

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Bruce Breslow



**STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH**



Interview Conducted and Edited by:
Donald B. Seney in 1999
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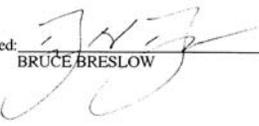
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STATEMENT OF DONATION
OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF
BRUCE BRESLOW

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, BRUCE BRESLOW (hereinafter referred to as "the Donor"), of SPARKS, NEVADA do hereby give, donate, and convey to 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 and JULY 16, 1999 at SPARKS, NEVADA and prepared for deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration in the following format: tape recording and transcript. This donation includes, but is not limited to, all copyright interests I now possess in the Donated Materials.
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BRUCE BRESLOW

INTERVIEWER: DONALD B. SENEY

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Introduction

In 1988, Reclamation began to create 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.

The senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation developed and directs the oral history program. Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to the senior historian.

Brit Allan Storey
Senior Historian
Land Resources Office (84-53000)
Policy and Administration
Bureau of Reclamation
P. O. Box 25007
Denver, Colorado 80225-0007
(303) 445-2918
FAX: (720) 544-0639
E-mail: bstorey@usbr.gov

For additional information about Reclamation's history program see:

www.usbr.gov/history

Oral History Interview

Bruce Breslow

Seney: My name is Donald Seney. I'm with Bruce Breslow in his office in Sparks, Nevada. Today is July 16, 1999. This is our first session, our first tape. Good afternoon.

Breslow: Good afternoon.

Early Life, Education, and Move to Northern Nevada

Seney: Why don't you start with a sort of brief biography. Tell me where you were born and educated, and how you got to be mayor of Sparks. What interested you in politics?

Breslow: Not much. (Seney laughs.) I was born in Boston, which created great politicians.

Seney: Oh, yes.

Breslow: But I only lived there for six months.

Seney: Enough to absorb some of it, though.

**Worked for CBS Radio in St. Louis, KMOX, after
Going to the University of Missouri at Columbia**

Breslow: (Laughter) I was raised in Stamford, Connecticut.

Four years in Dallas. Back to Stamford, Connecticut, for high school, and then went to journalism school at the University of Missouri at Columbia. Worked for CBS Radio in St. Louis, KMOX Radio, for a year and half with another young kid named Bob Costas. I had a chance to try television, and I said, "I'll see you at the top," which he reminds me annually in Christmas cards. "How's the top?" (Seney laughs.) But I fell in love with this part of the country, and

decided to stay here.

In 1989, after covering the earthquake at the World Series in San Francisco, I came back and there was a change in station management, so I needed to find something else to do.

Seney: You mean you worked for one of the television stations here?

**In Reno Worked for the ABC and the CBS
Television Stations as Sports Anchorman**

Breslow: Yes, yes. For the ABC station here and then the CBS television station.

Seney: As a reporter?

Breslow: As their main sports anchorman. But I was at the World Series when the place collapsed, so I ended up doing news. (Telephone call interruption.)

Breslow: Where were we?

Seney: You were at the collapsing—the earthquake.

Left after Change of Management at His Station

Breslow: Well, the station went through a transition, a news director and a new general manager, and they wanted to get rid of all the veterans and bring in young people at half the salary.

Got a Real Estate License

So I went and got a real estate license and looked for some action, something to do.

Becoming Involved in Local Politics in Sparks

I went to my first City Council meeting, at the City of Sparks. I was appalled by the decisions that were made over a little controversial mini-problem. I was vocalizing,

“Oh, God, I can’t believe they did this,” and somebody said, “Well, you think you could do better?” It just set off a little light bulb in me. I talked to my friends, and they started laughing. Talked to my wife at the time, and she started laughing.

Decides to Run for Mayor of Sparks

I said, “Well, the hell with you. I’m running for mayor then.” (Seney laughs.) And I ran for mayor.

Seney: Well, you must have had a fairly decent name recognition, I would think.

Breslow: I did, but I was a wacky sportscaster. To create a name for myself, I did something called Sports Challenge, where people challenged me to

anything. I mud-wrestled girls. I caught a grape
dropped off the top of the Hilton. I boxed
Michael Spinks.

Seney: (Laughter) Crazy, I see what you mean, yes.
Especially that last one.

Breslow: Yes. So we had some fun.

Seney: So kind of zany–

Concern over the Helms Pit

Breslow: It was, and I needed to convince people that I had
issues to talk about. So, in running for mayor, the
biggest issue for me that kind of I discovered,
there was a big old hole in the ground on
Interstate 80 called the Helms Pit. I remembered
from years before that at some point they were
going to make that into a park.

Seney: How long have you lived here now?

Breslow: I came here in 1978. I checked on this hole in the ground, went down and saw barbed wire, so having a reporter background, I took a camera and snuck under the barbed wire to, out of curiosity, take some pictures. When I got down there, I saw an entire wall of this pit covered with oil. So I took a bunch of pictures, had them developed, went down to the state, found out that the state knew about it, found out that the city knew about it and was covering it up. And I kind of blew the whistle. Held a press conference, showed the pictures, and ran for mayor. The cleanup of that oil spill was one of my issues.

Seney: Was it an oil spill or had it been a kind of toxic

dump?

