be a level of respect that has to be built up among the participants that probably wasn't there to start, and probably needs to be somehow earned through the process. People have got to recognize the rights of the other parties to say certain things. They've got to recognize where they're coming from, they've got to recognize the long history that has generated that way of thinking.

And they also have to recognize that they're also a captive of that same sort of thinking on their own side. And I don't think we're there yet. You know, the presentation that I gave was just one very small part of what's going on, and it had to do with the M&I supplies for the Fernley-Fallon-Wadsworth area. One of the big things about what would happen if some of the proposals came to pass, and that would mean a lot less agricultural usage out there, and manipulating how the water is used and certain parts of the project that are abandoned, and things like that. It would cause a lot less recharge to the groundwater, which would then have an impact on M&I water supplies in both Fallon and Fernley and Wadsworth. So that is a big peripheral issue to a lot of the proposals, because it's one thing to say, "Well, maybe

we need to retire some ag lands and we'll pay these guys off in some manner for that." But it's another thing to say that 10,000 people are going to lose their water supply, and also an area that is expected to grow tremendously, double in size in fifteen years, something like that, isn't going to have a water supply. So that's a lot tougher. And so it's a very serious problem that everybody has recognized in virtually *all* of the proposals, really, that needs to be addressed.

And so we've got a separate group that this office is facilitating to try to get the right people together to first of all recognize what the baseline condition is, do we have the right studies and things to understand how the ground water works and all that, put together some kind of process to get those studies if we need them, and then to look at alternatives that would then address the problem. And we need to get that information relatively quickly to the negotiators so that if how they're negotiating some particular aspect will be tremendously impacted by that, then they need to recognize that that's a big part of how we were intending to solve the problem. And if they do something that cuts off that avenue as an alternative, then it, of course, hurts us. And so we're just trying to keep feeding, pushing this study as long, as fast, as we possibly can, and then keep feeding the results to the negotiators so that they know what's going on. For example, the use of Lahontan Reservoir for possibly like the water bank concept that's in 101-618 might really be helpful to the city of Fallon to generate a conjunctive use type of arrangement where they take some of their water from the ground and some of the water from surface supplies out of Lahontan. But right now the 101-618 precludes using a water bank in Lahontan unless T-C-I-D negotiates recoupment, and recoupment isn't proceeding very well. And so what people are saying, like the reservation and the city of Fallon and all are saying, "We had nothing to do with recoupment, why are you holding *us* hostage for recoupment when we need this plan to allow us to generate M&I supplies." And so that's the kind of thing we pass on to the negotiators: "Hey, this is what the act said, but if we're going to address a water supply for the Fallon area, it would be nice to have that burden relieved from this process."

Also, the transfer situation with the city of Fernley where they've acquired some water rights. They then want to use those water rights to run through a treatment plant or whatever. Well, we've protested the transfer of those water rights, because some of them we believe have been abandoned and forfeited, and I don't know, what is the consumptive use that should be transferred, and all of those issues. So for us to go ahead and plan to use ag rights purchased by the city for an M&I supply, it's hard to say we can do that if all those things are being protested right now. So to explain that to the negotiators and say, "Hey, it'd be nice if you guys could figure this out, so that you can tell us, 'Well, you can only transfer 2.5 acre feet per acre, or 3 or

whatever," then we could then go ahead and size a system that they need. But now, we don't really know. So that's the kind of example.

Seney: So a lot of interrelated, unanswered questions.

Solbos: Sure. And that's the problem with the whole darned thing. I mean, a big issue for us I've already mentioned is the O&M contract with T-C-I-D, and it's tremendously interrelated with all the other things that are going on. For instance, if a decision was made that we would not contract with T-C-I-D anymore, it would change completely the perspective of how a lot of things would be done. And yet the group can't look at all these things individually. That's another difficulty: There's so many issues that you're trying to look at in a broad kind of perspective, and what people say, "It's not *right* to look at OCAP on it's own, and to look at bench/bottom on it's own and all that. You gotta look at it as a whole group of activities, a whole group of actions," which is true. But when you look at them all, they're so complicated and all that it's just very difficult to be successful when you're doing it, and that is the challenge that is before everybody. But I'd have to say that this office has had the piece-meal concept where what we're going to do is, let's say, look at OCAP and try to improve OCAP or administer it differently or whatever. We haven't tried to put the whole thing together into some big negotiated settlement that will address everything.

Seney: Let me ask you about the recoupment business. Recoupment, of course, is water that the Pyramid Lake Tribe maintains, and the federal government maintains, was taken illegally, 1,058,000 acre feet, somewhere in there, that is owed by T-C-I-D to Pyramid Lake, and that that's the water that needs to flow back into Pyramid Lake. Now, T-C-I-D is adamant, my understanding is, that they don't really owe that and they're going to fight it in every way they can. If the Bureau of Reclamation, if this office took over the project and began to run it, would you then be the entity that would negotiate the recoupment question?

Recoupment

Solbos: Well, one of the things that's important to realize is that even though T-C-I-D operates and maintains the project, they don't own the water rights. They have a small number of water rights that they own themselves, but the vast majority of water rights are owned by individual water users. And so any kind of a negotiation, even if T-C-I-D negotiated recoupment, they would have to go through some kind of a vote, and it would be more than just a vote of the board, it would be a vote of all the water users as to whether or not that was an acceptable thing to do. And even if the majority of the water users voted that yeah, that that was a settlement that they wanted to make, you could probably—and I'm not, again, a lawyer on this—but it

would not surprise me if individual water users could *still* sue as an individual against the federal government, because basically what you're talking about is something that impacts their property. And that's why it's so hard to do this. We would never expect to get *everybody*, one hundred percent of the people, to agree, so I would suspect that any kind of negotiation you're going to get sued on, even if eighty percent of the people agree with it.

And so just the fact that we would, let's say, take over the project, all it would mean is that we would not be going through T-C-I-D to negotiate it. We would still be having to meet with some kind of representative of the irrigators, and maybe you'd have a lot more public kind of a forum, as we tried to explain it to the irrigators, and just do it a whole lot more publicly than it's being done right now with the individuals. But you've got other groups out there, like the Protective Association, for instance, that is the advocate for water rights and things. Maybe they would be the individuals that would be more appropriate to actually be negotiating with. But we could not impose anything. It would still have to be something that would have to get validated in the courts. There was something called "repayment" a while back, where 21,000 acre feet was repaid, and it would be basically that same situation. We negotiated that with T-C-I-D and then it went to the courts for validation and the courts validated it. But even after that, there's been a difference of opinion on how we actually administered what the plan was, and so they're going to be, I understand, taking that to court. So it's a tough, tough process.

Seney: Is this the only Bureau project where the water users own the water rights?

Solbos: Oh, I don't believe so. I'm not really competent to say that, but [I don't think so].

Seney: I know in Central Valley they don't own the water rights.

Solbos: In Central Valley they don't. But there are other projects, I believe, throughout the West, that have similar situations—at least as far as the owning of water rights is concerned. I don't know how well they've done relative to the same kind of issues. We've had certain things that have driven this: endangered species and wetlands have really been drivers on this, and Indian trust issue, We've got everything out here. Some projects maybe can get away with not being under such scrutiny if you don't have those kind of things driving it.

Seney: Let me ask you a little more about the negotiations. There's kind of a tight time frame here. They hope to be finished in January [1995]. Does that seem realistic to you at this point?

Progress is Hard to Come By

Solbos: It's hard to tell. I think that progress is hard to come by. I think if we didn't have a deadline, or maybe it was a year or something, then I would have to say that yeah, we're making progress. But when you say that we're supposed to be wrapped up in two months, then you figure you're going to meet maybe five more times—that's it. So you're going to have all these issues resolved in five more meetings. That's hard to see.

Seney: I understand from some of the other participants that this is turning out to be a lot more work than people thought, that a lot more is having to be done between the negotiating sessions than people thought was the case. Are you finding that's true, from your perspective?

Solbos: Oh sure. Yeah, myself and the staff are almost consumed by this. In fact, where some people are starting to wonder—and this is something that the facilitator is going to have a hard time with—if progress isn't shown in a little while, the next couple of meetings, people will wonder if all the effort is worth it. We've all got lots and lots of priorities, and whether or not we can continue to put this kind of effort into something that may not turn into anything, that's a problem. I guess from the government perspective, though, I think everybody on the Interior team would just love—and I can certainly say that for Betsy Rieke—would just love to see something positive come out of this. Virtually, just like I felt relative to the Fallon Reservation issue. I don't want to do this, and no one within Interior wants to keep these darned court things going on and on forever. We'd love to see something happen, and so we're going to be very much resistant of the giving-up attitude.

So we're really going to try, we're going to keep working, and we're really going to try to do what it takes. But it does take a lot of work, because you can't really start talking nuts and bolts until you're sure that everybody's talking about the same things. A lot of these people are saying, for instance, how much water gets to the wetlands through the drains? You know, it's a critical issue, but you'll hear one say that it maybe gets 10,000 [acre feet]; you'll hear another say it's 30,000; another, 50,000. *Huge* amounts of water being kind of bandied about. We've got to resolve all of that, and that's what's being worked on. We've got to get a matrix where everybody said that, "Yeah, that block of water, we all agree that that's what we're talking about." And if we get to that, then we can go ahead and actually negotiate what's the best way to deliver it or what.

Seney: Whose numbers are going to be used here? Will those be your numbers, do you think?

Solbos: Well everybody's got their numbers. We just have to come to an agreement that the mechanism being used to generate that number is right. Now it may be that you can't come up with an exact number, and that's probably the case in most of these things. Then maybe we'll have a range, and I think we can do a lot better to get the range down to some more realistic numbers, I think in some cases they're not right now. But you might say that this figure is going to range between 10,000 and 15,000 acre feet. And so then that becomes part of the negotiation, and people recognize the softness in that number, and so if the whole thing that you're trying to accomplish is based on that number, then it reduces your confidence level that you can meet your needs even if you got all of that water, let's say. And that means that you've got to maybe negotiate for some other alternative, along with that, to enhance whatever particular resource that you're trying to enhance. And that is very time consuming, and that's what really has taken up so much staff time. And they've got all these subcommittees now: they've got a modeling subcommittee, and a wetlands subcommittee, and an M&I subcommittee, and subcommittees on trying to develop a core agricultural land. So now all these subcommittees will be working and reporting back to the group. So it's a major effort, I'll tell you! A lot of people are involved in it. [It's] something else!

Seney: How do you see the Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance at this point? Does this look like a more sensible entity to be negotiating the interests out there than just T-C-I-D? How does it look to you from your side of the table?

Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance

Solbos: I would certainly say that they're more representative of a broader interest than T-C-I-D could be. I think another thing that's very advantageous is that they don't have the baggage of all these wars that we've been going through with the district. I mean, you get to a point, obviously, where relationships are strained. I think our relationship with T-C-I-D is strained right now. I don't doubt that a bit. I think they'd have to say the same thing. So to have a new player come in that recognizes the problems but doesn't have all that baggage is certainly an advantage. They've got much more users to worry about, and much more people involved than the rest of us do. It's much harder for them to develop a proposal and say, "This is what we want," than it is for the rest of us. We've got three or four agencies to decide over here. Then you've got the Pyramid Lake Tribe—they're just basically trying to solve their problems. You've got the wetlands people that are looking at that from their perspective. On the Alliance you've got a lot of different types of people that all have to come together—and they're doing, I think, a good job at it. It's just a question of whether or not, you know, they're stuck with the same kind of problem—everything

always boils down to negotiating away people's water rights, and they really can't do that either. All they can do is develop a package that they think is reasonable, and then somehow it's got to be brought back to the users to say, "Hey, you guys gonna buy this?" So in theory, you could be developing something out of these negotiations that the rank and file won't like anyway. It's kind of like when you negotiate a big union contract or something. You've got to go back to the members to vote on it. And if *you* think it happens to be a good thing and they don't, then you haven't really accomplished much.

Seney: The problem being here that you really need a hundred percent approval.

Solbos: Well, like I said, I would never expect it, but if you can get a strong majority, then that would help you then on any kind of a court action that would be taken by the other ones, I think. But you know it's hard to tell. I don't think anybody expects that you'll ever get a hundred percent approval on anything.

Seney: You're referring to the letter that you showed me that was sent out by T-C-I-D to these water users on the abandonment issue and somebody has turned it over and typed a very vigorous note, shall we say, directly to you—threatening, insulting, and I don't know how else quite to characterize it.

Solbos: It's a tough one. When you're called a "sleazy liberal bureaucrat," and it said here, "I intend to fight you and the rest of you sleazy liberal bureaucrats and politicians to the bitter end." And so is that person going to buy-into a negotiated settlement? I don't know.

Seney: Well, you know, you have two here, this water rights, this property rights issue is sort of part of a broader movement that's going on in the West, the so-called "Wise Use Movement," where you've got these various conservative—I suppose you could say to some extent, anti-environmentalists individuals who see this as very much a constitutional question.

Wise Use Movement

Solbos: Sure. You could see that, as you've said, in all of the western states. I mean, the public trust doctrine, which is really what is being pushed, is that water is much too valuable to have it owned by individuals. And that it's a resource that needs to be wisely shared and used by all of the public. And so the concept of someone owning it and being able to use it as they see fit, even if it has adverse consequences to the environment and growth and everything else, is a real issue. It's being addressed in certain areas through the courts. I mean, we can see what happened with Mono Lake

where that concept of public trust was very instrumental in changing how something had been done for fifty years. And even with all the political might that a city like L-A [Los Angeles] has, and where obviously there's an awful lot of money associated with the impacts of that water, still the public trust was able to get a better water supply for Mono Lake and for the tributaries that run into Mono Lake. And it was a tremendous victory for the local area, basically what you'd call the "area of origin," against what in the past, you know, you'd never have a chance of winning something like that. And so that's popping up all over the place. One thing that the act [Public Law 101-618] did, was it kind of accelerated past a lot of that stuff, because in theory you could have said that the wetlands were being tremendously degraded, and gone through the court process of public trust to try to address that issue. But instead we had an Act of Congress that allowed the federal government to buy water rights to address the same issue. And so it was a much better solution. The question is now, though, if you've got to buy that many water rights, then what happens to the project? And that's what we're talking about.

Seney: I want to go back and talk about some of the issues that are important in terms of the project. I want you to give me your perspective on OCAP, the origins of the operating criteria and procedures, and the way in which that has evolved, from the perspective of the office here, and yourself as Project Manager.

Perspectives on OCAP

Solbos: Okay, well, OCAP has been around since the late 60s, really, in some form or another. The '73 OCAP is where we started calculating this recoupmant that we've been talking about. And basically the whole concept of OCAP was that prior to an OCAP there was no mechanism, really, where the federal government could meaningfully participate in how water was used on the project. We couldn't set standards relative to efficiencies, or water conservation, or water that was used for things other than agriculture. You know, in those old days, there were a lot of times that water was being diverted from the Truckee River solely for power generation at Lahontan. It was in the wintertime, it would run right through the power plant and run out to the wetlands. It wasn't even used for agriculture. So those things just were not acceptable, from a federal perspective.

