

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW



Jake Ossofsky
Chief, Operations Division
and
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Mid-Pacific Region



Interview Conducted by:
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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

Jake Ossofsky was born in Sacramento, California, in 1915, but spent most of his childhood and teen years in Stockton. He attended Stockton schools through high school. Following high school graduation, he returned to Sacramento where he attended Sacramento City College. He then entered the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Civil Engineering with a specialty in transportation.

Following college graduation, Ossofsky held a number of engineering positions involved in highway construction, irrigation, and shipbuilding before joining the Army Air Corps. The Air Corps assigned him to Newport News, Virginia, where he worked on wind tunnel design. Once discharged from the Army, Ossofsky found employment with the Army Corps of Engineers in Sacramento, but transferred to the Bureau of Reclamation after only a short stint with the Corps.

Beginning with operating studies upon which the Central Valley Project marketing plan was based, Jake Ossofsky saw many facilities of the project grow from their very beginnings. He was in charge of turning on the pumps at Tracy for the first time and oversaw the initial filling of Folsom, made especially exciting because of coincidental heavy rains and floods. He later was placed in charge of the Auburn Dam planning effort.

Ossofsky is especially proud of those whose careers he helped shape and of his own unique management style. While the Bureau seemingly was struggling with its own self-identity and adapting new styles of management, Ossofsky experienced few problems because he was already practicing what others were seeking.

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.

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For additional information about Reclamation's
History Program see:
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Bureau of Reclamation History Program

**Oral History Interview
Jake Ossofsky**

Petershagen: This is George Petershagen conducting an interview with Jake Ossofsky on behalf of the Bureau of Reclamation. This is the eighteenth of May, and this is Tape 1, Side A.

Jake, to start with, you would please just tell us where you were born and where you went to school through college?

Early Life and Education

Ossofsky: Yes, I was born right here in Sacramento. I grew up mostly in Stockton, went to grade school and high school in Stockton, came back to Sacramento, spent a couple of years at what they called City College [Sacramento City College], and then went to U-C-Berkeley [University of California]. I received a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering in 1937 from the University of California at Berkeley.

Petershagen: And then from Berkeley, you must have gone to work for somebody. Who was that?

Consulting Engineer

Osofsky: Upon graduation I came back to Sacramento and went to work for a consulting engineer that had been in practice in Sacramento for many years. And I spent about eighteen months with him, and moved on to work for an irrigation district that was preparing some sites for construction of dams up in the San Andreas area of California. From there I moved to the city of San Francisco and worked for the Sanitation Department for a few months, and then moved on to a job up in Trinity National Forest, because I wanted to work on highway construction. When that job was complete, I took a job with the Corps of Engineers in Sacramento.

Petershagen: You mentioned earlier an irrigation district that you worked for that was building dams in the San Andreas area. What was the name of the district, do you recall that?

Osofsky: I can't recall the name, it was just a short appointment. It was just in the formative stages, so I don't recall at all.

Petershagen: You worked, you said, in these engineering projects that are largely water-related, but you mentioned you wanted to work on highway construction. What's the reason for that?

Osofsky: My degree was in transportation, which at that time meant highways and railroads, so I was anxious to work on a highway job to see what it would be like. But my entire career actually revolved around water, and almost everything I've done since graduation has been related to water development.

Petershagen: Well, I interrupted you. You'd mentioned you'd worked on highway construction in the Trinity Forest. Where'd you go from there?

Corps of Engineers

Osofsky: I went to work for the Corps of Engineers here in Sacramento, and I stayed with them up until about Pearl Harbor. Just before Pearl Harbor I transferred to Mobile, Alabama, and went to work in their district, just shortly before Pearl Harbor. After Pearl Harbor, our entire work load shifted to water problems, because we were converting various mills into war work, and I stayed with them for about fifteen months and then came back to Sacramento with the Corps of Engineers. I left the Corps of Engineers and took a job with a shipbuilding company in Stockton and worked with them until I entered the armed forces.

Petershagen: And what branch of the armed forces were you in?

Army Air Corps

Osofsky: I entered the [Army] Air Corps in an engineering company. But since I couldn't pass their overseas physical, they eventually sent me to Newport News, Virginia, to work on construction of wind tunnels. And that was in a civilian capacity. I stayed there 'til after V-J [Victory in Japan] Day and was recalled to active duty and discharged. I came back to Sacramento and went back to work for the Corps of Engineers. Shortly thereafter I left them and took a job with the Bureau of Reclamation in their Operation and Maintenance Division.

Petershagen: Now, was there any one thing or group of things that caused you to look to the Bureau of Reclamation for employment?

Going to Work for Reclamation

Osofsky: I was dissatisfied with the type of work I was doing with the Corps, and particularly didn't care for my supervisor, so I transferred to another agency.

Petershagen: I see. So then you went to work for the Bureau of Reclamation here in Sacramento.

Ossofsky: Yes.

Petershagen: And what was your first job with Reclamation?

Special Operations Studies

Ossofsky: Actually, it was working on water supply, but shortly thereafter they decided that they needed some special operations studies to develop a water marketing program. So I was transferred to work under what they then called a watermaster of the Central Valley Project.¹ And under his guidance and direction, I developed the first operation studies on the Sacramento River and the San Joaquin River, by which the Bureau of Reclamation was able to base their water marketing program.

¹ The Central Valley Project [CVP], in California, extends from the Cascade Range in the north to the semi-arid 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. For more information, see Eric A. Stein, "Central Valley Project Overview," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program. www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=253.

Petershagen: And do you recall who the watermaster was that you first went to work for?

Ossofsky: Yes, his name was E. L. Christianson [Eugene L. "Gene" Christianson], who was formerly watermaster for the old Miller and Lux Irrigation District in the San Joaquin Valley.