Breslow: It had been there as an oil tank farm in Sparks about a mile from there. It was a combination-- the City of Sparks and the state sued Chevron, Shell, Texaco, Barry Hinkley Terminal, the railroad, and a pipeline company that came in from, I think, Venetia, somewhere there. We had Senator Bill Bradley out and did a field hearing with Senator [Harry]¹ Reid,² and we got an order

1. Note that in the text of these interviews, as opposed to headings, 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 have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their
(continued...)

for a disaster cleanup area. They were ordered to clean it up, and we won a settlement of twelve million dollars against the respondents, which we have used to turn the pit into a lake with beaches, park structures, in fact, six million dollars in infrastructures going, starting next week.

Seney: So that was the upshot of your campaign issue.

Breslow: Yes. It took eight years to finally get it done, but now people are swimming, and sailboats are in it instead of a gravel pit. That's how I got involved in politics.

The Helms Pit and Water Quality in the Truckee River

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1. (...continued)
removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.
 2. Senator Harry Reid was interviewed for Reclamation's Newlands Project oral history program.

Seney: The Helms Pit is adjacent to the Truckee River, isn't it? So there were some question about whether or not this was getting into the river?

Breslow: The fear was that the plume of oil which was discovered, which was quite large, would migrate to the Truckee River if the pit stopped pumping. The pit is the lowest point, like a cone. It pumps five million gallons of water a day out just to keep it empty. For years, for gravel operations, they pumped this water out and put it into the river. By stopping the pumping, the natural ground water would fill up the pit and therefore it wouldn't be a siphoning cone. The oil which migrated to the pit would then go on its natural course and perhaps find itself in the river,

therefore contaminating everything downstream.

Remediation at the Helms Pit

Well, the [U.S.] Army Corps of Engineers and the oil company, the respondents in the lawsuit, and the state did a whole bunch of recovery and extraction wells to kind of get a handle on it, to keep it from migrating.

Flood in 1997 Filled the Helms Pit Twenty to Thirty Years Earlier than Planned

Then we had the flood, New Year's '97, and the pit filled up overnight with floodwater. And instead of waiting twenty to thirty years for the final cleanup to being able to put water in it, the state said, "Well, it's already wet and the walls are already soaked. So it's okay, you can keep the

water in it.”

“ . . . the city got a lake twenty years sooner and we could use the settlement monies to add all the amenities really quick. . . . ”

The positive upshot, the only positive of the flood, was that the city got a lake twenty years sooner and we could use the settlement monies to add all the amenities really quick.

Seney: By this time you had cleaned it up enough so that you were intercepting the oil, so no more would—

The Problem of Nitrogen in the Truckee River

Breslow: I think the Truckee River’s the most heavily regulated water source in the country. They check the water. It’s a little high in nitrogen, so we’re going to build a denitrification plant.

Seney: And that will take care of any water problems?

“The power company is trying to find a way to also have water treatment built into that, so they can use it as an emergency drought supply. . . .”

Breslow: That will take care of the nitrogen. The power company is trying to find a way to also have water treatment built into that, so they can use it as an emergency drought supply. So that’s why the denitrification plant isn’t up and running now. We’re working on getting other parties to help pay for it.

Seney: So if you can get the power company to use it as an emergency drought supply, then you hope you can get them to pay at least part of the denitrification, which will bring the water up to drinkable, potable quality?

Breslow: Right.

Seney: This must have gotten you into all these water issues, then. Had you ever been involved in them before?

The Honey Lake Project

Breslow: I was a sportscaster; I wasn't involved in any of it.

Senator Harry Reid and His Staff Gave Him a Crash Course on the Negotiated Settlement

I got a crash course on the Negotiated Settlement, as it was called, from Senator Reid and his staff when I first became mayor.

“ . . . first three or four years as mayor trying to stop what I perceive as a financial scam which was called the Honey Lake Project, the water importation plant. . . . ”

I also spent the first three or four years as mayor trying to stop what I perceive as a financial scam which was called the Honey Lake Project, the

water importation plant. I went through the contracts over and over and over, and could not see how they made any sense financially for Washoe County to do this water importation at the cost that they were going to be charging. Plus, if the Negotiated Settlement succeeded, there was enough water supply for this population to double. It just seemed wrong. The more I looked into it, the more offended I grew.

Seney: A number of people I've talked to on this project have felt strongly about it, people who were involved in Reno, for example. I don't want to say who yet, because while I've interviewed them, they haven't approved their interviews, but it's someone you'd know, who is also very upset,

as Bob Pelcygar was. Bob's approved his interview, so I can say that. A number of other people have raised this Honey Lake thing. It gets people's backs up. It obviously got yours up. Why is that? What is it about it that—and explain some of the details to us about that project.

Breslow: It's been years since I looked at the contracts.

Seney: That's all right. We don't expect the finest details.

The Honey Lake Project Water Costs Were out of Line with the Cost of Normal Water Resources

Breslow: In general, the cost of bringing the water here was so out of line with the cost of normal water resources.

Seney: Who would have paid for this?

Breslow: The citizens of Washoe County.

Seney: It would have been a bond issue that would have been put forward?