Once we had a commitment to try to do something with Pyramid Lake, we had to come up with a process that still allowed us to deliver what people's entitlements were on the project, but didn't exceed that. We just didn't run a bunch of water over here that wasn't needed. And that's what the purpose of OCAP was. It sets efficiency targets and it also, since it's so difficult to get the water *back*—I mean, once

you bring it over here, you can't pump it back—we had to come up with basically enforcement provisions in case the efficiencies weren't met, what you did about it. And also in anticipation of problems, it isn't even a good deal to build up a big debit that has to be paid back, because that's hard to do too. So that's where the targets in OCAP come in from Lahontan storage, so that when the level in Lahontan gets up to a certain level, then you don't make any more diversions from the Truckee River. And that's been very effective from my perspective.

Back when this whole thing started, they were using 400,00-450,000 acre feet on the project. We're talking about 300,000 now. So there's been a virtual 100,000 acre foot savings of water use on the project, without having what I would consider a significant effect on delivering entitlements to individuals. If you look at the environmental impact statement, for instance, it mentioned that you would have over ninety-two years of record, you would have seven years of shortage that was caused by OCAP, so that's not too bad. Unfortunately, what's happened, since we've got into this '88 OCAP, we've been in a drought the whole time, and so people have been tremendously impacted by their water supply. Now whether it's the drought or not, or OCAP, it's sometimes hard to figure out how much it is. But since '88, OCAP has not done a whole lot, but in theory, it would. The problem with OCAP is, it's just a terrible labor-intensive operation to administer. It's also, I guess, you could even use the word "demeaning" to irrigators. I mean, when you've got to fly over people with a plane and take low-level aerial flights three times a year to see what they're doing.

Seney: They very much object to that, I would think.

Solbos: Sure they do. You just hate to hear the noise and look up and know when that guy's taking a picture of your field. It's just a terrible way to do it. I can't think of a better one at the moment, and that's what part of the negotiations is all about, because we are finding that the irrigation of non-water-righted lands does go on, and I'm sure that this close scrutiny makes water use more efficient, and I don't doubt that one bit. Also, the setting of a maximum allowable diversion that we do every year. Back in '93, for instance, we set one at 315,000 acre feet. The district wanted it, I think, at 369,000.

Seney: That's all they can take out of Lahontan?

Solbos: Yeah, it's the total diversion for the project, from Lahontan and also from the canal to the Truckee Division. So you can see those 50,000 acre feet right there that you saved just by setting that diversion limit. So it's a significant, important thing that Interior has to do to control the water use on the project. But if there was another way that you could maybe set those targets or whatever, and get out of the labor-

intensive business of monitoring every darned thing that the farmer does out there, that would really be great. And it would be cheaper! I mean, we're putting a million dollars a year into OCAP. By definition, you're not getting any benefits from it, other than this enforcement kind of thing. You know, I'd rather put a million dollars a year into conservation improvements or something on the project that would generate water, rather than the process that we're going through.

Seney: When it's "labor-intensive" for the Bureau, what do you mean? How does the enforcement work?

OCAP Enforcement Work

Solbos: Okay, well, probably one of the most labor-intensive things that we have to do is, we have to totally understand the amount of water . . .

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 24, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 24, 1994.

Seney: Today is October 24, 1994, my name is Donald Seney, and I'm with Ed Solbos, Jr., the Project Manager for the Lahontan Project Area, in his office in Carson City, Nevada. Ed, we were talking about the OCAP and your having to administer it out there, and you were saying your people really had to have a detailed grasp of how the district worked.

Solbos: Right. What makes OCAP so complicated is that first of all, there's a tremendous amount of just flat-out, baseline data: When you look at the thousands of individual parcels that we're dealing with, we have to have an in-depth knowledge of all of those parcels. And of course they're changing all the time. Things are becoming subdivisions, people are trading off pieces of it, people are getting transfers to move water rights around on the project. So you're never done, it just goes on forever. So what we need to do is, we have to have an understanding of the property boundaries and who owns the various properties. We have to have an understanding of the water rights on those properties, because if you look at a particular property map, you'll just see that these water rights are all over it. I mean, you might have forty acres of property and you might have 27.6 acres of water rights that are in five separate pieces on that property. You then have to—and this is where the low-level aerial flights come in—you then have to match up what they irrigate with those pieces of water-righted land. You then compare them to see if indeed that they did irrigate on the water-righted areas, and then you have to decide whether or not the water that was actually delivered to that headgate exceeds the duty of 3 ½ or 4 ½ acre feet per

acre. So that means every single piece of property you've got to be monitoring constantly.

And like I said, with thousands of these different parcels, it's just a huge undertaking to do that. And you've also got some tremendous logistical problems from the fact that the project is so old, and you've got a water right map that's drawn in a square that you're trying to superimpose over a property that was never surveyed, that is tied to a quad sheet that is assumed to be square when it's actually a trapezoid. So there's a lot of what they call "rubber sheeting" involved, where you overlay all these maps—the property maps, the water right maps, the irrigated land maps—and you put them over each other and they don't ever match up. And so rather than have a bunch of slivers that you're calling non-water-righted land, then you make some judgements in there as to how these things really would overlap. And so those things are then always opened up to differences of opinion.

And when I first came here, they were doing it by satellite, and they would actually take these flights from space, and then we were then trying to get them down to somebody's two-acre piece of land and determine what had been done on that two-acre parcel. It became obvious to us that the accuracy just wasn't there, because we were talking about things that were six feet wide, and trying to determine them from space. Maybe you could do that if you had C-I-A [Central Intelligence Agency]-type technology, but we didn't have the technology, and so then we evolved to the low-level aerial flights where we can get much better resolution on these things. But we have all we can do, given the computers that we have, and the staff that we can muster, even with the cost that we put into it, to be able to do everything in the timeliness that we need. You need to understand that everything that you generate out of a year's worth of irrigation activity has to then be turned around to change the next year's activity. And you'd have to know that as early as when you start having runoff, which is like January or February. So right now the irrigation season, or the *normal* irrigation season if we had a hundred percent year, would go into November. And so you can't even start basically finalizing your data until November, and you've got to have the answer in January. And you're talking about, like I said, for thousands of different parcels. These guys out at the Fallon Office are working ten-and twelve-hour days, six days a week, to knock out that kind of data, because if a debit is created, we then have to adjust up the targets, we've got to adjust up the diversions from the Truckee.

Every month we have to write a letter to the [federal] watermaster saying whether or not water can be diverted or not. And you've always got things that are complicating matters, like the repayment that was approved by the courts. We then had to change repayment. We've always got a *cui-ui* run right in the middle of it,

and so if diversions are reduced, we've got to account for those changes in diversions and pay them back if there's a certain payback that needs to be done, associated with that. When you've got something like bench/bottom that comes down right at the end of the season like this, all of a sudden now they've got to take all those maps that said 4 ½ before or 3 ½, [and] go through all the different parcels, change them, put them into the computer, get them over to T-C-I-D, have them change the things they have to change to make the allocations, and again, you're talking about thousands of them. And a lot of this stuff can be done on the computer, a lot of it has to be done by hand. And there's an awful lot of field checking. And as soon as you make some kind of decision and you send it out to a farmer and say, "Yeah, on your forty-acre parcel 27.6 acres is water-righted land, and you irrigated 2.7 acres of non-water-righted land and you exceeded your duty by .4 acre feet per acre," immediately you're going to get a letter back saying, "I don't believe it." And so then you've got to go through the process, the landowner comes in, he meets with T-C-I-D, then if they can't resolve it he comes to our office and we meet with them. We go out in the field to look at things that maybe we didn't see it right from the plane, maybe we made a mistake. Maybe something that looked green and we thought he was irrigating it, is actually because of some leakage from the canal, and so consequently he wasn't irrigating non-water-righted land. We can't go out and check all of those.

Now one thing that's really good is that we've had a staff that's been out there a little while, and so they know historic problem areas, and they know, for instance, if there's a particularly leaky area in the canal that just manifested itself that particular irrigation season, that they would expect that there might be a ring of green around that somewhere that we don't want it charged toward an illegal irrigation. And you've got people where water is ending up in a person's land, and he is actually growing crops with it, but it isn't even his water, he doesn't even *have* an allocation—it's just that his neighbor upstream has got water running off his land, and so consequently this other person is using it, so he's getting a crop from it. You tell him he's making an illegal irrigation, but he's saying, "I didn't even take an allocation of water," so then you've got to follow the water upstream to see where it's coming from on every darn parcel in the whole project. And that's one of the hardest things too.

Like I said, some decision will come down, like the transfers. The transfers was an incredibly complex issue because it came down in the middle of the year. In July a letter went out saying that a bunch of these water rights were invalid. So consequently, even if someone had *wanted* to do it right, they wouldn't have started until the end of June, and so they might have already had water on these fields already. So then to figure out what should actually have been considered an illegal

irrigation, you had to go back and do an analysis of how much each person put on that individual piece that was then determined to later be invalid, when he did it, and then say it's okay up to June 30, and it's not okay after July 1, and you have to have all that figured out by January!

Seney: In other words, I might have water rights, I think I have water rights, although the Bureau's going to say I've abandoned them, but I transferred them to you, and you irrigate with them. And now the decision comes down that I didn't have those water rights, I couldn't really transfer them to you, but you've already irrigated with some of that water. That's the complexity you're describing here.

Solbos: Sure. Yeah. So what do you do with that situation? And also, that's all tied up into the MAD.

Seney: That's the maximum allowable diversion?

Maximum Allowable Diversion

Solbos: Yeah, because then you've got to calculate. Well, we'll assume that certain amounts of land will be illegally irrigated. You'll assume that certain amounts of it, people will indeed quit irrigating, and so then you generate a number that you say, "Okay, this is as much as we're going to allow you to divert," and of course there's so many assumptions wrapped up in that thing that you can argue them either way. And if we go too low, then they're saying that we're not allowing enough water to be gone through the canal system to provide entitlements. If we put in too much, the Pyramid Lake Tribe and our need to address endangered species, means we shorten those guys that amount of water.

Seney: And they're watching what's going on.

Solbos: Oh absolutely, yeah. And so when you set a MAD, you've got everybody mad at you! It's a great anagram, because the tribe will always say that it's 20,000 too high, and the district will always say it's 30[000] or 40[000] or 50[000] too low. So we just do the best we can. That's pretty much the bottom line.

Seney: Out in the district, they do say that your OCAP office out there ends up kind of micro-managing things, and I guess in a sense they're probably right.

Solbos: Heck yes, it does! The only way that we can understand what's going on is to know virtually everything they do. We've even gone down to as fine as if a farmer always rounds his fields off and doesn't go in the corners with his equipment, we're saying

that that corner of the field did not get water applied to it, and so it doesn't get an allocation. It's really amazing, the detail that we go down to. Now an awful lot of that stuff, when someone sees what we've done, we make changes in that, and maybe the guy then does put his equipment in at the corner of the field or whatever. There's an awful lot of things that after the farmer comes in and talks to us about it, we'll change it, because if he's taking the time to do that, and if it could go either way probably, we try to be as reasonable as we possibly can with them. There's an awful lot of people, though, that don't come in, and so we end up kind of fighting over it. Also, the issue of the fact that you're doing all this stuff with very little actual surveys is really tough. We've been generally extremely accurate, within one percent, all the time, on doing these things with the maps. But if someone comes and says, "How can you say that I've got 2.7 acres that I'm doing wrong with, without having it surveyed?!" We don't have a good comeback for that, other than this is the process and we're generally always within one percent, and if you can prove to us through a survey that we're wrong, we'll change it. But we can't be going out there every year, surveying 65,000 acres of land—can't do it.

Seney: Right. Let me go back to ask you about coming to be Project Manager, and taking over the office. We'll get into some of these other issues too as we talk about this. What was it like to come and take over this office? It was much bigger than the Weaverville operation, I take it. How was it different?

Issues When Taking Over the Project Office

Solbos: Well, I think Weaverville was a much more one-dimensional situation over there. We were trying to restore a fishery on the river and there were a lot of controversies associated with how to do that. But I wasn't so directly tied to the water—in other words, where the water was going, over there, as I was over here. Over there, you were collecting the water in Trinity Lake, you were conveying it through the system over to the Sacramento River, and then water users in the Central Valley were using it, which was 100 miles or more away. So I was never in a confrontation, directly, with water users down there.

Seney: That was somebody else's problem.

Solbos: That was really somebody else's problem, and it was a *problem*, certainly, to the people in Sacramento, for sure, and the people in Redding and Willows and everywhere else in the valley. Over here, though, of course, everybody's here. And the cause and effect of a decision ripples through all of those users immediately. So it's much more difficult to make a decision: things are slower, there's a lot more

controversy on every single issue, but that kind of comes with the territory. It's a tougher job, there's no doubt about that.

Seney: Much tougher, a lot tougher?

Solbos: Yeah, I'd have to say it is.

Seney: Did you think it'd be as tough, by the way? Did you have a sense that this was going to be as hard as it's turned out to be?

Solbos: I don't think so. I don't think anybody (chuckles) could have predicted so much. Like I mentioned earlier, the biggest difference between this and so many other offices is the close involvement by the Interior Office in Washington on it, and the Department of Justice. We don't make significant decisions out here, virtually, without being closely involved with those guys up there. And also, they make decisions—and this is the hardest thing—I really never have been in a situation where I had decisions imposed on me like this job. Some of them I don't necessarily agree with totally. Some of them the processes are really difficult. I understand from the long-term perspective that what comes down from Interior needs to be done. But sometimes the timing of it, and the packaging of it, there's no good way to do it.

Seney: Can you give me some examples of that?

Solbos: Well, I think the transfers has just been a very, very difficult one. Again, I believe that it needs to be addressed. It was an irrigation project, and to have people not use irrigation rights for fifty or sixty or seventy years and then sell them to the highest bidder, let's say—that isn't what Reclamation was about, that's not what we were supposed to be doing this for. So I understand all of that. I wish we could have somehow come up with a way either through the courts or otherwise, to do that differently. This process that we go through of saying [people are] doing things illegally, coming up with a policy decision, then it suddenly makes 215 people illegal, they have to do a bunch of things to become legal again, it costs a lot of money, and then you might have some kind of a court ruling down the road that changes it. I don't know if there's anything that could have been done any differently, but I would have liked to have tried, (chuckles) I guess, to do things differently.

Seney: Do you get the feeling in this kind of an issue on this transfer business that up in Interior they're saying, "Well, we need more water. How in the world can we get more water? Well, if they don't use the water rights, then maybe we can get that. Let's look into that and see if that's an area where we can accumulate some water for

wetlands and endangered species." Do you get the sense that that's the way the thinking goes up there?

Solbos: I don't know, I don't think we're on a "search and destroy" mission for looking for water cheaply because we don't want to pay for it.