Petershagen: Now, at the time that you went to work for the Bureau, I think both Friant and Shasta dams were completed, correct?

Ossofsky: Well, they were completing Shasta [Dam].² Shasta hadn't been completed. Millerton Lake, was, I guess, completed—Friant Dam, I should say, was completed.³ But Shasta was

² Located about nine miles northwest of Redding, California, Shasta Dam is a major feature of the Central Valley Project. The 602 foot-high concrete gravity dam was constructed between 1938 and 1945, providing flood control, hydroelectric power, recreational, and water supply benefits. For more information, see Eric A. Stene, "Shasta Division Central Valley Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1996, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=107.

³ Completed in 1942, Friant Dam is on the upper San Joaquin River in Fresno County and provides downstream releases to meet water delivery requirements above Mendota Pool; provides flood control, conservation storage, and water diversions into Madera and Friant-Kern Canals; and delivers water to a million acres of agricultural land in Fresno, Kern, Madera, and Tulare Counties in the San Joaquin Valley. For more information, see Robert Autobee, "Friant Division Central Valley Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1994, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=103.

still in construction stage. In fact, I had actually moved into operations about a year later and was instrumental in actually starting the operation at Shasta and at the Tracy Pumping Plant.

Petershagen: Let's take up Shasta first. When you say you went into operations, and then you were at Shasta and essentially helped bring Shasta on line, what does that mean?

Operations and Maintenance Division

Ossofsky: Well, what happened in our Operations and Maintenance Division is they set up an Operations Office, and Gene Christianson was put in charge of that, and I was his assistant, and we started to build a strictly operating office for the Central Valley Project. And at that time we were going to operate Shasta Dam and the Tracy Pumping Plant. We hadn't started operating either one of them because they still hadn't put in the flood gates in the spillway crest. So we started to build our organization at that time.

Petershagen: The Operations and Maintenance Office and so forth was here in Sacramento?

Ossofsky: Yes, we were in Sacramento, and we were just the Operational Office.

Petershagen: Just operations at that point.

Osofsky: Yes. The maintenance was handled by the Maintenance Division, and we were part of the Operation and Maintenance Division.

Petershagen: I see, so if we were to draw an organization chart, we'd see O&M and down below it would be Operations on one side and Maintenance on the other.

Osofsky: Maintenance on the other, yes. And the Power Section was also in there. They had a Water Section and a Power Section, Operations, and we just operated the water.

Petershagen: I see. So it was at that time that you actually established the Operations Center here in Sacramento?

Osofsky: Yes, we were developing operational criteria and working with the Corps of Engineers to agree on flood control criteria, which affected our releases to the rivers throughout the Central Valley.

Petershagen: How were your relationships with the Corps of Engineers in that capacity? Did Reclamation and the Corps work well together, or were there a lot of issues that they disagreed upon?

Reclamation's Relationship with the Corps

- Osofsky: The part I was involved in was mostly the agreement on flood control diagrams. Fortunately, I had worked for the Corps and actually worked on some of those diagrams prior to going to the Bureau so I was quite familiar with the Corps' requirements *and* the Bureau's requirements, and I participated in negotiations. And they were cordial relationships. I'm not sure the relationships were cordial throughout the entire organization because there was always rivalry between the Bureau and the Corps and the Bureau, the state, and the Corps.
- Petershagen: Did any of those rivalries really affect the way you approached your job at all?
- Osofsky: No, we were actually operating the Central Valley Project and pretty much did as we felt like doing. We had a public relations aspect that we were conscious of. If we were getting into anything that affected policy, then we would consult those above us and that continued on throughout all of operations.
- Petershagen: Then—I think I've got the order of this right—you brought Shasta on line.

Bringing Shasta Dam On-Line

Osofsky: Yes, we brought Shasta on-line. In fact, we started to store water in Shasta above the spillway level, even though the gates weren't installed. We took it up on what they called falsework and saved some of the water and used it later in the year. And then we reached a point where we had to decide on pumping water from the Delta into the Delta-Mendota Canal, and we had to activate the pumps at Tracy.⁴ That was quite a traumatic period because we weren't sure we wouldn't be pumping salt into the canal, and we didn't know how to operate the pumps. We didn't know whether we should turn one pump on or two pumps on—what would be best as far as quality is concerned. Because our contracts for water out of the Delta-Mendota Canal had quality provisions in them, so we're not only required to meet quantity, but also required to meet certain qualities.

⁴ The 115.7-mile long Delta-Mendota Canal was completed in 1951 and carries water southeasterly from the Tracey Pumping Plant along the west side of the San Joaquin Valley for irrigation supply, use in the San Luis Unit, and to replace the San Joaquin River water stored at Friant Dam. For more information, see Eric A. Stene, "Delta Division Central Valley Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1994, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=102.

Petershagen: And the quality concern was?

Osofsky: Too much salt in the water, of course.

Petershagen: I understand that, but it came from not having the storage capacity built up at Shasta yet?

Water Quality in the Delta

Osofsky: No, the ocean intrusion brought, you know, ocean water into the Delta.⁵ During the critical dry years, such as 1931, we had ocean salinity as far up as Sacramento, and anybody that pumped water out of the Delta was getting water that wasn't conducive to agriculture. So when the contracts were signed for *quantities* of water, the irrigators insisted that we meet certain *qualities*. They didn't want us to pump pure ocean water into their service area. So those were built in. The State also had this type of contract with their water users—not only along the State Canal, but as far as Southern California is concerned.

⁵ 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.

Petershagen: I see, so when you brought Tracy up on line then, I think what you're telling me is it was kind of a learn-by-doing experience.