Breslow: The county would have had to pay, perform on a contract they had with Franklin Genes and some other people. It was millions and millions of dollars. The county would have had to have come up with a way to do it, either through a bond issue or through raising taxes, or whatever. It didn't get that far.

Seney: How did the county end up with a contract? You're mentioning the gentleman who was involved in the development that would have benefitted from [sale of] this water, right?

Breslow: He was the prime signatory.

Seney: How did they end up with the contract?

Breslow: Before I became mayor, apparently, they had signed a deal to do this water importation study. People wanted environmental impact studies and they wanted all sorts of things which the county tried to stall, which eventually were forced on the county's hand. I used my position on the Regional Governing Board to try to slow the project down to help us get an environmental impact study, and then worked with Senator Reid, who really came through to stop this project before it got any further.

Seney: What did he do that was important?

Breslow: Two things. He tacked on some legislation language that prohibited the county from going

forward in this project. He worked with—I don't remember if it was [Secretary of the Interior, Bruce] Babbitt at the time, to not permit the transfer of this water from one state to the other or across county lines or something.

Seney: Because this would have come from California, wouldn't it?

Breslow: Yes. And the people around it, the ranchers, were opposed. The people in the community were opposed. I would guess that eighty percent of the residents of Washoe County, if you had taken a poll—and there were some straw polls done—were vehemently opposed. They thought this was the biggest boondoggle they'd ever heard of.

Pete Sfferazza Ran His Mayoral Campaigns in

Reno on No Growth

At that time, there was a lot of political—well, Pete Sfferazza in particular, the mayor of Reno, always ran his campaigns on no growth, that growth is evil, even though the growth rate in this region's been less than three percent for the last ten years. Each year, three percent. So there was a real “Water's going to mean growth. We don't want that California water brought in here. We're going to have to pay for it.” People were very offended by it.

Seney: It wasn't a lot of water, was it? Five thousand, seven thousand acre-feet, somewhere in that neighborhood?

Breslow: I don't recall the number of acre-feet, but it was

enough to put water in some parts of Washoe County that the county had had problems delivering, without having to deal with this power company.

Seney: And there were water-quality questions about this water, as well, were there not?

During the Honey Lake Project issue “I had several personal threats during this process. . . . I had my car forced off the highway at one point. . . .”

Breslow: Every question you could think of was raised about this. I had several personal threats during this process.

Seney: Really. Tell me about that.

Breslow: I had a couple phone calls from male people—male gentlemen, I’ll say—who didn’t identify

themselves, that basically said, “You have no interest in this. Keep your mouth shut or look out.” I had my car forced off the highway at one point. The only thing I could tie it to would have been this. It didn’t look like a regular person doing it. I contacted the F.B.I. at one point because of it. I believe they told me—because I thought somebody might be tampering with my phones or something. I asked how to find out if somebody has entered your house, in the garage or something. They said to sprinkle kitty litter, and they can see footprints that way. It was a weird time. I mean, there was some paranoia obviously that came from that. I had forgotten all about that.

Seney: Well, there was a lot of money involved had this gone through, right? I mean millions and millions of dollars would have been realized by the backers had this happened.

Breslow: Some people would have done very well. I don't recall who it was, but some people were tying this to a company called Waste Management, that they said was behind the whole deal.

“ . . . people said this was part of the right to try to get a contract to clean up the Herlong Army base or something, that it had nothing to do with water in Washoe County. There were a lot of grandiose theories. . . . ”

Some other people said this was part of the right to try to get a contract to clean up the Herlong

Army base³ or something, that it had nothing to do with water in Washoe County. There were a lot of grandiose theories.

Seney: Herlong military base was in the basin where the water would come from?

The Honey Lake Project “didn’t seem to make sense fiscally, so . . . somebody else must be pulling the strings. . . .”

3. “Sierra Army Depot (SIAD) is a government owned, government operated installation, functioning as part of the U. S. Army Industrial Operations Command, Rock Island, Illinois. SIAD is located in Herlong, California, in Lassen County's Honey Lake Valley, east of the Sierra Nevada mountains. . . . In 2005, DoD recommended to close Sierra Army Depot as part of its 2005 BRAC Recommendations . . .

“Sierra Army Depot is a munitions disposal site for the United States Army. It is licensed in California and operated by a civilian contractor working for the U.S. Army. SIAD is engaged in the open burning of munitions, a process that releases many know toxins into the air, including heavy metals, dioxin, PCB, and fiberglass. For more than 30 years, Sierra Army Depot has been exploding and burning millions of pounds of unwanted bombs, bullets, rocket engines and other munitions in open pits. Yearly, more than 53 million pounds of explosives are detonated. . . .”

Source:

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/sierra.htm> accessed January 13, 2010, at 5:05 p.m.

Breslow: It was next to it and would have been affected by it. So it was almost like the J-F-K assassination, as far as grandiose theories of why this water importation was going on, because it didn't seem to make sense fiscally, so therefore there must be some other weird—you know, somebody else must be pulling the strings. None of that ever came to light.

Seney: Maybe it never will.

Breslow: Maybe it never will.