Seney: You know there are people who say that.

Water Transfers

Solbos: Sure they do. I think more often than not—and like the case of the transfers—what happens is, is that the Pyramid Lake Tribe inspires it through Bob Pelcyger, their legal representation.²⁸

Seney: A very shrewd fellow, I understand.

Solbos: Oh, he's an excellent lawyer, certainly. And so he recognizes something that's being done, that he feels is not in accordance with either state or federal law, and starts court proceedings to have that addressed in the courts. Then the government has the issue then of whether or not we join them in the suit, or whether we join the irrigators in the suit, or whether we just stay out of it. We don't seem to have an ability to stay out of it. So then it's down to what is our interpretation of the law in this case, and whether or not we think that the case that the tribe has presented is valid. And if it is, then we join them. I think in general, probably, if there is a particular situation, like the transfers, that could tremendously impact our goals [we would take action]. For instance, you've got about 15,000 acres of land that theoretically—and I don't think it probably could—but theoretically you have 15,000 acres of land that could suddenly come into cultivation overnight. And we're having all we can do to maintain endangered species and all this other stuff with what we've got. And so if suddenly the project went up by twenty-five percent, we'd be in large trouble. So to look at something like that, it would be tough to take the viewpoint of, "Yeah, let's support T-C-I-D and say yeah, they have every right to use this water that they never used for fifty or sixty years." So that's usually the process, is that the tribe comes up with it, and then [We have to decide how that impacts things].

28. Mr. Pelcyger participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Robert (Bob) S. Pelcyger, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Professor Donald B. Seney for the Bureau of Reclamation, in 1995 and 2006, in Reno, Nevada, and Boulder, Colorado, 1995 interviews edited by Donald B. Seney and all interviews further edited by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, 2013, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

Seney: That drives these issues.

Solbos: Yeah, and then we have to decide how that impacts all of the other things that we have going on, and is it legally supportable, and what is the best for Interior? And in general, we aren't going to take a position that hurts endangered species in Pyramid Lake. In fact, we legally can't. I mean, we have the responsibility when we do a federal action, to verify that it doesn't impact endangered species. And so to, let's say, side with T-C-I-D on the transfer situation, when it would [be impossible]; if you ran the *cui-ui* model with that, with an extra 15,000 acres of irrigated lands, you'd have shown that the *cui-ui* go extinct. I'm sure you would, so we can't even legally take a position like that. And so that's usually what drives it.

Seney: You talk about dealing more with Interior and Justice in this job than you did in Weaverville—I take it in Weaverville, the phone would ring, it would be Sacramento, the Regional headquarters on the other end. Here, if the phone rings, is it likely to be Sacramento, or is it more like to be D.C.?

Communications with Washington, DC

Solbos: It's much more likely to be D.C. I would say I probably communicate two or three times more often with Washington than I do Sacramento. And I guess I try very much to keep Sacramento involved, and my supervisor used to be at this office, so he's very familiar with the issues. And we talk a few times a month on issues so that I keep him apprised of what's going on.

Seney: But that's kind of what you're doing, you're sort of keeping him apprised of the contacts you're having with Interior and Justice.

Solbos: Sure. And whenever there's a major decision that I have to make, just like in the case of the Fallon Reservation thing and the takeover and all, I knew it would be really controversial, I knew there'd be a lot of bad press, so we talked about it at great length in Sacramento, about the way to do it. In fact, that was one thing that never came out of Washington at all. That was a request made by the tribe to me, personally. I believed that what the tribe was asking was appropriate to do, so I told Washington that that's what I intended to do, and I talked to Sacramento and discussed with them, you know, whether or not they could live with the consequences of what I thought we needed to do, and everybody bought into that that was the right thing to do, and we did it. And that's how that process went. But there are very many issues that pretty much are coming out of Washington.

Seney: But you would know, of course, if this was an issue that had you said to Washington,

"Geez, I don't know what to do here, what should I do?" they would have told you, "Deliver the water," and you know that.

Solbos: Sure, that's just from experience. And I had a number of trips to Washington in the early part of this job where I learned quite succinctly where the attitude was on certain issues. The Commissioner, for sure, has made it clear that I have the authority to make decisions out here. There's no one micro-managing me, and that's really a good feeling. But knowing all the participants in this thing, and after a while you know where the opinions are coming from, and I've got to take all that into account when I make these decisions. It just hurts me to make a decision that just gets reversed in Washington—it just doesn't make any sense.

Seney: Would it be Mr. Bettenberg you'd call? Or would it be Betsy Rieke?

Solbos: Well, it depends on what it is. I communicate with Betsy and Bill and Dan Beard and others in Washington too. But we've got a pretty tight group up there, an amazingly tight group. If I talk to Mr. Bettenberg, for instance, he'll make sure that the other people get involved in it too, so I think it's working quite well in that regard. In fact, it's a closer relationship between the Interior agencies than I've ever been associated with before. Just like these negotiations, to have Betsy Rieke coming out and spending this kind of time as an Assistant Secretary is amazing! It's really amazing.

Seney: What's her background? What did she do before she became Assistant Secretary?

Solbos: I think she was the head of the Water Resources in Arizona. She's had a lot to do with issues on the Colorado River. I believe she's a lawyer, and of course was appointed by [Secretary of Interior Bruce] Babbitt²⁹ to fill that position. She's taken a very personal role in a lot of the things in Reclamation that normally you'd have never had an Assistant Secretary become very involved with before. I know she's tremendously involved with the Bay-Delta issues over in the Regional Office area near Sacramento. And like I said, she's over here three times a month—amazing! She really has a personal interest: I'd say definitely a personal interest in seeing these negotiations succeed. And if they *do* succeed, she will be responsible, in large part, for it, I think.

Seney: Now you've been here three years as Project Manager so that brackets the Bush and Clinton administrations. You were here when the Bush administration was in power,

29. Bruce Babbitt served as Secretary of the Interior under the Clinton administration from 1993 to 2001.

and when the Secretary of Interior, Mr. [Manuel] Lujan³⁰, was in office, and I'm not sure who the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science was at that point.

Solbos: Ah, that would be John Sayer.

Outlooks between Different Administrations

Seney: And then you're obviously here when the administrations change—a Republican, now a Democratic administration. You notice a big shift in outlook between those two administrations?

Solbos: I don't know. (sigh) I wouldn't say so. I mean, that's kind of a funny thing to say, I guess, because those administrations, obviously, were quite different, but our Region has always, I guess, "been on the bandwagon," if that's the right term or whatever, but we have been on this recognition of multiple use of our projects prior to this administration. For instance, while I was over in Weaverville, that was a restoration project, and we were always aggressively negotiating to do environmental enhancement kinds of things with water that was going historically to agriculture. So I can't say personally there was a tremendous change.

Seney: And the Bush administration had that same multiple-use outlook?

Solbos: We did. And I guess they must have too. I guess why I'm being a little vague on this is that I don't feel like I had a close tie to upper-level management in Washington, prior to the administration that we have now. I mean, this situation I have now where I can call Dan Beard on the phone or send him a mail message, or talk directly to Betsy Rieke about a problem that I've got. I didn't have anything like that prior to this situation, and so I could almost say that I didn't even know, to a large degree, what that individual personally believed in. You know, for instance, early on when Beard came on, one of the first things we got into was a fight over the MAD in '93, and the tribe didn't like what I'd said, the district didn't like what I'd said, and I was just hauled up to Washington, just *bang!* to talk about it to the Commissioner, and he spent an hour with me on it. It wasn't, "Just give me a briefing and get out of here." I mean, he wanted to understand the issues, and so we talked about the angles and how it was calculated and what the consequences were and all of that. And so when I walked out of that thing, I had a very, very clear understanding of where he was coming from. And so that's been a tremendous help in understanding what's going on, whereas before I would have to say my feelings about what the administration wanted came from the Regional Director, and prior to Roger, that was Larry

30. Manuel Lujan served as Secretary of the Interior under the administration of President George H. W. Bush from 1989 to 1993.

Hancock. So that's where I got it from. Now, as Area Managers, we're supposed to implement what the administration feels is appropriate, not necessarily even what the Regional Office is trying to do. But in reality, we're talking so closely together that that's not an issue.

Seney: Sure. How long has the Area Manager concept been in place?

Area Manager Concept

Solbos: It's been about a year.

Seney: So this comes in with Mr. Beard and the new administration, (Solbos: Yes.) that he's more likely to deal directly with *you* than he is to deal with Roger Patterson and Mr. Dimick and have *them* deal with you.

Solbos: Certainly, yeah. One thing, though, is that if you were talking to an Area Manager over in C-V-P [Central Valley Project], they would give you maybe a little different flavor, because all of those offices are so related by the Central Valley Project, and because the Regional Office is so involved in the Central Valley Project, I don't think they have the same kind of relationship over there that I do over here. Here, we're pretty much the only office that addresses these issues, and so it's much more of a briefing situation for Sacramento, and a direct dealing with Washington over here.

Seney: So in that regard, you're more autonomous than the other area managers throughout the Central Valley Project.

Solbos: Yeah, I'd say I am, just strictly from the point of view that with the issues that they have over there, and the complexity that they have over there, they need to put their resources in C-V-P, and as long as things are proceeding over here, to where they don't have to become involved in it, that's an advantage to them, and I think they appreciate that. I'm delighted to have Betsy out here helping us, but it also is sad that she has to be spending that kind of time over here. In reality, I wish I could be the one that was solving all these problems, but that's not happening.

Seney: Well, I expect part of her interest is driven by the fact that she's also, I take it, probably over the Bureau of Indian Affairs? (Solbos: Sure.) And the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Reclamation, (Solbos: Fish and Wildlife Service.) Fish and Wildlife. And there are quarrels between these entities, and as "the boss," I guess she can referee those quarrels to some extent.

Solbos: Sure. To get us all working together is hard to do. For instance, they've opened up a coordination office here in town that has been staffed by some people out of Interior, and just to help that coordination, and also to put them on certain assignments that we just don't have the time to do. It's kind of funny, we talk about—and I think if you read these tapes, everything is Newlands Project and all of that, but we have other projects; [for example], the Humboldt Project. In fact, when we had a lunch with Betsy here at the last negotiation session, and the concern for how much time things were taking was all of our concern, and how much work we were doing on this, and that we had other work to do. And so she wanted us to accelerate some of the things that we were working on. And she asked me what my two priority items were, and I told her the Humboldt Project; we have to do a repayment contract with Pershing County Water Conservation District for our big Safety of Dams repair over there on Rye Patch, and it's very controversial. And my biggest liability really is there right now. The next one is that I've heard from Washington that we are going to very, very shortly, in the next month or so, get directions about having to do some major work for Walker Lake. And if that comes down, that'll have to be done, you'll have to build pumping plants and change allocations of water and do all kinds of things in time for the irrigation season in '95. And so that'll become top priority that we'll just suck people off of.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 24, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 24, 1994.

Seney: So the Newlands Project isn't the only thing you're worried about. (chuckles)

Solbos: Yeah, that's it. Of course, that's my perspective of what top priority is, and it's just a matter of someone from up there calling me and changing my priorities—it can happen. But as an example, we're doing a lot of things out of here: We've got the TROA [Truckee River Operating Agreement] that we've got to spend an awful lot of time on. We're negotiating contracts, just like the one we just did with Sierra Pacific for the 5,000 acre feet of water in Stampede [Reservoir]. We're doing a lot of other things that are very, very important to this area.

Seney: I want to ask you just a little bit more about what goes on with Interior. I expect that Secretary Rieke wouldn't be out so often, if, obviously, these negotiations weren't going on. I mean, the situation here is in flux, and once this settles down, and let's say that everybody's dream comes true and a settlement is negotiated in January and everyone's happy with it—at that point I expect that the Assistant Secretary and Mr. Bettenberg will not be so important, and you will go back to being more of sort of an autonomous agent here. Do you suppose; just checking [in] from time-to-time?

Department of Interior's Involvement in Project Issues

Solbos: That would really be a worthy goal to shoot for, yeah!

Seney: You're smiling!

Solbos: Yeah, that would be marvelous, that would be marvelous, from a lot of personal perspectives, but also there are a lot of significant problems that Interior and Reclamation have to address throughout the West, and you can only spend so much time on any one particular problem. I almost think that what you're saying would happen relative to Betsy, regardless of how the negotiations turn out. In other words, this is her shot. She's going to put the time in to see if something positive can happen. If it can't, then I suspect that she's going to phase herself out and let things play out, because she just doesn't have the time to spend forever on this darned thing.

Seney: Well, I'm told that there are certain aspects of these negotiations and the problems involved here in this project area, that apply to other project areas, and so maybe she's trying to work this out as a model for some of these others that may come up, do you think?

Solbos: I think that's true, sure.

Seney: Let's talk a little bit about the TROA. As you know, I've attended one of the TROA meetings, and it was one of the longest, I think, six or seven hours of my life. (chuckles) It's *very* complicated stuff. How is it going so far, from the Bureau's perspective and your perspective here?

Complexities of the TROA

Solbos: Well, I think for the complexity, as you noticed, and just the sheer *work* involved in taking a whole river system and writing in minute detail how every drop of water is going to be addressed, it's going quite well! We have a draft that's done. What they're working on now are the appendices, which are pretty involved—it's not a trivial exercise to do the appendices.

Seney: I hear maybe five more years of negotiations on this.

Solbos: Oh, I would *hope* not! You must have talked to someone that was in a depression stage, I guess. I'm not in a depression stage on that. I think that there are enough advantages to all the parties to come up with something, that it'll happen.

Seney: And it *has* to happen, doesn't it?

Solbos: Well, I don't know if it *has* to happen.

Seney: Could the old TROA stay in effect?

Solbos: Well, by definition, you could never have an agreement, and what you would have then is what we had before. There's a lot of things in 101-618 that have to have a TROA, so that's certainly an incentive to do stuff. But we're all working along now like it's going fine; our E-I-S is on track.

Seney: Now, one of the problems here is, you have to do these sort of simultaneously, you have to do the TROA and the environmental impact statement simultaneously.

Solbos: Yeah, and that makes us have to anticipate how certain things will be resolved, or talk about it in a general fashion so that any number of ways of doing it will work. What that does is just make more work for us; rather than say, "This is what's going to happen," we have to develop matrices that show the various possibilities, but we're doing that and proceeding on it. There are something like twenty-three different issues that have yet to be resolved within the TROA.

Seney: Can you give me an overview of the agreement—because I know it's a *terribly* complicated agreement—but can you give me a kind of overview of it, or discuss some of the more important parts to give us a flavor of what this is all about?