Osofsky: Yeah, it was very traumatic, because no one could agree on what we should do. Our Delta Office had one theory. We had another theory. No one really knew what was going to happen. Unfortunately, the day we decided to turn the pumps on all of our bosses were gone, and it was up to me to make the decision. (Laughter)

Petershagen: Did you make the right one?

Osofsky: No, I didn't. I made the wrong decision! We talked it over internally, and we decided that the least harm we could do was to turn one pump on. So I ordered one pump turned on. Later analysis showed that if we'd have turned more than one pump on, we'd have drawn more fresh water across the Delta and the quality would have been better. So instead of one pump being the answer, we should have turned more than one pump on. It didn't harm our operation, but we learned a lot from it—just that type of experience.

Petershagen: Now what was the source of power to the pumping plant at that time?

Contracts with PG&E

Osofsky: Well, we have contracts with many users of power, and we actually, in effect, supplied our own power, even though it may have been supplied by P-G&E [Pacific Gas and Electric Co.]. Our big contract was with P-G&E, and they took our power and then supplied power to us, and we had contracts that allowed us to use some of their capacity on the lines. So essentially we used our own power.

Petershagen: I see, but I'm still curious as to where it was coming from, because I think this is before the powerhouse at Shasta was on line still, right?

Osofsky: I don't remember.

Petershagen: Okay. (Both chuckle)

Osofsky: I really don't remember now.

Petershagen: Alright. Well, are there any other things that you did in this first "term," so to speak, in operations that we should explore?

Osofsky: No, we were mostly in experimental stages at that time. During that period, Richard

Boke was the Regional Director.⁶ He was quite anxious to get contracts signed with the water users. We had no water contracts so I worked closely with our water marketing people to develop a supply of water that would be useable to the irrigators. One of the major concerns was the amount of water that we could supply. One of the things that influenced the entire development of the Central Valley Project and final determination of its water supply was the critical dry period of 1931 to 1934. So it was incumbent upon us to develop operational criteria which would take care of a dry period such as that.

Dry Cycles

Unfortunately, we experienced a dry cycle recently, over the last several years, and the criteria we had developed then was not used during this dry cycle, unfortunately, I think. But what we evolved was that in a dry cycle the water users would be required to give up one year's supply over a seven-year period. Now, they could do that by taking, say, a twenty-five percent deficiency in their water supply, four years in a row, or two fifty percent deficiencies two years in a row, or spread out in some other manner. But those

⁶ Richard Boke was Mid-Pacific Regional Director from 1947 to 1953.

were written into the contracts eventually, and we developed that criteria, and weren't able to test it until recently.

Unfortunately, when a dry cycle occurs, the farmer will say, "Well, maybe it won't be dry next year, give us a hundred percent this year, and we'll worry about next year, next year." I think this is in part what's happened over the last several years. One of the things we had to determine was whether the crops would survive under the criteria we developed, and I worked with agricultural people and various other operators and no one knew just how drastic we could reduce the water supply. But we *did* know that in 1931 that the irrigation in San Joaquin Valley, although deficient in water supply, did improve in many instances, and that was through additional cultivation, keeping the weeds down and so on. We also knew that perennials, such as almonds and so on, may not bear fruit, but would survive. So this is the criteria we came up with, and used it in all of our contracts.

Petershagen: In establishing this criteria, what were your identifiers of a dry cycle?

Osofsky: Well, we used the 1931-34 period as a key and worked out inflow relationships that would warn us in advance that we were getting a dry cycle. And based on that information we would trigger a dry year criteria.

Another major problem we faced was how to control ocean salinity because of the experience of 1931 with Sacramento being subject to this ocean intrusion. We had to decide how much water we had to release into the Delta to repel that salinity. There'd been a number of studies done by the State of California, and there was a big controversy on how much water is required. But the Bureau essentially took it upon themselves to make their own determination, and we operated on that basis for many years until changes were made based on additional data that was collected and due to environmental aspects.

Sacramento River

There was also a fish problem. We had to maintain certain flows in the Sacramento River. And another problem was navigation. There was a large barge traffic in the Sacramento River. That required a minimum of six feet of depth throughout the entire river. Not many people know this,

but in 1931 there were places on the Sacramento River where you could walk across the river without practically getting your feet wet. It was that dry! So we had a navigation requirement, and that was governed by the Corps of Engineers. We eventually determined that six feet of depth would allow barges to proceed up the Sacramento and return, providing adequate dredging was accomplished with that.

Petershagen: How far north did you have to go with this six-foot depth?

Ossofsky: All the way to Shasta. Yeah, it was required up to Shasta.

Petershagen: And then the Corps was responsible for ...

Ossofsky: It was their criteria—the Corps and the state were responsible for keeping the channel open, yes.

Petershagen: Now, in these early years of the project, I think it really was a matter of taking water from the Sacramento River, largely to supply agriculture to the south, correct?

Ossofsky: Well, we did a couple of things: We firmed the supply on the Sacramento River. During the summer there was always a very low-

flow period in the Sacramento River, so we firmed that supply so that the farmers had an actual supply that met their crop requirements. We also started to pump water at Tracy into the Delta-Mendota to supply some of the irrigators. But we had no contracts, so we were developing contracts. Most of the early days was operating *for* the Sacramento River.

Petershagen: I see. And the contracts you speak of with the irrigators, are those contracts with individual farmers, or are you speaking of contracts with water districts or water users associations?

Settling Water Rights

Osofsky: They were with irrigation districts, with cities, municipalities and so on. So I doubt if there were any individual contracts. A major problem on the Sacramento was settling the water rights—how much of the water was the irrigator entitled to without payment and how much should they pay for? And that was a long, protracted negotiation—was finally settled.

Petershagen: And were you involved in that?

Osofsky: No, I was not involved in any of that part of it.

Petershagen: But you certainly were close enough to see a lot of that go on, I'm sure.