Senator Harry Reid Might Have Believed Importing Water from the Honey Lake Project Would Reduce Pressure to Develop the Negotiated Settlement

Seney: I understand, too, that people close to Senator Reid—although I didn't ask Senator Reid when I interviewed him this question specifically—but

people close to him have said that one of the bases of his opposition was that the notion that you could bring water in from the outside to help solve some of the water problems here, is that it will lessen the pressure for the Negotiated Settlement to go through, [Public Law] 101-618 and TROA [Truckee River Operating Agreement] and all the rest. Was that your impression, too?

Breslow: I don't think that was what was perceived as the reason that this was a bad project.

Seney: One of the things in the mix of reasons, that it might lessen the pressure to resolve these questions.

The Importance of Public Law 101-618

Breslow: I would disagree with that, just from the

standpoint that there was no reason to not go forward with the Negotiated Settlement. It was something for everyone. It would have ended hundreds of years of litigation for the most litigated water right in the world and solved water problems for all the various parties. So the people who did participate in it would have all benefitted. So I can't see that there would have been less of a reason to go forward with that either way.

Seney: I take it when you became mayor, which would have been in--

Breslow: '91.

Seney: By this time Public Law 101-618⁴ has passed?

4.

“The legislation, known as Public Law 101-618 was approved by the 101st Congress at the end of its 1990 session.

(continued...)

4. (...continued)

“This Act is often described as an excellent model for resolving some of the difficult water and other resource issues confronting many areas of the country. The legislation engages all parties in a regional context to help solve serious environmental and water supply problems. It provides a framework for using creative technical approaches to water use and conservation to help solve these problems, and it goes a long way towards resolving long-standing Indian water rights and water use issues as well as addressing endangered species and wetlands issues in a meaningful way.

“The legislation is divided into two acts: The Fallon Paiute Shoshone Tribal Settlement Act and the Truckee-Carson-Pyramid Lake Water Rights Settlement Act. The main topics covered by the legislation are:

- “The Fallon Paiute Shoshone Tribal Settlement Act establishes a settlement fund for this tribe totaling \$43 million. The Tribe is authorized to purchase land and water rights to consolidate tribal holdings within the reservation. Specified litigation involving the Tribe must be dismissed.
- “An interstate allocation of waters of the Truckee and Carson rivers. Provisions are made for transfer of water or water rights.
- “A new operating agreement to be negotiated for the Truckee River ([TROA](#)), covering procedures for using storage capacity in the upstream reservoirs in California.
- “A 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.
- “A recovery program is to be developed for the Pyramid Lake cui-ui and Lahontan cutthroat trout. Water rights acquisitions are authorized. A tribal economic development fund of \$40 million is established for the Tribe. Another fund of \$25 million is established for the lake's fishery.

(continued...)

Breslow: It was about that time.

Seney: But Reid's people got in contact with you to bring you up to speed on what was going on with the—

The Water Companies Also Contacted Him to Explain the Negotiated Settlement

Breslow: To explain the settlement. The water companies did the same.

Sue Oldham, Bob Pelcygar, and Mike Buschelman

-
4. (...continued)
- “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. The 1973 Morton decision and final OCAP are recognized, and the Secretary of the Interior is directed to enforce compliance with the **OCAP**.
 - “A number of contingencies are placed on the effective date of the legislation and various parties to the settlement are required to dismiss specified litigation.”

Source: http://www.usbr.gov/mp/lbao/public_law_101-618.html
accessed on January 13, 2010, at 5:30 p.m.

Sue Oldham⁵ was a very strong water attorney for the power company, and probably the most knowledgeable water person that I've met. Bob Pelcygar,⁶ being up there, and a gentleman named Mike Buschelman, who worked for Summit Engineering at the time, a brilliant man as far as water.

Seney: Mike Buschelman?

“I kind of created the Regional Water Planning Commission when we were having these impasses. I had a summit that I called on water, and one of the things that came out of it was the creation of the Regional Water Planning Commission . . .”

Breslow: Yes. I think he knows more than anyone else in this region about water. I put him on the—I kind

5. Ms. Oldham was interviewed for Reclamation's Newlands Project oral history program.

6. Mr. Pelcygar was interviewed for Reclamation's Newlands Project oral history program.

of created the Regional Water Planning Commission when we were having these impasses. I had a summit that I called on water, and one of the things that came out of it was the creation of the Regional Water Planning Commission, and Mike Buschelman was my appointee to that. He, I believe, at some point may have worked for the power company, out of Summit Engineering. 747-8550. If I needed water rights in this town, or if anybody did, he's the one guy who knows how to make the system work.

Seney: Let me go back before we talk about the water summit you convened, to get a sense of what you thought maybe you'd stumbled into when Senator

Reid's people came over and began to talk to you and Sue Oldham about the water problems. As you said, you were a sports person. You had no clue, I take it.

Breslow: Well, it was obvious that we had a water shortage and we were in the middle of a long drought.

Seney: At this point.

Worries about Water in Washoe County

Breslow: So everybody was looking for a way that we could find a better water source for the region.

“ . . . public perceived it as, ‘Growth is bad because we don’t have enough water.’ ”

The public perceived it as, “Growth is bad because we don’t have enough water.”

“The more you learned, the more you realized that we have water; we just weren’t able to store it or

manage it. When you turn most of it loose . . . so that the endangered cui-ui fish can procreate at the expense of the communities . . .”