Solbos: Well, really, the concept is simple. What you're talking about is a way of sharing the resource so that it's really more of a demand kind of arrangement, rather than the existing arrangement now. What you've got now is, you've got the various decrees, like the Orr Ditch Decree³¹, the Truckee River Agreement, which have set up what's called Floriston rates. You've probably heard that term. Floriston rates just provides a certain amount of water at a certain time of year. You can thumb through it, and it'll say, "On September you've got to provide 500 c-f-s in the river at certain points,"

31. The Orr Ditch decree was entered by the U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada in 1944 in *United States v. Orr Water Ditch Co., et al.* The decree was the result of a legal action brought by the United States in 1913 to fully specify who owned water rights on the Truckee River and had rights to storage in Lake Tahoe. The Orr Ditch decree adjudicated water rights of the Truckee River in Nevada and established amounts, places, types of use, and priorities of the various rights, including the United States' right to store water in Lake Tahoe for the Newlands Project. The decree also incorporated the 1935 Truckee River Agreement among Sierra Pacific Power Company (now Truckee Meadows Water Authority), TCID, Washoe County Water Conservation District, Department of the Interior, and certain other Truckee River water users. See Truckee Carson Irrigation District, "What is the Orr Ditch Decree and why is it important?" <http://www.tcid.org/support/faq-detail-view/what-is-the-orr-ditch-decree-and-why-is-it-important> (Accessed 5/2016)

and then in November it drops down. In the wintertime it's 300, and then it goes back up at a certain time. So that means that depending on whether anybody is using the water or not, or *how* the water is being used, or if there are other opportunities for use, the water is going to get released, and it's going to go down. And what would happen then is that it'll either end up in the Truckee Canal, going over to the project, or it will end up going down into Pyramid Lake. But it's been recognized that there are much more efficient ways to use that water, where it might be able to be used conjunctively or whatever, if it wasn't so rigidly just thrown in the river at certain times.

Seney: Let me stop just to say, what do you mean when you say "it could be used conjunctively"?

Solbos: Okay, for instance, water that ends up in Pyramid Lake, just because it isn't used by anybody, isn't the best way to use the water, and this is basically what has happened during the recent negotiations for the 5,000 acre feet in Stampede. The concept there is that Pyramid Lake is much better off if the water is timed so that it can be released during *cui-ui* runs. And the users upstream are much better off. The Truckee Meadows users are much better off if they can store that water to use it when drought conditions exist in the Truckee Meadows. And so what has been allowed then by some kind of re-thinking of how to use the water is that you store the water in federal reservoirs for use by the cities during certain carefully-defined drought conditions. And the cities put their own water rights in there. This is rights that aren't Pyramid Lake's or the federal government's. If the cities don't enter those drought conditions, then they release the water for the fish, and they release it during times when we need it the most. If you do enter those drought situations, then the water is released for the cities.

Seney: And the fish won't get it?

Solbos: And the fish won't get it. So what we're doing is, we're basically helping both sides. It's a win-win situation. You're getting water for the *cui-ui* that they would not have probably got as much of, and also they would have got at the wrong time, and you're also providing storage for the cities that they would have to pay a tremendous amount of money to build for themselves, even if they ever could do it, given the endangered species laws and all the other stuff that's going on.

There's also an ability, if you reduce Floriston rates when demands aren't there, [to] then store that water also. And so what the Truckee River Operating Agreement is going to do is going to allow the changing of Floriston rates to a more demand

type of release. And then that will allow whoever could have used the water but is not now using the water, to then store it. And of course we have some of the storage available in those federal reservoirs, which we could then sell.

Seney: You sell the storage rights?

Solbos: Storage rights. And so we'll get water in some conditions, or we'll get money. And the money helps us also, because it goes to what's called the Lahontan Valley and Pyramid Lake Fish and Wildlife Fund, and that goes right into a fund that allows the federal government to use it to enhance fish and wildlife in those two areas. They're either buying water rights, or enhancing the river system in some way or whatever else we need to do. So it reduces the overall federal investment at the same time.

Seney: How do you charge for storing water? What's the charge?

Solbos: Basically, during the negotiations we just had with Sierra, we agreed to almost what you call a "replacement cost" type of analysis whereby we look at what it would have cost them to build a facility elsewhere. That's where you start. And of course you can argue about how difficult that would be, whether you could even ever do it, what kind of mitigation would be required if you did it, and all that, but you'd come to some agreement eventually, on just how much it would have taken to do that, and then you look at the advantages. Of course if they had their own place that they built someplace, then they wouldn't be tied to all these restrictions that we're putting on it. And so you got to discount that number, based on the fact that it isn't a perfect relationship for them, and then you come to some agreement like that. We arrived at \$50 an acre foot, through that process, which compared to \$16 an acre foot, that we had done in the past, which was basically based on what it cost for us to build the facility. For instance, Boca Reservoir: you look at what it cost to build Boca Reservoir, you index it up to today, you look at what the little incremental part of the reservoir they're actually getting—let's say they're using 5,000 acre feet out of a 200,000 acre foot reservoir, so you take some small percentage then of that, and it generates a number. That generally generates a smaller number than actually looking at what it would cost them to build their own facilities now, because things are quantumly more complicated to do, and all of that. So that's how you do it.

Seney: Do you want to say anything more about the Truckee River Operating Agreement?

Solbos: No, I think that's fine. Our office, in reality, we're involved in that relative to modeling, mostly. We sit in on some of the creation of the appendices.

Seney: The appendices are actually where all the details are.

Solbos: Yeah, for instance, maybe the operating agreement says, "These individuals at certain points in the river will be able to take certain amounts of water out." The appendices describe how you calculate that: where the monitoring is done, how you determine what the return flows are, the forecasting that goes into it—all of that.

If you're tracking something, for instance, like snow-making, you've got water that's taken out of the Truckee River way upstream, you make snow out of it, you spread it on the mountains for skiing, and then it all melts, a certain part of it goes into the groundwater, a certain part of it ends up in the stream. How much of that water then gets back in the river to be credited back to those people? In other words, you're not charging them for the *whole* amount that they take out of the river, you're charging them for the consumptive use portion that doesn't get back to the river. Well, how you calculate all of that, there are some people that'll say, "none of it gets back," the other side will say, "all of it gets back." I mean (laughter) it's tough! They really are! That's a good example, because how it comes out depends on what the weather is like. I mean, you could have a long slow melt where a lot of it sublimates, where you don't get a lot of it into the river, or a lot of it ends up in the ground. You might have a real quick runoff, where you get warm rain on snow, and it's just going to come ripping off and end up in the river. So that's one of the cases where you don't have a right answer. You know how you could calculate it, and then you just argue over how we're going to put it in the appendices. And so then that's tied to how well you did on other parts of the negotiations that you're involved with. So like everything, it's all interconnected.

Seney: Yeah. Do you get involved directly in these negotiations?

TROA Negotiations Primarily Handled by Departments of Interior and Justice

Solbos: I have not played a major role in that.

Seney: I know you weren't at the TROA meeting. Dave Overvold was representing the Bureau there.

Solbos: Yeah, our main involvement is in the E-I-S, and in trying to keep up with how decisions are being made that affect our E-I-S. Whenever one of the particular items has to do with something that we're very involved with, like the Newlands Project or deliveries to the operation of Marble Bluff, let's say, or something down there on the Truckee—then we'll get very involved in that particular item. But I would have to say

Mr. Bettenberg, Fred Disheroon³², Lynn Collins³³, it's mostly being handled through Interior and Department of Justice.

Seney: I'm not exactly sure what Mr. Disheroon's title is, but he's a pretty important individual.

Solbos: He's a solicitor with the Department of Justice.

Seney: Right. And Mr. Bettenberg is what?

Solbos: He was a Special Assistant to the Secretary.

Seney: And Mr. Collins is the Regional Solicitor for the Department of Interior [in Salt Lake City]. Right. So these are pretty important people, it seems to me, to have involved in the TROA negotiations.

Solbos: Absolutely. And they've been involved in them for a long time, most of them. I think Lynn has probably got less time in than Fred and Bill, but I mean between Fred and Bill, you've got twenty-five years of time in these issues, so they've been around a long time, and they're very knowledgeable, certainly, about all the ins-and-outs of what's going on.

Seney: Well, one of the things that struck me at the meeting was how well these individuals know each other, and how long they've worked together. Mr. Pelcyger was there, the hydrologist who works with Mr. Pelcyger for the tribe was there. (Solbos: Ali Shahroody³⁴, you're talking about?) Yes. Of course, the people from Sierra Pacific Power were there, and Reno and Sparks—all the players were there, and it was kind of interesting for an outsider to see them. Although I didn't understand much, as I've said to you several times before. It was obvious that these people have worked together on these things for a *long* time. (Solbos: Sure.) And while they all had

32. Mr. Disheroon participated in Reclamation's Newlands Project oral history series. See Fred Disheroon, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Donald B. Seney, edited by Donald B. Seney and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, 2010, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

33. Mr. Collins participated in Reclamation's Newlands Project oral history series. Lynn Collins, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney, edited by Donald B. Seney and desktop published by Andrew H. Gahan, historian, Bureau of Reclamation, 2013, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

34. Mr. Shahroody participated in Reclamation's Newlands Project oral history series. See Ali Shahroody, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney, edited by Donald B. Seney and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, 2013, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

different points of view and were actively and vigorously putting those across, they clearly understood each other. It was interesting to watch it.

Solbos: Yeah, and equally so, you can see where someone who has not been involved with it, or who would be considered maybe an outsider in the negotiations, how difficult it is for them to get into it, and to actually be able to meaningfully negotiate for whatever group that they're dealing with. I think, for instance, a good example of that is the Upper Truckee folks around the town of Truckee and up there. They've started to develop some real clear interests in what should go on, and so they've always had a question: "How do we get into this? How do we break into this circle of people who've been involved in this thing for years and years and years? How could we ever convince them of anything, or even be smart enough to figure the ins-and-outs of these things?" So it's hard, hard to do it.

Seney: Tell me a little bit about the negotiations you've alluded to with Sierra Pacific Power over storing the 5,000 acre feet, in Stampede or Prosser, one or the other.

Negotiations with Sierra Pacific

Solbos: I thought we might have talked about that in other tapes, but maybe we haven't. The 101-618 talks about what they call an interim contract with Sierra Pacific to allow the storage of no more than 5,000 acre feet on September 1 of any year, of water owned by Sierra in our federal reservoirs. And the reason that was put in there was that it was recognized that the need for the cities was becoming acute for storage. It was not known how quickly the negotiations would be able to go on for the TROA, and so that was just something that I imagine Sierra Pacific negotiated in the legislation, so that we could do something in the interim. And so that's what we did. It was a fairly difficult contract to negotiate. You know, all our negotiations are in a public forum, and so we had a lot of participants at various times. It went on for so long that people petered out after a while, and so we got down to a pretty small group at the end. But in general, Sierra Pacific was trying to get the storage for the amount of money that they were willing to spend, under the conditions that they wanted to. Our goal was to make sure that it didn't hurt situations with the endangered fish, and actually enhanced the situation, and also that we could get as much money as we could get into the Fish and Wildlife Fund. And so, in a nutshell, that's what happened. It took about four months of meeting two or three times a week.

Seney: Did you handle these negotiations?

- Solbos: Yeah, myself and a few key members of my staff were in there for all the negotiations.
- Seney: Why did you get involved?
- Solbos: Well, it was . . .
- Seney: I ask only because you're not involved in the TROA negotiations. Why would you be involved in these?
- Solbos: The difference is, is that the TROA has got good experienced people who've been involved in these things, like we've already talked about, for so long, that it's hard for me to see, in the TROA, where I'm needed to be a day-to-day participant in those operations. They know where I am. If there's a Reclamation issue they can get a hold of me. I know exactly what's going on with the agendas, and I can attend what I need to attend.

The case of this thing, it was a Reclamation facility, it was a Reclamation contract, there was no one else to do the thing. And it was a very precedent-setting kind of contract that was going to really set the stage; see, ultimately when we do a TROA, we're going to have to go back and re-do any kind of agreements that we have. In fact, this agreement is for twenty-five years or until a TROA is signed. And then we do new contracts, because we anticipate that the TROA will bring in new issues that we haven't figured out yet, that we will then have to address in this contract. So it was a tricky contract for Sierra. [They] needed to be able to take this storage in the form of additional water for them, basically, because they were able to put their rights into it, and go to the Public Service Commission and say, "This is a virtual permanent water supply, so that we can issue 'will serve' letters on it an all of that." My initial philosophy was that we'll just do a contract that's over with when the TROA comes in, or that it's a five-year contract. That's what we wanted at first. And then it wasn't such a precedent-setting contract, it'd be over with. But that wasn't any good to them, because the Public Service Commission wouldn't say that that was considered a water supply. So they needed a longer-term contract. And so that was part of the deal too. But also, we had real incentive to get something out of it, because, again, like I say, we needed the money for buying water rights or whatever for the wetlands or the *cui-ui*. And also, we just saw a real opportunity there that we could acquire water that we wouldn't have otherwise been able to acquire, so that we could have enhanced our own position also. So it was a good contract to negotiate, because, like I said, there seemed to be reasons why both sides really wanted it to happen. And a couple of times we broke down during negotiations when we just weren't able to come to an agreement on some issue. But

we were always very quickly wanting to get back together again, because the overall goal was just too positive for both sides to let it fail.

Seney: What would happen when the negotiations would break down? Can you give me a specific?

Solbos: Well, there were times, certainly, when we were talking about costs and charges; charges, the length of term of the contract, and water conservation required by Sierra were probably the three big issues. And especially Washington has had a real philosophy within their contracting, that they want short-term contracts, because we can't predict twenty years down the line. Heck, we have a hard time with five anymore! So to lock up large quantities of water, or whatever you're locking up for twenty-five, fifty years, it just really reduces our flexibility to address other problems. So we're very down at the moment on long-term contracts, and it's bothering people all over the place, that their supplies aren't as assured as they used to be. And so Washington really had to be convinced, in this case, that a five-year contract was not what we needed to do. And if we couldn't have got a "good deal" in other things, then it wouldn't have happened.

The issue of water conservation, there's a lot of things relative to the operating agreement that will generate, through the P-S-A, some real advantages relative to water conservation. And when Washington looked at that, and myself also, we really want to accelerate those things. For instance, putting water meters in the city of Reno. That seems to be a good idea for the West and the area in general. So we wanted to accelerate that. We're on a process now, through the TROA and all, where heck, it's not going to happen in ten, twelve, fifteen years. So we wanted to start the process immediately. That was a real problem to Sierra for monetary reasons. For instance, if you imagine a big subdivision with 100 houses, it'd be great to go in there and just change them all. It's cheap to do it that way. To go in and change *ten* of them is very, very expensive. Also, there's state law that requires that you can't, unless you have a certain amount of people who've agreed to do that voluntarily, then you can't jam it down their throats. So there were a lot of reasons why they couldn't do that, and there were, of course, reasons why we wanted them to accelerate. So that was a tough one to get over.

Seney: Sure. Now, when you say, "Aw, I don't know, we're not going to be able to come to an agreement," and things would break down, how would you get back together? How would that work?