Osofsky: Yes. Well, a lot of our operation studies were used as a basis for the contracts, and later I was involved in all of the water right hearings for the Bureau obtaining rights to the water and settling the whole problem of water rights between the Bureau and the water users. And I spent many, many hours on the stand under cross-examination and also presented the studies that backed our requirements for water rights.

Petershagen: And who was conducting these hearings that you were speaking of?

Osofsky: This was under the State Water Rights Board.

Petershagen: So this was largely done here in Sacramento?

Osofsky: Yes, it was *all* done in Sacramento.

Petershagen: Now, during this first decade or so that you worked for the Bureau, was there somebody that you could identify as your mentor?

Osofsky: Well, I guess E. L. Christianson would be, and over him a man named Martin Blote.

Martin Blote was actually head of our Operations and Maintenance. Martin had been an employee of the State Water Resources and knew the Sacramento River like the palm of his hand and eventually came to work for the Bureau as the water expert for the Sacramento Valley. Christianson worked directly under Martin Blote as the watermaster. I was Christianson's assistant. Actually, I was on special assignment, doing most of the operational studies.

Petershagen: So these two gentlemen largely had the greatest effect on your early (Ossofsky: Yes.) career with the Bureau.

Progressing Up the Ladder

Ossofsky: On my early career, right.

Petershagen: Then as you spent more time with the Bureau you must have progressed up the ladder, so to speak.

Ossofsky: Well, I worked for operations for a number of years, and then I went to work for the Planning Division. At that time, the Planning Division decided they wanted someone in their Hydrology Branch that actually had some experience in operations. Most of the planners had absolutely no

experience in actual operations. So I moved from operations into the planning area and headed the Hydrology Branch and did all of the studies for all of the future projects, for the power operation contracts and so on. And I was there for ten, eleven, years, I guess.

It was kind of an interesting place to be because you're involved with power aspects and water aspects. We worked closely with the Water Rights Branch. We worked with the Department of Justice in the water rights hearings. We worked with the [Southern] California Edison Company and P-G&E in contract negotiations, and I was involved in all of these aspects so it was a rather interesting period in my career, gave me such a variety of work to do.

Petershagen: About when did you make this transfer from operations to planning?

Ossofsky: I don't know. It must have been in the late '50s, early '60s—something like that.

Petershagen: I see. So by that time, if I'm correct, I think most of the major construction projects were completed—certainly most of the large dams.

Osofsky: Trinity [Dam] was completed.⁷ The San Luis [Dam] ... When I moved into planning in hydrology we were just planning San Luis Reservoir, and we worked closely with the state in sizing San Luis Reservoir because part of that San Luis was allocated to the Bureau and part was allocated to the State.⁸ I was involved in that. In fact, I was responsible for setting the size of the federal portion of the San Luis Reservoir, which was one of my first jobs when I moved into the Hydrology Branch.

Petershagen: Okay, good. You really anticipated my next question (Chuckles), which was with regard to San Luis. Now, this seems to be somewhat of a strange relationship, having the state have a part of it, and the Bureau having a part of it. I don't think there's

⁷ Completed in 1962, Trinity Dam, on the Trinity River in northern California, is an earthfill structure 538 feet high. For more information, see Eric A. Stene, "Trinity Division Central Valley Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1994, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=108.

⁸ Completed in 1967, San Luis Dam and Reservoir are major features of a joint Reclamation-State of California project to store supplemental irrigation water for 600,000 acres located in the western portion of Fresno, King, and Merced counties. For more information, see Robert Autabee, "San Luis Unit, West San Joaquin Division Central Valley Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=109.

anything quite like that anyplace else in the Central Valley Project, is there?

San Luis Dam

Ossofsky: No that came about, I think, principally because we were planning an off-stream reservoir, and the state was planning an off-stream reservoir. And what we wanted to do was pick up surface water and store it and use it later. And I think it was at the instigation of a man named Murray, Norman Murray, who was head of the Planning Division at that time, who I think went to the state and said, "Look we both are working on, in effect, the same project. Is it possible that we use the same site and build a dam that will give you the capacity you need and the capacity we need?" I think it was a result of that. This is just hearsay on my part. I think we launched into a combined effort and came up with a size for the state and a size for the Bureau and an agreement that the state would operate that reservoir, under criteria mutually agreed upon.

Petershagen: Was all of this fairly cordial?

Ossofsky: Well, it was tough negotiations, but, yes, it was fairly cordial, I think. There was always rivalry between the Bureau and the

state, and I think both of us were pretty pig-headed. I don't know if you realize what happened, but the original project, although developed a long time ago, was really a state project—the state took it over and wanted to build the Central Valley Project. The Depression killed all that, and the Bureau moved in and started to build it.

Reclamation's Relationship with the State of California

Well, we moved into California, instead of taking the state, in a way, as an equal partner, we didn't do that, it's my understanding. We just moved in and arbitrarily started to build the project, without a lot of help from the state. I think we could have been a lot more careful in our relationships and ended up with a more cordial relationship.

Petershagen: So there was perhaps some animosity built into the state-federal relationship just by the way the project was started.

Osofsky: Yes, I think the state had a lot of animosity. There's no reason why the state and the Bureau shouldn't have had a joint operation office, but the rivalry was too intense, and the state always had, and *still* has, the idea that they should be operating the Central Valley Project. And Wilson [Governor Pete

Wilson]⁹ recently, you know, took that on as a job, and then kind of dropped it, also. So I think we should have evolved into a joint operational office and operated the project ... In fact, I'm convinced almost all water facilities in the Central Valley should be under one direction, one office—even the private reservoirs—so that we maximize the use of our water resources. We eventually have to come to that. Whether politically that's sound or not, I don't know.