The more you learned, the more you realized that we have water; we just weren't able to store it or manage it. When you turn most of it loose out of the reservoirs so that the endangered cui-ui fish can procreate at the expense of the communities, it gets people's dander up in the communities in times of change.

“ . . . the water delivery system in Fernley and Fallon was such that the ditches, that it loses so much water that the public here was angry that a system hadn't been developed that would be more efficient. . . .”

Also, the water delivery system in Fernley and Fallon was such that the ditches, that it loses so much water that the public here was angry that

a system hadn't been developed that would be more efficient.

“At one point we offered to help Fallon and Fernley put together a municipal water supply. . . . but they never bid on that. . . .”

At one point we offered to help Fallon and Fernley put together a municipal water supply. If they wanted to, we'd work with them in Washington, etc., etc., but they never bid on that.

Seney: There were numerous offers of that kind of support to them in anticipation of 101-618.

Breslow: Right.

Perspective on the Fallon Community

Seney: And in the so-called Settlement II negotiations, and other times. And you're right, they have not bid on that. What's your general take on that?

When you look down the river toward Pyramid Lake and especially the Truckee Canal and over into Fernley and Fallon and whatnot, what's your general take on that area?

Breslow: Well, it's changed over the years. It's now my belief that there's two totally separate factions in Fallon. There are the farmers and the water district people that have been using the majority of the water for years and years and years, and feel they have a birthright to it. And there is the City of Fallon, which has a City Manager and would like to be a city and be able to manage itself as a city, and needs a water supply, etc., etc., to do that. But all the power and the clout in the county out there has been on the side of the

farmers.

“ . . . the transition of farming water rights to municipal water rights seems to be a natural progression. . . . ”

The sentimental part of me and the love of the American way wants the underdog farmers to be able to keep farming. The more you think about it, though, this is the most dry part of the world. This is not really a farming Mecca. It was created that way by the Federal Government a long, long time ago. The farmers are not being able to compete. They're disappearing. The art of farming has turned into the corporation of farming, and the transition of farming water rights to municipal water rights seems to be a natural progression.

There are some that do not want that to happen, obviously, because they have been doing it their whole lives and their families have been doing it, and couldn't blame them for wanting to have the right to farm. I just think that there's got to be a way to negotiate a middle ground.

In this case, you have some very powerful attorneys, Bob Pelcygar working with the Indian tribes. They have Washington almost as a very strong ally in this, working against the farmers, and they didn't have the clout. They just rather than participate, I think there was a sense of paranoia.

**Sierra Pacific Power as the Water Supplier for
Reno and Sparks and the Pyramid Lake Tribe**

Seney: As you said, there are powerful attorneys here, working on behalf of the Indian tribes, and the city, and the power company. Power company, I suppose, is the key element here, isn't it? Because they're really the water purveyor for Reno and Sparks.

“The public perception is, ‘Never trust a utility company.’”

Breslow: Yes, they are. The public perception is, “Never trust a utility company.” That's never changed.

“The tribe because—their position of, ‘We want everything’ turned off the public here too, ‘Well, they don't care about anything but money. . . .’”

The tribe because—their position of, “We want everything” turned off the public here too, “Well, they don't care about anything but money. They

wouldn't really care about these fish. It's all about money." That's what the public thought.

Seney: Is that what you think?

Breslow: It's my opinion that the attorneys who represent the tribe care about money. The tribe, I hope, cares as much about the cui-ui fish as they say.

Seney: You're smiling. The tape won't see that smile on your face. (Laughter) I know there's a lot of suspicion of the tribe in the community, and yet as I look at all these things, the tribe has been willing to negotiate and work out agreements in the recent water-quality agreement, which you must have been part of.

Negotiating on Behalf of Reno and Sparks

Breslow: And they have. They have been part of that. I

have not been part of the negotiations. I'm there to represent the city at the time of assigning, but Bill Isaeff represented the cities of Reno and Sparks in the negotiations, and he's the assistant manager for the City of Sparks, assistant manager.

Seney: I think I've talked to nearly everybody, but I should talk to him too, shouldn't I?

Bill Isaeff "was the chief negotiator for both cities in all water issues over the last ten years. . . ."

Breslow: He was the chief negotiator for both cities in all water issues over the last ten years. Including the negotiations—

Seney: He works for the City of Reno?

Breslow: City of Sparks. He was the deputy city manager.

I think he has a new title now. But it's Isaeff—I-S-

A-E-F-F.

Seney: Believe it or not, that's how I spelled it.

Breslow: Okay. He's the water attorney.

Seney: You don't know his number by heart, do you?

Breslow: No, but you can get it by dialing 353-2310, the manager's office.

Seney: So you yourself didn't participate in Settlement II negotiations.

Breslow: No.

Seney: Did you and Mr. Sfferazza, when he was mayor, did you get together and strategize?

Breslow: Never.

Seney: Where did Mr. Isaeff get his marching orders from?

“Water issues are so complex that it's very

difficult to understand them, and it takes somebody who spends their life in that field to really get a handle on it. . . .”