Solbos: Okay, we wouldn't say, "we're not going to come to an agreement." What we'd say

is, you know, they'd give their position, we'd give our position, we'd work for a little while to try to come to some common agreement or something, and we just couldn't think of anything. You know, just like the term of the contract thing, they'd just say, "We just cannot live with a five-year contract. It's a deal-killer." And we all had certain deal-killers. And one thing that was nice about that, is that relatively quickly, we were able to convince ourselves that what the other side considered a deal-killer truly was one. I mean, you could *say* that as part of your negotiation, but I believe [it]. In fact, they even had the Public Service Commission come here and talk to me, and the state engineer came and talked to me, and I convinced myself that a contract for five years wasn't going to give them what they needed. And so I was willing then to say, "Okay, we'll craft this so that you can get twenty-five years out of this thing, but then because of what we have done, then our deal has got to be better so that we feel better about locking-in for that amount of time."

Seney: Are they pretty good to deal with, to negotiate with? Are they pretty capable on their side?

Solbos: Oh, extremely capable. They were more capable than we were, I'm sure. They had a lawyer there who had two two layers representing them, a hydrologist, a modeler—I mean, they had a lot of firepower there. Here we had a contract administrator, another person who was very knowledgeable about how the dam actually operated, and myself. I'd almost consider myself a facilitator as much as anything in that, although I had certain goals that I certainly was trying to accomplish. So anyway, when we would break down then, it was just the fact that we could not figure out how to address people's deal-killers. And so we would then take a few days, you know, we'd say, "Even though this meeting is set to go to five, and here it is three o'clock, I don't know what to say for two hours. The next scheduled meeting is next Tuesday, and we just need to think of what to do by next Tuesday." And between now and next Tuesday, then, things would come to your mind, and you'd call them on the phone and say, "You know, what do you think about this? Is this a possibility?" And they would think about it and they'd call you back the next day. We had a lot of calls at home on the weekends, calls on the cellular phone in the car, where things would just pop into your head and you'd throw them out. And they really tried, I think, to listen to what you said.

Also—and maybe I was naive in this thing—but it was a very complicated issue as far as where the water would have gone, if this contract hadn't been done, which is an important thing for the environmental documents that you've got to do to support the contract. And also, it was hard to figure out just how much water they were getting out of it. It's always this discussion of yield. You can say, "Yeah, you can put 5,000 acre feet in by September 1," but under the normal hydrologic scenario,

how much water is that actually buying you? Actually, this allows them to put 14,000 in there, but it's all got to be gone except for five. How often does the water go to them? How often does the water go to us? If you only get use of the water ten percent of the time, then to charge full price for it is pretty bad. So all of that stuff.

And they had an advantage over us on that, because their modeler was basically in there. But I just got the feeling that he was treating us honestly. There were a lot of times when I would say something like, "Well, it seems to me that you get all the advantage from that, don't you?" And after a couple of minutes of talking, they'd say, "Yeah, we do." They wouldn't just fight it. And so it was a good negotiation. There was a couple of times when I got probably a little short with people because, you know, you meet three times a week for two, three, four months, you want the thing to be over with, you just were given another assignment that you had to get to, and you weren't making any progress, so you get a little upset about something. But nobody got mad for more than a day, and we kept focused on it, and eventually came up with a contract. And then, of course, the contract was between us, this office, and them. They had to get it approved by their management—in other words, the president of the corporation—and I had to get it approved by mine, which was the Sacramento Office and Washington—Washington Reclamation and Washington Interior. And so we did some very, very creative things in that contract. People were surprised when they saw it. But all the people recognized how much time we'd put into it. There were some changes made by Sacramento that I thought were positive changes, but they were small issues. They didn't impact money or any of the major issues. And Sierra was able to buy-into those mostly wording changes in legal paragraphs. And so we were able to negotiate a contract which allows them to immediately do some storage of water for them, and in the midst of a drought here, it's a great thing.

Seney: You feel pretty good about it?

A Good Contract

Solbos: I do. Yeah, it was a very good process. I feel like we got as good a deal as was fair for the government to get. We got, for instance \$200,000 going into this fund here, starting in January, where we wouldn't have gotten anything before without this contract. Even if they don't put any water in there, we get the \$200,000. But they also have the confidence that that storage is there for them. So both sides, I think, came out with what they wanted to. It worked out pretty good.

Seney: So based on this, you feel like you have a good working relationship with Sierra

Pacific Power?

Solbos: Yes, I do.

Seney: And they're an important player here.

Solbos: Oh, in most everything we do, sure. I mean, we have a definite desire to strongly participate with what happens in the Truckee Meadows. I mean, how things go over there directly impacts how much water ends up down the river for our other needs—both the Newlands Project and endangered fish. And also the agricultural lands on the Pyramid Lake Reservation. They all need water. So it's really important to us. Just like the issue, people would say, "What does the Bureau of Reclamation care about water being used in Reno for?" But it is important to us. We think it's something that we need to be involved in, and it's a winner, I think, for everybody, but it's just logistically hard to do, and of course it's expensive and everything else.

Seney: Right. Well, listen, the tape's about to run out, so let me thank you again, and to warn you that I'm going to be back to talk to you again. I hope you'll talk to me again after the negotiations are over.

Solbos: Alright.

Seney: Thanks, Ed.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 24, 1994.
BEGIN SIDE 1 TAPE 1. OCTOBER 25, 1995

Seney: My name is Donald Seney. I'm with Ed Solbos of the Bureau of Reclamation in his office in Sacramento, California. Today is October 25, 1995. This, Ed, is our fourth session, and our first tape.

We've had a lot of discussions—fruitful ones—already. And you know, it's been almost a year to the day since we talked last, and in that time, the Settlement Two negotiations have ended, without an agreement. I know you've participated in those up until the last meeting. I want to go back and ask you to first give me a kind of overview of what you thought about the negotiating process and so forth, as it went along.

The Settlement Two Negotiation Process

-
- Solbos: Well, I guess when I think back of when we had our last session, I probably didn't sound very optimistic about what was going to result from those sessions.
- Seney: No, you didn't, as a matter of fact.
- Solbos: I think that that has pretty much borne to be true, and that's exactly what has resulted. It was such a difficult effort, and there were so many different issues and so many behind-the-scenes things going on at the same time, that it would have been a truly remarkable achievement, to be able to come to some kind of agreement. There were a lot of different goals. With some people, the goals could almost only be surmised at, and a lot of people had ideas on what other people's goals were, whether they were right or wrong.
- For instance, a lot of people went into negotiations, and I think the [Department of] Interior's goal was trying to avoid long, complex litigation that would preclude us from being able to implement a lot of the things that the act [PL 101-618] really had laid out for us to do. It just doesn't do you any good to start a process, to, let's say, acquire water for wetlands or increase flows to Pyramid Lake, when you just get started and you have an injunction imposed upon you that then requires you to shut down, and you're back in the same old thing that's been going on for ninety years. So it was always a good strategy to, one more time, try to get together and work those things out, if you could possibly do it. Now, there are a lot of people within Interior that didn't feel they would be productive. Politically, like I said, it's important to try.
- Seney: Who was that? Who didn't think they'd be productive?
- Solbos: Well, I think the people that are less likely to think that these things are going to be successful are people that have a long history of working with this particular project.
- Seney: Would that be Bill Bettenberg?
- Solbos: Well, you've got Bill Bettenberg, you've got Fred Disheroon. Maybe Fred was the most vociferous at not believing the thing would work. Fred didn't really have a very active role in the negotiations but, of course, he had a lot to do with things that happened behind the scenes.
- Seney: What do you mean by that?
- Solbos: Well, by not having an active role, he didn't give presentations at the sessions, he
-

didn't directly address issues that came up at the sessions, but after those sessions, and in thinking about how to react to things that had come up, he would be at all the internal meetings that we would have. His general response to most every issue that is brought up was that this is just another stall technique.

Seney: On the part of the—

Solbos: On the part of the agricultural community, T-C-I-D [Truckee-Carson Irrigation District], the agricultural water users, and that over a long history that he did have on the project, he had seen numerous examples of things being started and promises being made, and he was really of the mind that these issues were so complex, that the court process was the way to resolve them, and that there was no person smart enough, I guess, or group that was willing to compromise enough to ever get at the root issues, the philosophical issues that had to do with what was going on in that project.

Seney: What do you see as the root issues or the philosophical issues?

Philosophical Issues

Solbos: Well, I think one of the biggest is, is that does the government have a legal and moral responsibility to maintain an agricultural community out there in Fallon. Were those people given a perpetual right to enjoy the benefits of that Reclamation project or not? And that's really, I guess, what we're always arguing about.

I mean, in reality, what [Public Law] 101-618 does, is it provides people a chance of getting out of that situation. I mean, obviously, it's a recognition that we didn't consider a whole lot of things when that project was built, and it has caused a lot of environmental problems, and that we would like to initiate a change out there that reduces those environmental impacts and causes some improvements, both in wetlands and in the situation at Pyramid Lake. That can only occur, in all likelihood, with some kind of reduced agricultural activity out there, and a reducing of the reliance on the Truckee [River] for the agricultural lands, and maybe some kind of better sharing of the water from the Carson [River] for the wetlands.

Seney: Do you think that the Department of the Interior has come to the conclusion that's what needs to be done?

Solbos: Well, certainly the legislation implies that. I mean, it provides water for both wetlands and Pyramid Lake, and I don't think there's—from a point of view of the abilities that Interior has, in other words, the authority that they have to do things,

certainly the authority is with projects that we have some control over. You can go into areas as far as trying to come up with other water supplies, like going into the upper Carson, for instance, but those are very, very difficult, and all you could ever do there is try to purchase rights, based on a willing seller situation. The first thing that you would do before you would do something like that is ~~have that~~ [to improve the] situation relative to the projects that you do have control over.

So that's what the act does. It allows us to buy water rights from willing sellers. The problem is, is that you've got to go through an appraised value process to do that, and the value that we're assigning to that water, in accordance with the appraisers and the land, is not what the people out there feel is appropriate. Or maybe put another way, it's not what feel they would need to go to Idaho or Oregon or some other place and get comparable farming land and start up an operation up there. I mean, there are so many subsidies and all that were built into bringing agriculture to the Newlands Project, anyway, that to start over somewhere else with that amount of money is probably not a very realistic thing to do.

So it fits in for some people. It might fit in with people that the land has been passed down from generation to generation and so they don't have a lot of capital of their own invested into it, and that sort of thing, but for someone that just bought a spread in the last ten years and has got big mortgage payments to pay and that sort of thing, that probably isn't going to be enough for them to go on and start a new life someplace else. So the willing-seller concept is not working all that well, and we don't know what to do about it.

Repercussions from PL 101-618

Seney: The comment's been made to me that [Public Law] 101-618 is really sort of the Newlands Project Destruction Act. Maybe I'm putting that too strongly, but if you take the 100,000 acre feet of water that is destined for *cui-ui* recovery under the new plan that has just been put together, required by that legislation, and the 125,000 acre feet, plus or minus, needed for the 25,000 acres of wetland, you've got 225,000 acre feet. If you subtract that from what the Newlands Project irrigates, something in the neighborhood of 300,000 acre feet, you're left with 75,000 acre feet of water. If you take an average of say four acre feet per acre, and that's probably generous, and divide that up, you end up with maybe 13, 15,000, 20,000 acres. Is that the way it looks to you?

Solbos: If you followed through with all of the possibilities in the scenario that you laid out, yeah, it looks like there isn't a lot of agriculture left on the Newlands Project. I guess

the way I look at the act is that the act is almost like, if this is what everybody wants, then this is as benign a way as we can think of to have it all occur, if indeed there were that many people that wanted to get out of farming, and if indeed you needed 110,000 acre feet, which hasn't been verified for *cui-uis*, and if, again, indeed you needed that amount of money for wetlands, and again everybody agreed to it, then—

Seney: That amount of water for wetlands.

Solbos: Water for wetlands, yeah. Then it would be a non-controversial issue and it would just smooth the transition. It would give us authority and the Fish and Wildlife authority to make the payments to the people that want to get out of that business anyway, and things would have worked out fine. So that's the kind of bill you usually get from Congress is that if everybody agrees to what is going on, then this bill will work fine.

But like most bills, there's a lot of controversy with actually implementing those things. Like they say, the devil's in the details, and in this particular situation there's a lot of details. The bottom line is that there aren't that many willing sellers to go and implement that sort of thing. And in implementing it, even if you had the willing sellers, then it might be—it was expected this would take an awfully long time to implement anyway. Just to get the funds to buy that number of water rights is going to take many, many, many years. You're talking decades to acquire it anyway. So it's not unrealistic to maybe see that over a long period of time, that would slowly take place.

I think what the real problem is, is that you can't have a nice smooth progression of smaller and smaller amounts of agriculture, because there's such a interrelationship between the purchase of those water rights and the success of agriculture in the area. It just gets harder and harder for agriculture to be successful with less and less farms. That has to do with just the infrastructure that's set up for agriculture, the seed factories, the equipment manufacturers, all of those infrastructure needs, if there aren't enough people that are taking advantage of those, they move to California or whatever, and then people have got a harder time getting those needs fulfilled.

Also, of course, as we've talked about before, there's the efficiency impact issues associated with delivering smaller and smaller amounts of water, and it's an issue that we haven't addressed yet very much, but we'll certainly have to address [it] is when you have got seven individuals at the end of a long canal, and six of them have sold their water rights, and there's only one person way down at the end, and he takes 200 acre feet of water, and it takes 5,000 acre feet of losses to deliver it to him, what

do we do with that situation? The guy doesn't want to sell, let's say. He's perfectly happy down there.

We have basically created through the act, a situation that has caused that to occur, whereas with all those other water users down there, those 5,000 acre feet of losses or 10,000 acre feet of losses, was acceptable. But the losses stay the same, because you've got to wet up that canal that whole period of time, whether you've got one person or whether you've got seven. So what do you do with that situation?

What you've also done, of course, is make that person's land less valuable, because he's in an awkward situation now, and maybe legally and politically he's in a difficult situation, and so that has to have an impact on his property values. And what happens to those people that were all around him that left? Did they just have a bunch of tumbleweeds and things on their property, and so his property doesn't look as attractive as it used to be, and all the weeds come from their land onto his land?

So this whole interrelationship of things is just making the slow transition not very palatable and not very fair, and that's really what the negotiations were all about. We have a mechanism in place to buy people out, and it may be that we eventually get that many willing sellers. But how do we handle that so that people are treated fairly? How do we address those issues? We've always talked about a core agricultural zone that makes a whole lot of sense. If you could get all of these people, and somehow get them in the middle of the project along very efficient canals, then you would have more water than you had before. Maybe, just looking at the mathematics now, you might only get 10 or 15,000 acres of agriculture. In a case of a good, efficient, core agricultural area, you might get twice that much. So you might be able to, with a 20,000 acre reduction in the project, you might have 40,000 good acres of land that you could keep going under those circumstances. But the negotiations weren't able to figure out how to do that. Consequently, we're back to this slow transition and people are caught in the middle.