Petershagen: I see. Let's hold it right there, and we'll start again on the other side of the tape.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1.
BEGINNING SIDE 2, TAPE 1.

Petershagen: This continues the interview with Jake Ossofsky; this is Tape number one, side B.

Now Jake, you were telling me before that you thought, or it's your idea, that there should be more state and federal cooperation in managing the Central Valley Project. As you were working in operations and then in planning did you try to start that sort of a cooperative effort?

⁹ Pete Wilson served as Governor of California from 1991 to 1999.

Osofsky: I did not. There was a lot of talk about it, I think a lot of discussion, at higher levels. But I was not involved in that at all.

Petershagen: I see. Then from your planning job, as I understand it, then you went back to operations.

Assistant Planning Engineer

Osofsky: Well, what they did is, they decided they needed an Assistant Planning Engineer, or two Assistant Planning Engineers, so they took the Head of Economics and the Head of Hydrology, which was me, and moved us up to the front office as assistants, and I took over all of the branches that were doing the planning, and they were under my direction. And in that job I was fortunate enough to coordinate one of the final reports on Auburn Dam.

Petershagen: Before we start on Auburn, what was your title at this point?

Osofsky: Assistant Project Development Engineer.

Petershagen: And you were ...

Ossofsky: I worked directly for a man named Vernon Hansen, who was Regional Project Development Engineer.¹⁰

Petershagen: And that was in operations?

Ossofsky: No, that's in Planning Division. That *was* the Planning Division, actually.

Petershagen: I see. Let me ask you, as kind of a sidelight, in some organizations that I've worked in, the planners were always treated by the others as some kind of outsiders. Would that be true in your case with the Bureau?

Planning Division

Ossofsky: Well, it depended on the individual. The designers, you know, looked down upon the planners, and the planners looked down upon the designers, and it was all this kind of rivalry. But the Planning Division needed the cooperation of almost any organization in the Bureau. So one of the

¹⁰ Vernon Hanson participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See, Vernon Hanson, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by George Petershagen, Bureau of Reclamation, Sacramento, California, in 1994, edited by Brit Allan Storey, further edited and desktop published by Andrew H. Gahan, 2016, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

big jobs I think I had was working with the design people, the grant acquisition people, the operational people, and I made a special effort to develop a relationship so that I could walk into the Design Division and say, "Look, I need this. I need it by tomorrow. Can you help me?" Instead of just going down there and saying, "I want this. Get it to me," type of thing.

So I looked at my job as really a facilitator, so that the people working for me could do the best job they possibly could under the circumstances. So I worked rather hard on developing relationships with others outside and internally, so that I had a pretty good working relationship with most people that I worked with. That wasn't always the case with a lot of the people. They thought their bailiwick was most important (Chuckles) in all of the work being done.

Petershagen: And in your capacity as the Assistant Director, I think you called it ... (Ossofsky: Project Development, yeah.) How many people did you have working for you?

Assistant Director Project Development

Ossofsky: I can't remember. There were at least six or eight branches under me—various projects. Each branch handled separate projects.

There were four or five, six, operating branches, like Hydrology and Power Branch, which the other Assistant Project Development Engineer handled. And he and I worked very close together, fortunately we were compatible, and so we had an excellent working relationship. But in those branches there might have been six to ten people, so maybe I had sixty, seventy people under me. I can't recall.

Petershagen: Now a few minutes ago you dropped a word, "Auburn Dam," which, of course has not, at least not yet, been completed. But I think it's fair to say that was largely your baby. Is that a fair assessment?

Auburn Dam

Ossofsky: Well, it wasn't my baby. Actually, all of our reports were put together by a Report Branch. At that time Bob Pafford was the Regional Director.¹¹ He wanted to put out a

¹¹ Robert J. Pafford served as Mid-Pacific Regional Director from 1963 to 1973 and participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Robert J. Pafford, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, in Sacramento, California, in 1994, edited by Brit Allan Storey, further edited and desktop published by Andrew H. Gahan, 2017, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

report that he thought we could get through Congress. And Bob and I had an excellent working relationship. When he went out on speeches and so on, I used to go with him, handle a lot of the material for him and so on. So he had a lot of confidence in me. And he decided that I ought to coordinate this report and called me in and put me in charge. And he had very specific parameters to follow.

So I coordinated that report and if I recall, we could have built Auburn at that time for less than \$700 million. I think the cost today is somewhere between two-and-a-half and three *billion* [dollars], but no one would pick that up. And we had some concern as far as earthquakes and so on. Everything has delayed that project. And the water supply wasn't all that great because the only amount of water available with Auburn would be that that would be surplus through Folsom and that wasn't a lot. So the cost would have been high for water and for power both. It still is.

Petershagen: I see. You mentioned earthquakes. Did that cause delays and plan revisions, that kind of thing?

Osofsky: Yes, they got concerned about some of the fault lines up there. After spending a

tremendous amount of money developing the foundation, they went in and concreted and bolted the foundation together. This problem of earthquakes came up, and the project just kind of ground to a halt. There was a lot of dissention and disagreement among the various agencies on what the conditions were, and what kind of a dam to build there, or whether we should build at that site. And they're still arguing on what type of dam that they should build there. And we need more flood control based on the new criteria, developed by the Corps. So that thing has to be built eventually, to some degree.

Petershagen: But if you were to point your finger at any one thing that stopped the construction of the Auburn Dam, it would be the earthquake considerations? Do I hear that in what you said?

Ossofsky: I think that that was the principal start of it and then the rest of it was whether we wouldn't damage some of the environment. As the years went on, the environmentalists gained strength in terms of the needs for the environment, because the Bureau pretty largely ignored the environment in their original concept to develop the Central Valley Project. We took care of the fish.