Breslow: He represented both cities to sit in and see what he felt was best for the region. Water issues are so complex that it’s very difficult to understand them, and it takes somebody who spends their life in that field to really get a handle on it. But then you have to have a knack for being able to convey that into words that the average person—especially an elected official. Our brains are much smaller than most people’s. (Laughter)

Seney: (Laughter) So you had confidence in him, you and Mayor Sfferazza, that he would represent adequately—more than adequately, perhaps—the interest of Reno and Sparks?

Breslow: Yes.

Seney: He would come once in a while to report to you
and let you know what was going on?

“Basically, the overall thought was the Negotiated Settlement would allow us enough drought storage to give us enough water supply for another twenty to thirty years of growth, and stop all the fighting. . . .”

Breslow: He would report to the City Managers, who would
then disseminate the information to the mayors
and the council. Basically, the overall thought
was the Negotiated Settlement would allow us
enough drought storage to give us enough water
supply for another twenty to thirty years of
growth, and stop all the fighting. And that was
good enough for just about everybody. That’s
why we went forward with it. I didn’t get into the

details of it.

Growth in Water Consumption in Washoe County

Seney: This is Public Law 101-618 you're talking about here. Actually, water is being used at a quicker rate than everyone thought it was going to.

Breslow: I don't know.

Seney: That's my understanding from others.

Breslow: I haven't seen the total amount of acre-feet.

Seney: The fifteen years', twenty years' protection is coming down as the amount of growth has gone up.

Breslow: I would think that the projections on growth at the time were trying to use the three percent growth figure. Sparks, the last eight years is at 1.8 percent growth. Washoe County is a little bit

higher than three, and I think Reno's right around three. So I can't see how the amount of water would be off on their predictions, because it should be right on.

Seney: I'm told by people in the Chamber of Commerce in Reno that they're bumping up against that max a little quicker than they thought.

Breslow: The public perception and maybe some people in the Chamber believe that we have this great surge of growth over the last ten years, when the actual numbers from the State Demographer do not support that.

Seney: Is that right? Of course, when one drives around, you see a lot of new construction and a lot of new housing.

Breslow: The impression that Sparks is that way. There's new golf course communities. There's new housing. But yet, last year, they say that we grew at .04 percent.

Seney: Is that right?

Breslow: And we petitioned to get higher. We said we at least had a 1.5 percent growth here. They said no. So we petitioned the state to try to get higher growth numbers for the city.

Seney: Why would you do that?

Breslow: Because your funding from the state comes with your population. We have these new communities and people are moving in. We just needed it.

Seney: Get anywhere with the dispute?

Breslow: I don't know. I think that's still up in the air.

Building a Grey Water Reuse System in the City of Sparks

Seney: You said you called a water summit at one point.

Tell me about that.

“Honey Lake had paralyzed Washoe County, Sparks, and the City of Reno governments when it came to water issues. . . .”

Breslow: Honey Lake had paralyzed Washoe County, Sparks, and the City of Reno governments when it came to water issues. I thought it was a common sense move that we needed to have a gray water reuse pipeline to our community. We were in the middle of a drought. We have golf course, parks, that we could use the effluent. The county stalled and stalled and stalled and didn't want to address

it. We tried to bring it up through the Regional Governing Board, and they kept it from happening. The City of Reno said they had never looked at an effluent pipeline, and at that time I held up a study that the City of Reno had done two years earlier on that effluent pipeline. So they were lying about it.

Seney: Why did the county oppose it?

Breslow: It's my opinion that opposing that, they were trying to justify the need for a treatment plant in Spanish Springs Valley. Now, that treatment plant was also the treatment plant that was going to funnel the Honey Lake water and make it usable. So if we showed that through the effluent reuse pipeline out to Spanish Springs it would

solve a lot of the water problems and that that plant wouldn't be needed, they would have a hard time justifying the plant for the Honey Lake Project.

“So we built our own water reuse system in the City of Sparks. While the county is still talking and Reno is still talking about it . . .”

So we built our own water reuse system in the City of Sparks. While the county is still talking and Reno is still talking about it, we now have a system that delivers effluent, tertiary-treated effluent, to our major athletic complexes, to Wild Creek Golf Course, and the potential to bring it all the way out through Spanish Springs Valley as soon as that there's some users that will help share the cost of adding the extra couple of

miles of pipe.

Seney: How much water do you think you're saving with this system?

Breslow: I'm not technical.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. JULY 16, 1999.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. JULY 16, 1999.

Breslow: Our water system here was built by the Chinese laborers, I don't know, in the 1800s, these ditches around the county, and that has been the irrigation ditches that the farmers have used and the ranchers have used forever. They, of course, lose water through evaporation, through leakage. And when there's a drought, there's no water in the ditch, so even though you have water rights, you have no water.

“Using the effluent system gives you a drought-proof supply. You’re not depending on a ditch to water your park or your ball field. . . .”

Using the effluent system gives you a drought-proof supply. You’re not depending on a ditch to water your park or your ball field. And there’s some liability to the city when the ball field’s get—the grass dries up and the ground gets hard, and things like that. The golf courses lost probably three and a half million dollars when they had to plow under the course. There was no water to keep grass. So it was a financial insurance policy for the golf course, and a prudent move for the city.