Seney: It's hard for me sometimes to understand exactly what were the objectives of the negotiations. Now, I know that there were lots of questions about, obviously, wetlands and *cui-ui* recovery that was really at the heart of it. The state of Nevada had very small interests, they wanted to keep a certain pool of water in Lahontan Reservoir to maintain the fishery. That was about it for them, wasn't it?

State of Nevada's Interest in Settlement Negotiations

Solbos: I think another thing with the state that was important is that they have got, of

course, a long history of interpreting state law relative to water rights and how they should be used, and the abandonment and forfeiture issue, and how a person's duty can be used, and how much water you can transfer under certain transfer conditions, is it the consumptive use portion and that sort of thing. You've got the decrees on the Truckee and the Carson that they have worked under for years. They didn't want the whole water-rights situation in Nevada to be impacted or overturned by activities that were going on in this way.

They were involved in it much more than just keeping a minimum pool in Lahontan. It was really, first of all, educating all of us on what the water laws really were and why they were the way they were, and then also working with us, hopefully, to change them in some manner, or interpret them in some manner, that would be beneficial. For instance, one of the issues that we always talked about that I thought was a good idea and I don't know why we couldn't implement it, really, is right now there's no incentive for farmers to use less than their full entitlement. That's basically three and a half or four and a half acre feet per acre, depending on where they are in the project. If they don't use that water, it just goes to somebody else. So there's certainly incentive to just take that water and maybe make an early season irrigation or late season irrigation with it. It does some good, but it doesn't give you the good that you should get out of an acre foot of water.

So it always seemed like a very realistic thing to do, to allow an individual water user to sell some unused part of his water right, and basically, let's say, he needs three acre feet of a four and a half acre foot right, or a duty, just let him sell that other acre foot and a half to the wetlands for them to use in restoring a habitat down there on the wetlands. So it gives them an incentive not to use it and to also conserve and to look at their canals and maybe do efficiency improvements on their whole system, because then they can turn right around and sell that water. That is not something that is done in Nevada under state law, but it wasn't something that seemed impossible to do under state law.

So with the state, their actively working through that process, they could see the advantages and also apprise us of the disadvantages of doing that. We could then put that into a package so that it was part of the give and take. In other words, if a negotiation occurred whereby the water users perhaps had to give something up for the negotiation to be successful, then what they could get in return was possibly the ability to sell these individual parts of water rights and maybe then the impact to them wouldn't be so bad. In other words, if they were to give up, for instance, some rights that we considered were inactive, they might end up with the same money that they would have had initially because of this new process which would allow them to sell things that before they couldn't sell. So there were some real possibilities

there.

Seney: Would that have required change in state law, or could that have been done?

Solbos: It could have been done just on a different interpretation, or it could have been in a clarification.

Seney: By the state engineer?

Solbos: By the legislature, if it needed to be. We never got down to that point as to actually how we would do it, but Pete Morros [Director of the Nevada Department Conservation and Natural Resources], with the state, always made it sound like it was something that was very plausible to do, and that if it was part of a package, that he would work very hard to support that, and believed the he could get it approved and then passed. So there were a lot of things that could have come out of the negotiations for the water users. That's just one of them.

Seney: What were some of the other things, do you think, that could have come out of it for the water users?

Possible Benefits for Water Users

Solbos: Well, I think what they wanted the most out of it was some degree of certainty. As long as you've got this slow transition that I talked about and the impacts associated with it, people aren't really going to know the value of their water rights. There will always be a cloud hanging over them as far as what they're really worth and how long-term they are. Are these really permanent rights or is something going to happen in the next X number of years that is going to cause these things to lose their value? So that's a very tough thing for a landowner or anyone who owns land is always worried about the person that moves across the street or something that happens that impacts the value of their property. So the things that we do out there impact the value of their property, so they want to get that over with.

That was, I think, the greatest thing that they could have walked out of there [with]. If they could have said, even if it wasn't perpetual, even if we could have said, "This is an agreement that's going to last twenty years," just like the contracts we have over here on the Central Valley Project, basically they're now twenty-five year contracts. They used to be longer-term than that, but now, at least, they're twenty-five years. So it's good to know that for twenty-five years this is what we're going to have, and this is how the game is going to be played.

Seney: The situation here is different, though, isn't it, because these water-right users [in the Central Valley Project] don't own water rights as they do over in the Newlands Project.

Solbos: That's exactly right, sure.

Seney: Those used to be forty-year contracts, didn't they?

Solbos: Right. And it's been a fairly recent policy that has caused [the Department of] Interior to reduce the length of time under those contracts. The philosophy on that is that there are just so many things that change in the span of forty or twenty-five years, that we need to have some flexibility in Interior to address. Just to say that we're going to sign something now for a very long period of time, and that that will be a good idea twenty-five or forty years from now, is really tough to do.

But the flip side of that, of course, is that people need to be able to get loans to do their farming or somehow develop that land in some manner. And if you do something that said that you're only going to have this resource for five or ten years, and they're trying to get twenty-year loans, then obviously they've got a problem with that. So you've got to compromise on that.

I think from an Interior perspective, we wouldn't like to have contracts at all. We would just like to have a year-to-year situation and say, "Looks like we've got some water we can provide next year, and who wants to buy it?" But we can't do that, and the process has been set up that people have become dependent upon this water supply, and it's appropriate to continue that in some manner that addresses the contemporary needs that we have now and will have in the future.

Seney: My understanding is that Sierra Pacific Power didn't really have a lot on the objectives and negotiations, mostly to keep an eye on the Preliminary Settlement Agreement and their arrangement with Stampede Reservoir, but they didn't really make proposals. Have I been given an accurate assessment of that?

Sierra Pacific Power's Role in Settlement Negotiations

Solbos: I'd have to agree with that. I think that the real issues of the negotiations were the ones between the Fallon, Fernley, Wadsworth area, and Pyramid Lake. The negotiated settlement, or the process that was going on on the Truckee relative to Reno, was really being handled in the Truckee River Operating Agreement [TROA] negotiations, and they were comfortable with that. They were very involved with that, providing tremendous amounts of time and resources.

Seney: Sierra Pacific.

Solbos: Sierra Pacific was. So both from a manpower standpoint and just interest standpoint. I think one of the things, too, that would have come out of it is, if we got closer in negotiations to where we were really analyzing the nuts and bolts impacts of small changes in different proposals, then they would have seen where they were being affected and might have become a lot more involved in what was going on. But even as the negotiations broke down, we were still talking about very broad issues that never got to the point where it was obvious that there was an impact—a negative impact—to Sierra Pacific, so that's why they didn't take a very active role in it.

They did have some people, Rod Hall, for instance, that were very competent technical people that were very helpful during the negotiations at running computer programs and things like that, to help us understand the impacts of various proposals that people have. That was a very helpful role, but it was more of a technical role and not a policy negotiation role, as I would see it.

Seney: The Conservation Caucus, and that would be the Lahontan Valley Wetlands Coalition, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the Nature Conservancy, also provided modeling, did they not?

The Conservation Caucus

Solbos: Yes, they did, and it was kind of interesting. I always had the feeling that the right answer for solving the problems out there would come from that side, and maybe if problems are resolved in the future that maybe that's the way the answer lies.

Seney: Why do you say that?

Solbos: Well, for a couple of reasons. I guess they were a group that I could see was not personally impacted by what was going on. They could maybe be more open-minded about what was happening than anybody else. Obviously the water users were tremendously emotional about what was going on, the tribal interests were that way. Interior is quite constrained by regulations and laws and court precedent and all this paperwork that has been built up over the years that they had to maintain, whereas the coalition could sit back and really look at things totally creatively. I think that the best way that I could characterize it is maybe they were just ahead of their time, in a sense that some of the proposals that they would lay out on the table were just too complicated for people to see their way through.

We never got to a situation in those negotiations where we could take a proposal, and just everyone would take that proposal and work very hard on that proposal, and come back with counteroffers addressing that proposal. Everyone went into the negotiations with their proposal, and kind of stayed with it throughout the negotiations, so they would then see what people's reactions were to it. They would go back and they would modify their own proposal. So people kept pushing their own proposal along, which meant that you didn't make a lot of progress. That group might think their proposal was getting way better, but in reality, everyone thought that their proposal was getting way better, and that any minute maybe that the other group would see the wisdom of their proposal and latch onto it, but it wasn't going to happen. I don't feel like at the end of those sessions anyone had really moved off of their proposal and that I guess I could say Interior modified their proposal quite a bit and tried to take things that they had learned and change the figures and all of that, but the framework of the proposal was the same as how they started it.

I think people tried to, in general, latch onto the Interior proposal the most, because it had more meat on the bones, I guess, it covered every single issue and it had real numbers in it and that sort of thing, and it also was understandable. People could see that X number of acre feet of water was going to get transferred from here to there and that this is the impact it would have and that sort of thing, where the wetlands coalition proposal was always much more difficult to put your finger on. It was hard to tell what the final results would be. You couldn't really do model runs on it, that people could latch onto. It was very, very creative, and they talked about lots of different colors of water in various areas.

One thing that hasn't really been done out there, certainly hasn't, is to keep a certain amount of water identifiable as it's released. Now, you release some water from Prosser [Dam] or Boca [Reservoir], Stampede [Reservoir] up on the upper Truckee [River], and as soon as it hits the river, it's river water, and whoever gets it, gets it, and they use it for whatever purposes that they're entitled to use it for. But their proposals would track that water all the time, and someone could release a bit of water from Boca and it would go down through the system, and it would maintain their water, and the losses would follow that little block of water, and if it got to Lahontan, you could store it over in Lahontan and you could sell it once it got there. Everybody always had in the back of their minds, can we really track water that well? Can we really account for it?

One of the big things about the OCAP [Operating Criteria and Procedures] they were trying to get out of is the complexities of managing it and accounting for it and all the disputes that come out of it by us saying that the losses were this and the losses were that. So we were all wondering, is this just going to be trading one thing

for another, and someone's going to say, "I don't have 1.267 acre feet, I have 1.269"?

So it just was too difficult for people to figure out, but they certainly were the most creative, and I think they probably went out of their way the most to provide something for everybody in their plans. And also to just change a whole philosophy out there of how everything was done, and maybe get people away from being at each other's throats for so much, but they couldn't pull it off.

Seney: Did the farmers, do you think, have much confidence in the environmentalists? What seemed to be the relationship between those two groups?

Relationship between Farmers and Environmentalists

Solbos: One of the things that you had to have, and I know that the ag group had it, too, is you had to have a great deal of respect for them. I mean, certainly very, very competent people, Graham Chisholm³⁵ and then David Yargas, [had] a lot of analytical tools.

Seney: Let me turn this over.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 25, 1995.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 25, 1995.

Solbos: A lot of analytical tools were at their disposal. I remember one of the very first discussions that we had when we were setting up the ground rules was that we didn't want to have telephones there, we didn't want to have computers. We didn't have anything. And Yargas argued for having his laptop computer with him so he could punch things in while we were talking and get results back, and type up things and develop proposals and pass them out.

Seney: Was that accepted?

Solbos: It was accepted. So they certainly recognized the competency there, and I think that people acknowledged the integrity there. I don't think there was any doubt or any concerns that they were trying to put things in a proposal that was hiding anything. And you've got to realize that that is an extremely easy thing to do in this process.

35. Mr. Chisholm participated in Reclamation's Newlands Project oral history series. See Graham Chisholm, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney, edited by Donald B. Seney and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, 2011, www.usbr.gov/history/orallhist.html.

People show up at the meetings and they say, "I ran these models and the models show that there's no impact to agriculture by doing this, and Pyramid Lake will end up going up two feet a year for the next twenty years," and all these great things come out of this particular proposal. Then when you really get down to, well, what were the assumptions, because when you run that model there are many, many assumptions you have to make as you run that thing, so when you go through those assumptions that went into that particular run, you'll find out that most of the people around the table didn't agree with those assumptions.

That was one of the problems that we always had with the farmers' model runs. I mean, they would always seemingly be making assumptions that we couldn't buy into. Whenever something sounded too good to be true, it was because it was too good to be true, and that there was something that they picked in there that didn't work. So an awful lot of time was spent in the negotiations of all agreeing to baseline assumptions. When you thought you had them all, the next model run would come out and you'd find out there was a whole other set of assumptions that had been made that you hadn't talked about before. That, again, was another big difficulty with the negotiations. The issues were so darn complex that you just couldn't talk them out. Every single thing you did, you'd have to run the models, and there were a lot of people that had a basic distrust of the models, and it's just hard to negotiate under those conditions.

Seney: Did there seem to be a division with the farmers on one side with their models and everyone else on the other side saying, "We don't agree. This doesn't work"?

Problems with Farmers' Models

Solbos: I would agree with that. I think it was much easier to buy into, for instance, what the wetlands folks would come up with. I think we were very open with them, in Interior, as to what was going into our model, and so we had a really good relationship, I think. I don't think that very often there was a surprise by what we had assumed or what they had assumed. I would have to say the majority of the surprises usually turned out to be in the runs that were made by the water users.

Also, I think there was a degree of sophistication that the wetlands people had and Interior had at running these models and being able to manipulate them. The models don't, under any circumstances, allow you to look at every case that you want to look at. So what you're always trying to do is trick the model to give you an answer that simulates what would be close to what the proposal would actually create. So there's a lot of experience that goes into trying to trick the model to give you a right answer. We had people and the wetlands had people that were very, very good at doing that.

Seney: How were you at doing that?

Solbos: Personally, not good at all, but we have people on our staff that are excellent at it. It's all they do and it's all they've done for twelve years, work on those models. Oftentimes, too, what would happen with the ag community in their presentations was that they really didn't run it on the model, they just kind of looked at the results of the model from other runs and extrapolated it to this new proposal and make some statements about how that would go, and that sort of thing, and that just didn't work very well. The people that were around the table, Interior and the wetlands folks, would then immediately run the models based on that, and it wouldn't show what the ag folks were showing.

Seney: Can you pick any one of these models or model runs and kind of give us a detailed, maybe semi-detailed, explanation so that when someone reads this they can get a sense of what we're talking about when you're running model runs on the river?

Running Model Runs on the River

Solbos: I've been out of it for a year, and I'll give you the best that I can on this in my memory. But all the models do is they tie hydrologic scenarios based on past history. In other words, there's ninety years of record from streamflow data that exists in the basin. So what you do then is you can take and assign a probability to having good water years. There's X number of percent that it'll be a 100 percent year, and the percentages go down in each direction to having a wetter than normal or a drier than normal year.

So based on that hydrology, then you look at what the deliveries were to various areas, how much water got to Pyramid Lake, how much water went in the Truckee Canal, how much water went to the wetlands, how much water was used in the Reno-Sparks metropolitan areas, all of that. You can compare it to what the historic reservoir storages were under those conditions, then you can say, if those conditions continue on into the future, then we can assume similar-type results, and if you have similar-type results, then this is the water supply that people will have.