We took care of water quality. But we didn't really take care of much else. And that wasn't in the legislation. We were bound by the legislation that Congress had passed. But as environmentalists gained strength, then these other elements were included in our deliberations. So I think there's a lot of factors that delayed it—and the cost, rising costs, and no one to pick up the check. And the fact that the federal government hasn't got the money to put into projects that they did in the past.

Petershagen: You mentioned that eventually we are going to have to build that dam someday to meet flood control criteria.

Flood Control Criteria

Osofsky: We need flood protection for Sacramento, yes.

Petershagen: Do you expect to see that happen?

Osofsky: I don't know. I don't like what's going on right now. They're talking about a dry dam, and I don't like that at all. I think a good-sized dam there for water *and* power both, would be a benefit to the area, and that'd be a tremendous amount of recreation. Folsom [Reservoir] has proved that. Our loss in some of the environmental portions of the

area, I think would be more than compensated by other things—recreation, the fact that we’ll have power, and the fact that we’ll have flood control for Sacramento, because this area is just growing by leaps and bounds, and from here to Folsom, especially, this whole north area is being rapidly developed.

First Day of Operations at Folsom Dam

You know, one of the things that people don’t realize, I happened to be operating the first day Folsom [Dam] went into operation.¹² We finished Folsom, and we had one of the largest floods we ever had, and we filled Folsom in one day. (Petershagen: Oh, my goodness!) A million acre feet. Part of the Folsom Project—and that, by the way, was constructed by the Corps of Engineers—was to increase the levies here at Sacramento. At that time the levies could carry about 65,000 cubic feet

¹² Constructed by the Corps of Engineers in 1956 Folsom Dam is on the American River 23 miles east of Sacramento, California, and is the main feature of the American River Division of the Central Valley Project. For more information, see Wm. Joe Simonds, “The Central Valley Project, American River Division, the Folsom and Sly Park Units, the Auburn-Folsom South Unit,” Denver: Bureau of Reclamation History Program, 1994, www.usbr.gov/history/projhist.html.

per second. I think the new design capacity was around 130,000-135,000 cubic feet per second. So at that time we felt Folsom flood control, plus the downstream levies, would handle anything we needed.

Folsom filled up. We had to get the water *out* of Folsom because there was a possibility of another big rainstorm so I started to release water. We couldn't afford to let the inflow go uncontrolled because it would overtop the dam. So I started ordering releases out of Folsom. In the meantime, they started to sandbag the levies here, and I took it to the top of the sandbagged levies, and we actually managed to get through the flood. And I got a lot of curses and so on because the people were afraid the River Park was going under. There wasn't any choice. We had to evacuate Folsom. We couldn't let it go uncontrolled. The whole area would have just washed out. So that was a fun day!

Petershagen: Now, when you say you were operating that day, that means to me, I think, you're talking about the whole system, the whole Central Valley Project.

Operating the Central Valley Project

Ossofsky: Yes, but I was ordering all the releases from Folsom.

Petershagen: So when you're doing this, you're coordinating the releases, correct? Stopping releases from other dams (Ossofsky: Yes.) and taking more from, in this case, Folsom.

Ossofsky: Right. Mostly we were interested at that time in the American River. We had to protect the city, and that was our main thrust. We were safe on the Sacramento [River]. There wasn't a major problem. In fact, I was the only one around, I think, at that time. It just so happened these things happened, and I was ordering releases out of Folsom, and listening to them scream to cut back, wanted me to cut back.

Petershagen: Quite an exciting way to bring a new dam on line.

Ossofsky: We thought it paid for itself the first year.

Petershagen: Are there any other things you'd like to describe from this time when you were involved in project development, to get back to that?

Ossofsky: Well, I deviated. No, I enjoyed project development. I think Auburn was our last

big thrust while I was there. I was contemplating retirement about that time, because I'd pretty much done almost everything I'd wanted to do. My family didn't want to go to Washington. There were opportunities for advancement in Washington. One day I'm walking down a hall, and the Chief of Operations came along and said, "You know there's a job open as the Chief of Water Control and Operations. Are you going to apply?" And I said, "No, I think you ought to hire a younger man for that." He said, "I want you to put your application in." So I put my application in, and they hired me. And I took over the Water Control Branch under the Chief of Operations of the Central Valley Project and did that because they wanted to change an autocratic organization into a participative type of management and proceeded on that basis.

Petershagen: Before we talk about the change in management style and structure, your title at that time was Chief of Water Control?

Chief of the Water Control Branch

Osofsky: Chief of Water Control Branch, I guess, Chief of the Water Control Branch, yeah.

Petershagen: But it was "Chief" and not "Director"?

Ossofsky: No, Chief.

Petershagen: Well, then let's talk about this new subject that you introduced, the change in the management style. That seems to be something that I think I hear in your voice something that you're pretty proud of.

Reclamation's Management Style

Ossofsky: Well, this really originated in Washington. Someone in Washington decided that they needed a different type of management. A management where people would really relate to each other and talk to each other. So they started a new program and hired consultants and started to train what they called facilitators, in-house facilitators, so they could take over eventually, and do the training. And I was selected as one of the participants in that. I was trained as a facilitator and eventually did work as a facilitator with various offices throughout the Region, and even Washington Office, as part of their training program.

Petershagen: Before you got into this, how would you describe the management style of the Bureau?

Ossofsky: It varied throughout the various divisions, depending on the head of the division; depending on the Regional Director. The program I'm talking about actually was completely wiped out when we got a new director. He didn't want any part of that type of management so we discontinued the entire program. So it depended on the director himself. I'd say that most of the management was from the top down.

Petershagen: It was fairly autocratic, a military kind of organization almost?

Ossofsky: Not as bad as the Corps, but something on that order.

Petershagen: Along that line.