Seney: I take it one of the conclusions that you drew from this water summit was that if you wanted

this kind of system, you'd have to go it alone.

The Water Summit and the Regional Water Planning Commission

Breslow: We put in the system right before the legislature allowed us to have the Regional Water Planning Commission. In the water summit where we talked about effluent and we talked about the need to manage water, I can't remember who it was, but somebody needed me on board on something. I remember a series of meetings at some bank building. I was invited to—and shocked—to see these heavyweights around me. I won't even try to recall who was there. But it was one of those meetings like, "Whoa! Look who's here," where I floated the idea of a Water Planning

Commission in order to get people talking again and get them working. These people said that politically they would work on it.

Lo and behold, six months later, there was legislation introduced, the development of this Regional Water Planning Commission. We have it for land planning, and in many cities you would never need it for water planning, but our water system is based on lawyers, so we needed a system with technical experts.

The other big problem was, when the Honey Lake Project was coming forward, whether to do it or not. There was a Technical Advisory Committee made up of people like Mike Buschelman, and Bill Isaeff, effluent water

experts, technical experts, that reported back to the elected officials on policy. Their report was that the Honey Lake Project was not needed if conservation efforts were undertaken, low-flow toilets were put in, water meters were put in, etc., etc., it wouldn't be needed.

Truckee Meadows Regional Water Planning Commission

Putting in the Regional Water Planning Commission gave the technical experts a real job. It solidified what they were volunteering to do before, which was give the elected officials and the policy-makers some reality on whether or not the water importation project would make sense or what other water issues do make sense. So on

their big picture window to start with, the water importation project was one they looked at. The need for the treatment plant at Spanish Springs Valley was one that they looked at. Whether or not we should have water importation or reuse systems was something they looked at. They've been up and running for a couple of years. The city is involved because the public works director for the city is also on that, etc., etc. So the stakeholders have a piece of that.

Seney: And so you think this has been useful in terms of getting people to take a more regional approach to water problems?

Breslow: It's forced everybody to take a regional approach to water issues. The fear was that the county was

going to do this water importation project—
period—over the strong objections of both the
cities. The Regional Water Planning Commission
took away the total authority of the county and
placed it in a regional authority, which everybody
had a stake in. So it took away the fears and the
paranoia of any entity, whether it be Reno,
Sparks, or Washoe County, running away on
some personal project.

Seney: Do you think this might have the effect, or has it
had the effect, of unifying the approach here in
the Truckee Meadows, in terms of, say, casting a
longing eye at the water that flows into the
Newlands Project, perhaps?

Breslow: I don't know that they've actually looked with a

longing eye at the water in the Newlands Project, as much as using a regional eye on all options.

“Here’s what growth projections are going to be for the next twenty years, forty years, and fifty years. Where’s our water? What are our options? What’s most affordable? What makes most common sense? Which is most manageable? And then how do we finance these various options?” That’s what they have to tackle.

Seney: And the name of this board, again, is?

Breslow: The Truckee Meadows Regional Water Planning Commission.

No Dealings with the Bureau of Reclamation

Seney: What about the Bureau of Reclamation? Have you had much dealing with them over these

matters?

Breslow: None. None.

Seney: Never see them, never hear from them?

Breslow: No.

Seney: And don't call them?

The Federal Watermaster

Breslow: Never heard from them. The only Federal people

I've ever talked to is Gary Stone, the watermaster.

I was just fascinated by his role when I was a

sportscaster. What is a watermaster? I got to

meet him a little bit.

I do know that during our flood we needed

water released from the reservoirs because we

knew there was more water that was going to

overflow the reservoirs. We couldn't get the

Army Corps of Engineers or Gary to turn water lose, because the law on water management says you couldn't. So we had to call up the Senator [Reid], who had to call up somebody in the middle of the night in Washington, who had to call the states. Use some common sense here. But other than that, I haven't had any contact with any of the Federal agencies.

Amount of Time Spent on Water Issues as Mayor of Sparks

Seney: As mayor of Sparks, how much time did water take, do you think?

Breslow: In my first three years, it probably occupied fifty percent of all of my policy time. It was getting up to speed on it, finding out and learning about the importation project, realizing that something fishy

was going on, wondering why, with everybody objecting, the public objecting, the cities objecting, the Feds objecting, the Indians objecting, that they still were going to go forward no matter what. Therefore, something must be up. And trying to find out what that “something” is. It took up way too much time. And it was put to bed for me during the creation of the Regional Water Planning Commission.

After that was created, all of the lobbying and the power company people and everybody that used to make a regular stop in the office and stuff disappeared from my life.

Seney: And headed for the Commission?

Breslow: Yes.

Seney: Interesting. So not only did you achieve a regional view, but you got people out of your hair as well.

Breslow: Yes, but you feel a little left out of the process when they stop coming by. (Laughter)

Will There Be Enough Water for Future Growth in the Region

Seney: (Laughter) I suppose, yes. Is there going to be enough water, do you think, to build out the area to a reasonable level?