You can then, under these proposals, if you know how much water is available in the Truckee, then you can see what would have been delivered under the old mechanism and what would be delivered under the new mechanism that is the result of some proposal. So then you can say, if you've got some kind of a recoupment mechanism, whereby the district—I'm talking about the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District—is reduced in some manner from their normal historical deliveries, then you

calculate how much water then would actually go to the district under the new scenario. You can then see how that relates to how many acres less agriculture is in production, and you can just follow that all the way through as to what would happen.

Obviously, lots of assumptions that you would make. The city of Reno, Sparks, isn't what it was back in the 1930s when the major drought occurred, and so you've got some factors that go into there saying there's more parking lots and there's more runoff and there's a lot of different changes that occur. But people that are good at that can do that and, of course, you always look at how things that happened this year compared to how you guessed it would happen in accordance with the model. And you then adjust up the model to make sure that you're getting reasonable results based on things that you can see.

So what, for instance, the Interior model runs had in it was basically trying to address all the things that Interior's long-term goals were and how then would that impact people. So the long-term goals was getting recoupment paid back, a million acre feet of excess diversions. You had the issue of abandonment and forfeiture and inactive water rights. So you made an assumption on the fact that rights that are considered now by Interior to be inactive would not have water delivered to them, so you are able to crank that into the process.

All the other components of a negotiation, you've got to make assumptions on what the Fernley, Wadsworth, Fallon water supply for M&I will be, and you have to provide for that. You have to make assumptions on what will happen to the Truckee Division of the [Newlands] project, because there are things that are going on relative to buyout scenarios that said that it was better to buy water for Pyramid Lake from the Truckee Division rather than the Carson Division. So, consequently, you put those assumptions in there. The model would then show you what the impacts would be.

That's how they work. It's actually quite a complex thing to run, but once you've got it all set up and everyone's knowing what's going on, it's very easy to say, "Okay, we assume we buy out 5,000 acres of water rights in the Truckee division, and what would happen if we only bought 1,000?" We can go back, run the model, and in a matter of hours know exactly what those impacts would be.

Seney: And as complicated as this is, there's really no other way to try to understand the impact of various agreements.

"Almost too Much Data"

Solbos: That's really true, but, you know, when you look at the fact that this negotiation wasn't successful, and you look at the fact that there have been many, many complex water issues throughout history that have been negotiated without these analytical tools, I sometimes—and this is almost heresy from an engineer—but you wonder sometimes if you don't almost have too much data. Certainly people could argue that we never have enough data that we need to know, and we don't. There are so many things we don't know. We don't know what the true losses are under various circumstances, and things like that.

But I think we all know the philosophy and how the system generally reacts to change. We know that if we divert less water at Derby Dam, that more water will end up at Pyramid Lake. There's some obvious relationships that you can accomplish. I think what happened with other negotiations in the past, where you didn't have all of that data, was that people were willing to say, "Okay, we have a problem here. We know what these basic relationships are. Let's make an agreement for the next twenty years that we will operate under this certain scenario and then we'll see what that has done to us. Then we'll be willing to re-look at this issue at a later date, when we see what the impacts were."

So it allows a lot of room for negotiating, because you never really know what those impacts are. And one side can say, "Oh, the impacts will be enormous," and the other can say, "Oh, that's hardly going to do a thing." So you can easily split it in the middle, and you can then just see what happens. It's almost adaptive management. It just gives you some flexibility, where now we're all kind of pretending that we know exactly what's going to happen. We know when we run the model that they'll be wetlands that average 100,000 acres, and we know that there will only be 13,000 acres of ag lands left. It gets people all concerned, so they can really be righteously fighting for one side or another, and then they can say that because if we don't get this accomplished, this will happen, and agriculture will be wiped out, or the wetlands will be lost, or something, when in reality, a hundred different things are going to happen between now and when that run would take place.

You're trying to keep the *cui-ui* alive for 200 years, and we're trying to run a model that says that we have to provide a certain amount of water so a certain thing can happen 200 years from now? I mean, it's almost arrogance to even assume that that's even going to happen. But that's what people get into their heads with these models. And so you spend a tremendous amount of time arguing about the results of these models, and probably not enough time arguing about just the general things that have to happen to lead to a change.

Maybe that was a problem. I think it was. I think it was, because I always got frustrated at spending hours and hours arguing about model outputs, and we did spend hours and hours arguing over it. I think you had to do it to some degree, but we tried to keep it in small subcommittees where the gurus of the models would fight back and forth, but it always came up at the table of the negotiations, and we always just spent lots and lots of time doing it.

Seney: Pyramid Lake's proposals, I know they wanted to decouple or sever the Truckee [River] from the project. Was that a serious proposal, did you think? Did it seem to you?

Decoupling Issue

Solbos: I don't think from an Interior perspective we ever gave a lot of credibility to the negotiations that would result in some kind of decoupling. We all expected, of course, the tribe to have that as their position going in, but what they were looking for was some positive move towards that way off into the future. I know what they at the end tried to do was some kind of a five-year plan that would certainly not result in decoupling at the end of five years, but would be an acknowledgment from everyone that that is what the goal is, and that over the next five years we would work at ways to do that, or, I guess, reducing as much as possible, the negative impacts to existing water users. But to get everyone to buy into the fact that that was all of our goals, was to decouple, that was a tough one. So I don't think it was given a lot of credibility by a lot of people, and I don't think that—for instance, I don't think Interior spent a lot of time deeply analyzing that proposal, because we just didn't think it was very realistic. I don't think the wetlands coalition did, and certainly the agricultural community didn't. So it wasn't all that productive.

Seney: The tribe has been very successful in recent years both in litigation and in legislation, in terms of securing their objectives. Maybe it's a conclusion I shouldn't draw, but it didn't seem to me that these negotiations were all that important to them, that they had gotten what they want in other ways and there wasn't maybe a lot of motivation on their part to negotiate. Do I understand that right, or do I have that wrong?

Pyramid Lake Tribe's Interest in Negotiations

Solbos: Well, I think that, again, when you talk about people who have been involved in a project a long, long time, they've got a different perspective than the rest of us. Certainly, Bob Pelcyger, representing Pyramid Lake, was one of those people that was involved a long, long time. He had a real perspective, almost an Indian perspective, and by that I mean I associate Indians with thinking more long-term

than maybe the rest of us, and that they are looking at things generations down the road. Bob had, whether he had that from all the experiences of being on the project or whether he got that from being associated with representing the tribe for so long, I don't know, but he had that long-term perspective. It seemed to him, I'm sure, that history was leaning towards decoupling, and that at some point, maybe after he was gone, that that would indeed be a reality, and 100 years, 200 years from now, that would be a done deal, and that there would be no Truckee River water going over to the Newlands Project. So he didn't want to do anything that would impact that from happening.

He also had had opportunities, and he mentioned a few of them, a number of times during the negotiations, where he had had opportunities to actually make agreements for diversions to the Newlands Project, where the water users had made an offer, he had accepted that offer, and then through a number of technicalities it had fallen apart. It had happened in the early seventies, I know, when the OCAP started, and then some other times. Bob said that, now, looking back retrospectively, that those would have been terrible, terrible agreements, and he would have been giving up for the tribe a lot more than they had acquired through litigation and the other processes that had been followed. So that had taught him to be extremely reluctant to, let's say, sign a deal that, let's say you've got 100,000 acre feet of water going down the Truckee Canal, to sign an agreement that said, "From now on it'll be 50,000, and this is how it will be in perpetuity." He would have a very difficult time signing something like that, because his feeling was that twenty or thirty years from now, somebody's could to be looking at this document saying, "What's the jerk that agreed to this? Because it's completely keeping us from doing all the things that are so obvious to us, now, are appropriate." So that was in the back of his head. So that's where the five-year deal fit in with him, because he could say, "Okay, we can make a lot of agreements in this five-year deal, but be it known that the ultimate goal is getting water out of the Newlands Project that now comes from the Truckee River. And at the end of five years we're going to see where we are, and if we're not approaching that goal, then we're just going to cut this off."

Seney: The farmers wouldn't take the five-year deal, though, would they?

Solbos: No, and I think the real reason, the root of that is, from what I mentioned earlier relative to what they were trying to get out of it, some certainty. All of the five years was—a lot of us—I, personally, I guess I'd have to say, didn't like the five-year deal much either, because we had all worked so hard on these issues for so long that some agreement that says, "We are going to continue to work on these issues," didn't seem like much of a deal to us, because that's kind of what we would be doing anyway.

That's what we always do. That's what our jobs are, is to keep working to resolve the issues.

So if something really material came out of those, like a revised OCAP that we would then all buy into, and we wouldn't get protests on everything we did and all relative to trying to implement it, that would be good. So I guess it would depend on what came out of the five-year deal. But where it seemed to be headed to me was that since no one could agree on a long-term deal, and no one then could agree on a five-year deal, and so it was just kind of an agreement to continue to work. It's hard to get excited over that.

Seney: The Fallon Tribe really did achieve something; that is, they're going to end up with their own irrigation district, right?

The Possibility for Fallon Tribe Getting Their Own Irrigation District

Solbos: I guess that's all going to be wrapped up in the contract negotiations that are going to be ongoing with T-C-I-D. I know that was a goal of theirs. I don't believe it was formalized in the negotiations, but I think it's a likelihood that it will occur, because I think if it's set up right, the water district won't have a particular problem with it, as long as they get certain assurances that they won't be impacted. It allows the tribe to have more of a say in the day-to-day operations of things that are on the reservation. So I think that's probably going to happen, but I think it would have happened without the negotiations, and the details are going to probably worked out in this contract that's being worked on now.

Seney: They must have opposed, I would think, the decoupling of the two rivers.

Solbos: I don't know if "oppose" is the right term. The tribe was in an awkward—I'm talking about the Fallon Tribe—position, where they were having to be on the side of Newlands and the agricultural interests on the one hand, but then trying to recognize the tribal sovereignty and trust responsibilities issues that Pyramid Lake had. So they were always trying to walk that line. I think they didn't have their own proposal per se, they had a list of things that they wanted to see occur, and I think if decoupling was going to be done, and they could possibly have had decoupling if they had gotten some guaranteed water supply from the Carson, so they were able to sit back. They knew that Interior had a responsibility to them, a very strong legal responsibility. You could certainly have decoupling where the Fallon Tribe wasn't impacted by it. So it just depended on how that came out. So they didn't come out initially saying that, "Decoupling is something that we will not support."

Seney: There was a lot of optimism in various quarters when the Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance (LVEA) was forming and was designated as the negotiating—your brows are narrowing when I say optimism, and maybe you can correct me, and I want you to do that if you think it needs to be done. But it seemed like it was going to be a little bit different this time, that it wasn't going to be the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District representing the water users solely, that now you had a broader community umbrella. You had Fernley, for example, represented. The people in the city of Fallon themselves were represented. How did you see the Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance, and then how do you think that it worked out in terms of representing the Fallon and Fernley and Hawthorne areas?

Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance

Solbos: Well, I was delighted to see the growth of that organization. One of the big problems in a lot of the dealings that we had had with T-C-I-D, and really the T-C-I-D board, was that the issues that we were discussing were so much broader than just the relationship between the federal government and the Newlands Project. It always seemed awkward to be talking about things that we knew would have a relationship to the water supply for the city of Fernley, for instance, without people from the city of Fernley being there.

So we would always, after those kind of meetings, I would always try to contact people representing the city to let them know what had happened and what was going on that might impact them, but they never were a real part of any of these discussions. So this was just a convenient mechanism for me, just looking at it selfishly, to have one group that you could go to that really represented all these interests.

Also, I think that if the water going through the Truckee Canal was represented by just, let's say T-C-I-D, during the negotiations, that no one would have expected that to ever have been successful. I think that the only chance that it would have ever have had to have been successful would have been a broad, community-based response to the issue. So it was really a terrific thing, and I don't know what will happen to that now that the negotiations have broken down. I hope that they in some way keep together and keep going after those issues that are so important to them.

I think one of the most interesting processes they went through, and I hope, again, that it keeps going on, is this concept of a core community. They can do that without the government being involved at all. They can zone certain restrictions on lands that they have to maintain in agriculture, they can hook that into their planning

process for the cities, and without the government having any role—just move themselves along in that direction.

The trouble is, those are very hard issues, and when you try to get that through planning and zoning and all of that, there are always people that fall inside the lines and people who fall outside the lines. If you got what you wanted by falling inside the lines, you're going to have a hard time agreeing with the guys that didn't make it. So they certainly realized how very difficult that was, and they never were able to come up with an agreement that says, "Here is the core lands that we want to maintain, and these lands can go out of production, and we're going to build up in that area anyway." If we had that, that would have been very, very helpful. Then we would have done what it took to try to facilitate that in some manner occurring.

But they're tough issues, and they weren't able to work their way through them. But they worked extremely hard. They learned an awful lot, to their benefit, I think, learned an awful lot about how the project operated, and an awful lot of the individuals didn't know how OCAP even operated, or how it was implemented. There was just a lot of misinformation going on, and they had to learn all of that to make any sense out of all of this. So they became very educated on the issues, and that will just be beneficial down the road.

Seney: I'm told that as the negotiations went on, the role played by T-C-I-D and the farmers became more prominent in the negotiations.

TCID's Role Became More Prominent during Negotiations

Solbos: I wouldn't say that that was overt. In other words, it wasn't something that you could see at the negotiation table. It may have certainly occurred outside, though. One of the things that—

Seney: Let me stop you.

Solbos: Go ahead.

Seney: I've actually been told that maybe you could see that. That Lyman McConnell, the project manager at T-C-I-D, began to move closer and closer to the table, and then actually sat at the table.

Solbos: Okay, I wasn't at the last meeting. Maybe that was more obvious there.

Seney: Maybe it was.

Solbos: I think, though, Lyman did start standing up in meetings toward the end there, and reminding people, I guess, of some of the constraints that T-C-I-D had in the process. Certainly, that was something that we never could really get a handle on and never took on, to try to figure out, because that would have been the next step if we had an agreement. But somehow, all the water users would have to buy into this thing, and if, for instance, there was an agreement that we would reduce diversions from the Truckee by some certain amount of water, that would be something that every water user would have to do. If one single individual took us to court on it, then we hadn't gained all that much. We wouldn't have had anything much different than if we'd have imposed it. So no one really knew how that was actually going to take place. So it was kind of a cloud that hung over everything, and it got to the point where I think the district used that as a mechanism to just say that it was impossible for them to make some of these concessions.

We went into that thing hoping that we could do things like come to some general agreement about reducing diversions, but I don't think the district or the alliance ever believed that that would be acceptable. So somehow a package had to come out that was somehow neutral, and no one could figure out how to do that, because we had to get 100,000 acre feet to Pyramid, and we had to get 125 to the wetlands, and so how could it be neutral. That's why people like Disheroon, especially, since he was more focused on the legal aspects of getting a buy-in through the courts, thought that it was a waste of time, because he could see, even if we had some extremely amenable people sitting around the table that said, "Sure, that sounds good to me," and bought into it, there would always be possibly a large number of people that didn't buy into it, and they could always have a class-action suit.