Participative Management

Ossofsky: I guess you didn't get any feedback from the bottom up. What they were trying to do was change that so they did get feedback, and that's what this participative management attempted to do.

Petershagen: Can you recall any specifics associated with it? If I worked for you, for example, how might our relationship have changed under this new management?

Ossofsky: Well, what this management did is—it had a lot of training aspects—but one of the things is they'd put the boss and his whole staff in a room, and the boss was no different than his staff. And they'd exchange ideas. They'd work under a facilitator. They were free to say whatever they wanted, which was very difficult to tell their boss that they didn't like his management style, but we each went through that type of thing. And you know, we either learned by it or we suffered and moved on. So it changed so that people did come to you and say what they felt like saying. And you learned to take it in the manner that it was given.

Petershagen: Were there managers and supervisors that just couldn't accept it? (Ossofsky: Absolutely.) Were there some that had to retire?

Ossofsky: Well, they didn't have to accept it. It wasn't mandatory. A lot of them would have nothing to do with it. A lot of them would not take the training. You could refuse. It wasn't mandatory so there were many divisions that didn't get involved at all. I strongly supported it because I always believed in that type of management. I made sure I got into the program, and I got involved pretty heavily. And I was able to

do that because I developed a pretty good staff so I didn't have to be there all the time.

But to illustrate the type of management that prevailed when I took over, all the orders for turning the valves came from Sacramento. The former chief always sent a telegram, always signed his name to that order. If his name wasn't on it, the various field offices were not empowered to operate. When I came in, I asked the staff to please recommend a change, and the only thing they could come up with was that I always sign the order. I didn't believe that was necessary. Under the broad criteria that we developed, my operators could go ahead and send the orders. We eventually got that working.

It was very traumatic for people to take that responsibility. In fact, the former boss—if you had to make a change at three a.m., you called him. You woke him up, and you got *him* to okay the change. I didn't want anybody to wake me up at three o'clock in the morning unless there was a crisis. So we made those kind of changes in the organization, at least the operations organization.

Petershagen: I see. How about if we shift gears a little bit and talk about the electrical side of the

project? Did you have very much to do with that at all?

Electrical Side of Operations

Ossofsky: In terms of the operation, you mean?
(Petershagen: Right.) Yes, the operation of the water and power under the Chief of Operations ... Now the Chief of Operations at that time pretty much handled the electrical part of it. He was an electrical engineer, and I pretty much handled the water part of it so he did most of the electrical work. We had—I don't know what it was called—but we had a Power Branch under the Chief of Operations, as we had a Water Branch. So that was really in a way divided authority, but our dispatchers were under both of us, in effect. They had the water dispatching as well as the power dispatching. So he did most of the ...

Petershagen: I see. From the power side, as you're changing the mode of operation with various dams, there must be power considerations that have to go into that as far as generating capacity for the amount of water that is coming out of one dam versus another? Not just the water decisions.

Big Power Dams

Ossofsky: No, it's not a water ... Most of our decisions really, in a way, were power decisions because that's where our revenue came from—or most of it. Shasta has an afterbay, Keswick [Dam], so all big power dams have afterbays so you can smooth out the releases.¹³ And we have contracts with Pacific Gas and Electric Company, and so on, so all our coordination was ... And we were tied together so we coordinated closely with P-G&E. So the dispatchers were in constant touch with dispatchers at P-G&E and some of the other facilities. So there was an on-going, I guess constant, exchange of information and with the state also, as the state project came on-line. And also, by the way, I had a meteorologist under my direction, eventually, who worked with the Weather Bureau and was a coordinator and so on.

So we tried to tie all the various outfits that we needed to work with together. So we were always conscious of power. And then we were also required to assist P-G&E when they needed some peaks and so on. See, our water operation produced power

¹³ Located on the Sacramento River 9 miles downstream from Shasta Dam, Keswick Dam is a 157-foot-high concrete gravity dam, with a crest length of 1,046 feet. Keswick Dam acts as an afterbay dam controlling river fluctuations from the Shasta Powerplant.

that did not have peaking capacity, because the summer, you know, is just strictly a water operation—couldn't meet the power loads—and that's when the loads are greatest. So P-G&E in effect—our contract with P-G&E, in effect, was P-G&E acted as our steam plant because steam plants are the ones that firm that power supply. So we were always on constant give and take with P-G&E as far as power generation was concerned.

Petershagen: As I recall, the original concept for the Central Valley Project was to include a big steam plant (Ossofsky: Yes.) to take care of that peaking, and (Ossofsky: That's right.) it never did really get built.

Ossofsky: Politics didn't allow it. (Chuckles) Yes, that was way before my time.

Petershagen: I would imagine, though, that politics entered into a lot of the decisions that you saw made during your career.

Ossofsky: Yes, that's correct. Right.

Petershagen: Can you identify a year that this participative management style was adopted? If we could go back to that for just a minute.

Participative Management in Other Agencies

Osofsky: I would say about maybe 1970, '71, something like that. Yeah, something in that order.

Petershagen: Did you notice, were there other federal agencies trying to do the same thing about that same time?

Osofsky: I understand from the consultants that there were other agencies, but I'm not familiar with what they did at all.

Petershagen: I see. And so you didn't have any exchanges then I guess with other agencies with regard to this.

Osofsky: Not with other agencies. Just with the Region and with Washington, our Washington Office. There were some training sessions in Denver where Washington people participated. I was one of the facilitators, and that I remember.

Petershagen: So then you didn't see the Corps, for example, trying to do this same thing?

Osofsky: No, I'm not aware the Corps even tried it. They may have, but I'm not aware of it.

Petershagen: You almost sound as though you'd be surprised if you found out that they did.

Osofsky: Yes, I would be. The Corps was more of a militaristic organization, and held more to that line of command, in effect. Now, they may have changed. I'm sure they have over the years.