Breslow: It's built out to a reasonable level now. We have a 2.2 growth rate just from births. You factor in deaths, and your growth rate's about one percent. If people continue to have children, there will always be growth. Towns that don't grow, become stagnant and die. You know, boarded up

windows, etcetera, etcetera. There will always have to be growth, so therefore there will have to be a solution, a water solution. When you live in a climate like this, your solutions are a lot more technical than [when] you live in Seattle. That's why we need to always look at all the options and try to get the most out of the system that we can, make it efficient, make it fair, equitable, take it out of the hands of litigants and put it in the hands of the users.

The TROA Negotiations

Seney: Have you paid any attention to the TROA negotiations? Is that something you've been concerned about or kept up on?

Breslow: I've been briefed by Mr. Isaefff over the years on

it, but that's the extent of it.

Seney: And again, it's just briefing? You didn't send him off with any directives as to what the city wanted?

“It perhaps was too technical for elected officials to fully understand. They just wanted to find an expert to represent them, so that it would just get over with. . . .”

Breslow: None. No. He would ask occasionally, or he would suggest, “This is what's going on. This is the way everybody seems to think.” Everybody who would look around the room and go, “Okay.” There was never a strategy with the elected officials to go get this or go do that, or go tell them this. That never was the case. It was pretty innocuous, actually, for something that important. It perhaps was too technical for elected officials

to fully understand. They just wanted to find an expert to represent them, so that it would just get over with.

Seney: Well, to some extent, of course, that's in the hands of the power company, who's there with both feet and more. As the water purveyor is the owner of WesPac Utilities, they're using every avenue to make sure water gets here. I suppose if they weren't doing that, you'd have to do more. If this were, say, a municipal water system, then you'd have to worry more about it.

Breslow: You speak the truth.

Importance of Senator Reid's Re-election

Seney: I heard discussions, even among Republicans, in the last election for the United States Senate,

when Mr. Reid, the incumbent, managed to just barely nose out Mr. Ensign, the Republican challenger—and what was the final vote? Two hundred, maybe, votes difference?⁷

Breslow: It was very close, very close.

Seney: Yes, it was. Which is not uncommon in Nevada, I think.

Breslow: No, this was very uncommon. That was probably the closest senatorial election on record.

Seney: Well, when Senator [Paul] Laxalt beat Senator Reid in, what, '74, that was very close, too, may have been even closer. I think there were seventy votes between them or something.

Breslow: I don't recall.

7. Senator Reid's margin of victory was 483 votes.

Seney: Something very close. Anyway, he did win. I've had Republicans say to me, that I've interviewed, that they were going to support Reid.

"I very heavily supported Reid. . . ."

Breslow: I very heavily supported Reid.

Seney: Did you?

Breslow: I'm a Republican. He's a Democrat. He delivered Bill Bradley and the full force of the Senate to the City of Sparks when we had an oil spill, and facilitated the cleanup of that water and a new water supply for our city. He facilitated acquiring thirty million dollars in highway funds so that we could have an interchange in the middle of our downtown for the City of Sparks, where we did not have one. He took on the

Negotiated Settlement when nobody ever wanted to get near it. He has done, in my opinion, more than any other Federally elected official for the citizens of Nevada to get us something out of the Federal Government. You have to know how to use the system in Washington to benefit. You can't be naive to that fact.

I supported Senator Reid on all I could, even though he was in the other party, to the point where, I know—I have no doubt that if I had supported Senator Ensign, that he would be Senator today. Probably several other people would say the same thing.

Seney: You know, the rationalization given for these Republicans I've talked to that were supporting

Senator Reid didn't include the interchange and didn't include the cleanup of the Helm's Pit business, because they were not Sparks residents. Their major rationale was this 90-10 split, California-Nevada, that's in Public Law 101-618, that will become finally effective once the TROA is signed. Their concern was that Reid, this being his baby, would push it. And Ensign had made some kind of ambiguous statements about, "Well, I guess it's a good idea, but I don't really know."

Breslow: Correct.

Seney: Did that figure in your thinking, as well?

Breslow: Not prominently, because I knew that other people were going to be on that issue. But Senator Reid delivered. In Missouri, when I was

in journalism school, I had worked with Kitt Bond, and I'd worked with—God, he ran for President last time, from Missouri, what's his name? Congressman. Anyway, I've seen a lot of people, how they work in Washington. Senator Reid is the best that Nevada's had at it. His personality may not be such that people flock to him and send him roses and kisses, but he is very effective. For Nevada, whether I lived in Sparks or Reno, Senator Reid I knew would get the job done for Nevada, and I would support him for that.

Seney: Anything else you want to add? Any other points?

Breslow: No. I wish I had more information on questions

you're asking me.

Seney: Well, no, no. That's fine. I understand that the role--and former Mayor Sfferazza said the same thing--having WesPac controlled by the power company takes the whole water issue out of your hands. You're not going to be unconcerned about it, because you're going to have some attitude toward growth. I didn't know what yours was--perhaps more pro-growth, in a sense, than his was--but growth is still going to be an issue. But you've got the power company. They want growth, too. They want to sell electricity, and they can't sell electricity without water. So you know it's in good and effective hands.

Breslow: Right.

Seney: They're a very effective corporation. There's no question about it. They take a real interest in this and they have good people to push their interests.

Breslow: Yes, I agree.

Seney: All right. Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

Breslow: My pleasure.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. July 16, 1999.
END OF INTERVIEW.