Seney: The water users.

Solbos: The water users. And we wouldn't have accomplished anything. So what Mr. Disheroon said was that, "We're going to end up on court of in these things, anyway. Every single one of them's going to be resolved in court anyway, and—"

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 25, 1995.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 25, 1995.

Seney: Today is October 25, 1995. My name is Donald Seney. I'm with Edward Solbos, Jr., in his office in Sacramento, California. This is our fourth session, and this is our second tape.

Ed, the tape ran out a little bit as you were saying that Fred Disheroon of the

Department of Justice was always concerned that whatever agreement was reached, anyone of the water users, or a bunch of them could object to it. Maybe you'd finished that point.

Solbos: That is something that we never came to grips with during the whole time. We always, possibly naively, hoped that if everybody around that table thought it was a good idea, that the individual people then could go out and sell that concept to people, and maybe if we had some dissenters, that we would be able to come up with some way to address their concerns if there was a small number of them. What we couldn't, have of course, is have, for instance, the water users go back and try to propose something that the majority of the people didn't want and have the whole thing break down. So they had to have in their minds while they were negotiating, that what they were doing would be something they could sell. Oftentimes, I think we spent a lot of time talking about things that they knew that they could not sell, and weren't even going to try to sell. That's kind of how it went.

Seney: One of the groups that was not initially involved but became involved were the upper Carson [River] interests. I can't imagine now, and I suppose most of the participants couldn't, that they wouldn't be involved. Did they have much to say? I assume you agreed that they ought to have been involved.

Upper Carson River Interests

Solbos: Right. They needed to be in there. The only reason that they weren't involved very early in it is that everybody understands how the ability to negotiate things goes down when you've got more and more people involved. There were a whole different set of problems up there, and people who we hadn't done a lot of dealing with in the past. So just to bring all of that in and add a whole other realm of complexity was just resisted by some people in the early going. So initially, we didn't have them at the table and gave them an invitation just to see what would happen. But afterwards it was a very positive thing to have them there, especially as the discussions turned towards doing things in the upper Carson that would impact or improve the water supply on the project.

Obviously, the water available to the project is tremendously impacted by the use upstream, and there were the same kind of uses upstream as there were on the project. They had their own wetlands, they had their own agricultural areas, they had their own M&I areas. So it does look funny to put all this pressure, you got OCAPs and legislation and attempts to change laws and things, on a piece of the system, the lower Carson, and to basically have very little involvement on what's going on in the upper [Carson]. Of course, the reason for that is, is that the federal government isn't

involved materially in the upper Carson, so, consequently, the federal government was the driver for a lot of these activities that took place, and there was no need to go to the upper Carson.

But once you look at wanting to buy, and all the proposals contain usually about 10 to 15,000 acre feet of water from the upper Carson, then it was appropriate to have those people involved in it. They participated, and it was very illuminating to us to hear what they had to say.

Seney: What did they have to say?

Solbos: Well, I think what they brought mostly was an understanding of the difficulties of getting water downstream that would make a material difference. In other words, that system is set up in a number of reaches, and that's how the decree there is operated. You've got very strict regulations as to how water can move from one [reach] to the other, and probably the most important one is that when you try to transfer a water right from one of those reaches to the next downstream reach, it loses its priority. So it goes from what might be a very high-priority water right upstream, to the very, very last priority of the reach that it goes to. So you might buy terrific water rights in the upper Carson that aren't really worth a darn thing.

Seney: That would never get to the wetlands.

Solbos: They would never get to the wetlands or the Lahontan Reservoir. And you also had a system where under a lot of the years, it was over-allocated, so on a great number of years, the people at the end of the system weren't getting any water anyway. So if you were suddenly releasing water because the upstream users stopped using it, then they [the downstream users] would just take it before it got to where you wanted it to get, and it might be only a mile away, but they had every right to take that.

Seney: Unless you bought their right, they would take it.

Solbos: Yeah.

Seney: So you might have to end up buying two or three rights to get the water, you think?

Solbos: Sure. So what it led to was a realization that you seem to need to buy rights from the bottom of the system, so that there are no people downstream to take them from you. It also led to the realization that water rights in the upper Carson were far more expensive than they were anywhere else, and certainly than they were on the

Newlands Project, to the tune of two to three to four times, in some cases. So it was a real eye-opener to recognize that if we say that we're going to buy, let's say, 50,000 acre feet of water from the upper Carson, part and parcel to that was that the federal government would be putting in many, many, more millions of dollars than they would have had to spend.

I think one of the most surprising offers, to me, that came out of the federal government—I talked a little bit earlier about the offer to allow the individual water users to sell parts of their water duty. Another amazing offer to me was the agreement to buy a certain amount—and I don't know what the final amount was, 10 to 15,000 acre feet—of water from the upper Carson, even though we knew it was substantially more expensive than what we could get for on the project.

Seney: Well, you know, the farmers would say that's because there's only one purchaser of water on the project, and that there's a market on the upper Carson.

Solbos: But that's just kind of the way it is. We didn't create that situation. The growth in the upper Carson, Minden, Gardnerville, is much more rapid than it is farther downstream, and they're putting in a lot of houses up there, and properties are soaring. That makes the water extremely valuable, and that's just how things go. We might be doing some things that are impacting the value of water rights on the project by various court cases and things like that, but really, the impacts are within a fairly narrow band, whereas on the upper Carson, the sky's the limit, almost, on what those darn water rights are worth.

Seney: Right. What about the Reno-Sparks people? They were there, too, weren't they?

Reno-Sparks Interests

Solbos: Mostly I think they were represented by Sierra [Pacific Power Company], although they had their own representatives there also. But they mostly, I think, worked with Sierra to make sure that their interests were pretty well covered. Their interests were more water quality and some of the other things that they could do. They didn't have a lot of—it's almost like they were trying to piggyback some things that may come up that might be advantageous to them, at the end of a settlement, if it occurred. I think that from the negotiations, there were actually agreements made between Pyramid Lake [Tribe] and those interests on the upper Truckee that developed into lasting agreements that would be beneficial. So that was one of the few things that probably came out of the negotiations.

Seney: The water-quality agreements between Reno, Sparks, and the tribe.

Solbos: Right.

Seney: Pyramid Lake Tribe. Right.

Solbos: Right.

Seney: One of the reasons, or one of the sources of optimism, maybe, I sensed it was, was the fact that there was a neutral facilitator overseeing these talks. What was your reaction to the way in which the talks were conducted?

Conduct of the Negotiations

Solbos: She [Gail Bingham³⁶] certainly was a neutral facilitator. I would certainly say that. She had a lot of enthusiasm. She tried very hard to keep us at the table. She wouldn't let an unresolved issue just kind of be glossed over. She tried to open people up who weren't participating and get them to say what they were thinking. So she had, certainly, the skills and did, I believe, as best as she could, under the circumstances.

I think that to make that thing work would have taken a whole lot more time than was allowed, not only the length of time, but also the number of meetings. To come and meet a couple of times a month and then go back to Washington [D.C.], it's almost like you have to have somebody full time negotiating and then working with the subgroups and that sort of thing. I don't know if the way the process was set up would have worked, even under a little bit different circumstances. There were just too many issues, too much time spent on modeling, too many technical things, political things, to have it be successful in the time that was there. I think I've mentioned earlier that I never was all that optimistic, just because it just seemed like an overwhelming task. Since it turned out the way it did, maybe her optimism wasn't there, but obviously she has to be optimistic, that's what she's paid to do.

Seney: I'm not sure what else I want to ask you. I've got some other things in mind, but let me say here that approximately a month before the negotiations ended, you were—I'm not sure I want to say fired. You were transferred. You were no longer the Area Manager for the Lahontan Basin. I'm not sure what I—I simply want to ask about—I'm not sure what I want to ask you about. I know it was painful for you personally, and

36. Ms. Bingham participated in Reclamation's Newlands Project oral history series. See Gail Bingham, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney, edited by Donald B. Seney and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, 2009, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

I can see it on your face as I'm asking you this. I'm not sure what I want to say, except to say on the record that you were one of the casualties of the conflicts out on the Newlands Project, and the casualties of the tensions between the federal government and the farmers on the Newlands Project. How do you feel about that?

Casualties of Newlands Project Conflicts

Solbos: Well, I guess I'd start by saying what you're saying relative to me leaving is true. About a month before the negotiations were over, I was asked to leave that position, and have since moved down to Sacramento to accept another one [as Regional Engineer, for the Mid-Pacific Region]. It wasn't my idea that the move would take place. It certainly was something that was imposed on me, for a lot of reasons.

I think one of the things when you look at a responsibility of an area manager, and if you look at our, if you want to call them critical elements, the things that we are graded on, the most important one is an ability to persuade people to be able to come to some kind of a consensus on ways to make things better. I would have to say, in honesty, in looking at myself, that my powers of persuasion relative to largely T-C-I-D were not successful. I went into that project with some responsibilities and goals handed to me by the Commissioner [of Reclamation], very clearly expressed to me. And that was to try and bring about a more environmentally benign implementation of things on that project. And to work closer than had been in the past with the Washington Office, to try to bring about some of those things. And to bring about the intent of the legislation, which very clearly implies that we need to start transitioning out of some of that agricultural use into the more environmental uses there.

So my goal was always to try and bring about the goals of the acts in a most benign a fashion as I could, and to especially make sure that people that were farming now and who were continuing to get a benefit out of it would reasonably continue to do that, until some transition took place that they would then be appropriately compensated for.

But many, many issues came up on the project, day-to-day issues, that had to be resolved, and I tried very hard to work with the district and get them to see my way of thinking on a lot of the issues. I'm talking about implementation of OCAP issues, the issue relative to invalid water rights, and just how deliveries are done, the relationship they had with the Fallon Tribe. Those are all things that I had to administer on a day-to-day basis, and, in general, I was never very successful at getting the district to just agree that that was an appropriate thing to do, and that we could then get onto the next level of strategizing how to make it as less impacting as

possible, how to maybe even turn it into a positive thing, and maybe use it as a way to then go on to get something perhaps that would be advantageous to the district. But we fought hard on virtually every issue that came down the line.

I've talked in the past about the delivery of water to S line Reservoir, which started out, to me, to be an issue that should have been able to have been resolved by just people sitting down and working things out. But instead, it'd blown into a huge situation that involved the tribal police helping us turn gates [and release the flow of water to irrigators on the reservation] and doing things that everybody just looked at as being terrible.

I guess looking back on it, I don't know what I could have done differently. I saw that coming way in advance. I talked to the board. I talked to Ted de Braga [President, TCID Board of Directors] and tried to get that thing set up in some manner that would be palatable. But I also knew equally that if I went to Washington with a situation that the tribe wanted this to happen, and there was no technical reason why it shouldn't happen, and, in fact, it actually increased the water supply for the ag people, that there's no way I could sell that in Washington. Those are the kind of things that I shouldn't even be taking up there. I mean, that should be a done deal to make something like that work.

So anyway, that's just one example of a lot of things that indicated I wasn't very successful at talking with them. I think you can look through history, relative to federal people's dealings with the Newlands Project, and of course, I get that feel of history by researching things like recoupment. How did we get into that recoupment situation in the first place, and all of that. So you go back and you read all this literature, and it just goes back for decades of nasty letters back and forth and attempts by managers to offer things to the district, and eventually it not working out and that manager then moving on. You can look and see that no one's lasted there more than three years for the last three or four managers.

You can look at it two ways; that's all anyone should have to take, and also that if you can't give them what they want and make them happy out there, at least we can change the manager. What that does is it buys you some more time. It's probably a pretty good strategy. It's a little painful to the individual when it happens, but from a management point of view, it's probably a reasonable thing to do. I think if everybody changed, then you might really have some changes. In other words, if the Interior people have changed, and the Bureau person changed, and the manager for T-C-I-D changed, and you had all new people looking at that, that would be pretty interesting. I wonder what would happen. But it doesn't, and only one person

changes.

So that person goes into that with all this baggage that he's got—he or she, in this case she [Ann Ball³⁷, Mr. Solbos's successor Area Manager]. One thing that's different, certainly, is that the new person is under a different commissioner, a totally different situation in Washington relative to the strengths in Congress, and will be given a different set, and already has probably, been given a different set of broad goals than I was given. So maybe implementing those goals will be easier.

It was a very difficult job to have. It was a job that I really wondered about taking, back when I was thinking about it. It was offered to me as a [GS-] thirteen, and I knew how difficult the job was, and I balked at going there for that. When they then restructured the grade and all that, it was appropriate to go there and enhance my career. Now, whether or not it's done that, I guess the future will tell, but it was certainly an experience, and I don't feel bad about leaving.

Seney: Feel bad about the way it was done?

Solbos: I went through a difficult period of time associated with that, but it's over with, and I've got a position that's a responsible position here in Sacramento. I'm an important member of the team down here, and will probably be in Sacramento for quite some time.

Seney: Let me ask you to philosophize a little, speculate. What do you think the Newlands Project is going to be in twenty or thirty years? Will there be much of a Newlands Project left, do you think?

Future of the Newlands Project

Solbos: I don't know. It's easy for people to say that—and I might have even said it when I first got there—that ultimately it just isn't appropriate to have an agricultural area out in the desert where all these losses occur, that water is reduced from a reservation for the purpose of keeping that agricultural land going, and that we would be then accelerating the loss of that resource on the reservation, and that those wetlands are a national asset that we can't lose. It's easy to just say that with those things all working together, that there will be an inexorable march in the future of that project getting smaller and smaller to some point, that it won't be a project as we know it.

37. Ms. Ball participated in Reclamation's Newlands Project oral history series. See Ann M. Ball, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Donald B. Seney, from 1995 to 1998, in Carson City and Reno, Nevada, edited by Donald B. Seney with final editing and layout by Brit Allan Storey, 2009, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

But after seeing what has happened in this last situation, it isn't obvious that in the foreseeable future, and I'm talking fifty years, which is a long time, that you'll see that sort of thing take place. It wouldn't surprise me that if in fifty years we look at that thing and there's still a major agricultural area out there. The only thing that's certain to happen, is that the communities will grow, and that that will then generate changes that will maybe lead in that direction. But it's not going to be possibly negotiations that the government has anything to do with, and lawsuits that are won or lost. It'll just be the march of time that does it. How long that will actually take, I guess will remain to be seen.

Fernley's got to figure out a good long-term water supply, and once they do that, I think the people will flock into that area, because it's a nice place to live, it's close to Reno and Sparks, so people will want to commute from that area. So it's going to grow and it's going to gobble up land as it goes. But that's going to take a long time.

Seney: All right. Well, I appreciate again your giving us this time and your insights, and when it's ready, I'll send in the next manuscript.

Solbos: All right.

Seney: All right, thank you, Ed.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 25, 1995.
END OF INTERVIEWS.