Petershagen: It seems to me that your career is somewhat strange in that you spent so much time here in Sacramento. Do you agree with that, that that makes you a little bit different from most Bureau employees?

Career Stayed in Sacramento

Osofsky: Yes, that's right.

Petershagen: A friend of mine refers to a lot of Bureau people as "Bureau gypsies," that just seem to move around a lot.

Osofsky: Well, a lot move for promotions. You know, when you got a promotion, you moved. My opportunities were there, but my family came first, and I was tempted a number of times to go to Washington. I really didn't like Washington because I spent about three months there in a training session. I didn't like the work they did.

This was where the action was, and that's where I wanted to be. I guess I enjoyed the variety of work that I did here. Being in the Hydrology Branch kept me in touch with almost all the aspects. And operations was fun. You know, it was just an enjoyable time to operate. You can plan and plan and plan—it's all paper—but to take something and actually operate it once it's built, there's a lot of satisfaction in that. And there were a lot of problems.

Petershagen: Just intuitively it seems that something like the operation of the Central Valley Project would be “the fun part” of working for the Bureau of Reclamation.

Osofsky: *I* thought it was—some people didn't like it—especially when I moved up to the Chief of Operations, and eventually moved up to be Assistant Regional Director, and I moved up to be Chief of Operations.

Petershagen: When was that?

Osofsky: That was about the early '70s, I guess. I retired in 1974, I think I spent five years in operations, so it had to be early '70s—'70 or '69.

Petershagen: So that covers the period when the participative management style was coming in.

Ossofsky: Yeah, very much in there, right.

Petershagen: And I take it from what you've said, that you tried to implement this throughout the Operations Division then.

Implementing Participative Management within the Division

Ossofsky: We did. We did quite a bit of it, right, and some other offices. I worked with a training officer here in Sacramento and acted as a facilitator when they went into other divisions. And the field offices, we did a lot of work with our field offices. And I did it with my staff because once I was Chief of Operations *I* changed the type of management that had prevailed before and always got all of my chiefs together, my Field Office Chiefs, like Shasta, and Fresno, and the various offices. And we sat down and *we* worked the budget out, not *I* worked the budget out. And I worked with Mike

Catino,¹⁴ Head of Finance, and tried to get a consensus of where we spent the money.

Our operating budget was roughly about \$40 million a year. I had about 650 employees under me. About twenty-odd million was for purchase of power, twenty, twenty-four million. The rest was for operation and maintenance. It wasn't enough. We never had enough money to completely do our maintenance. So we had to sit down and make some hard choices: what do we fix? what needs repairing? what takes priority? Well, to sit down and ask for Shasta to okay a priority down at Tracy was a far cry from what management ever did before. I tried to get my staff to make those decisions as a group, saying, "Here, what is best for the operation organization?" It's a pretty traumatic kind of thing. But I gave them a choice, "Either you make the

¹⁴ As well serving as being the Head of Finance in the Mid-Pacific Region, Michael A. Catino went on to become the Regional Director from 1981 to 1983. Mr. Catino also participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Mike Catino, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, and Donald B. Seney, both of the Bureau of Reclamation, from 1994 to 1995, in Sacramento, California, edited by Brit Allan Storey, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

decision, or I'll arbitrarily make the decision. You can have a choice."

Petershagen: That's interesting. And even some of those that worked for you did not want to take that responsibility.

Ossofsky: No, you know, it's easier to have someone else make the decisions because you can always point the finger. But when *you* make the decision, that's where the buck stops. (Chuckles)

Petershagen: That's interesting.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2.
BEGINNING SIDE 1, TAPE 2.

Petershagen: This continues the interview with Jake Ossofsky, on May the eighteenth, this tape 2, side A.

Jake, earlier you were talking about your management style and some specific beliefs that you had as well as implementing the new style that the Bureau was trying to bring about so would you care to share some of your ideas with us?

Management Style

Osofsky: Yes. In most technical organizations the theory was that if you were a top technical man, you would make a good manager. That didn't prove to be the case. A lot of people who were *very* good technically were very poor managers. It was my idea that we develop managers, and they could actually pick up some of the technical aspects. When *I* had the opportunity to hire people I looked at their management skills, or their potential at least, for management skills. And once I found them and was convinced they could actually absorb the technical part of it I would give them the authority to go ahead and develop. And that way, I think I developed an excellent staff. Fortunately I hired a person to take over the Water Control Branch, my former job, when I moved up into Chief of Operations, who didn't know very much about water, who was a mechanical engineer. But I liked what I saw in terms of his potential. He worked out very well. He's going to retire as the Western States Power Manager, I think.

Petershagen: Who is that?

Osofsky: Dave Coleman.¹⁵ Dave and I kind of worked out a theory of our own in terms of what we'd do if we hired the people we wanted. If we got the type of people we wanted they wouldn't stay with us very long because their growth would be such that they'd need to move on, you know, accept higher challenges. So we evolved into an organization where part of the group would be those that enjoyed what they were doing, or competent in that field, and wanted to stay there. Part of the organization would be those that were highly competent, could continue to grow and move on. So we knew we had a stable base for our organization as well as a group that would bring in new ideas, would be creative, could develop new things.

And the thing that we'd find—at least *I'd* find in most organizations is that creativity is not rewarded. It was not even considered. We don't hire people because they're creative. We hire people because

¹⁵ David Coleman participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See David G. Coleman, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by George Petershagen, Bureau of Reclamation, in Sacramento, California, edited by George Petershagen and Brit Allan Storey, 2011, www.usbr.gov/history/oralhist.html.

they don't make waves. And that may be great for the boss and may prevent a lot of ulcers, but it doesn't produce, you know, a good product. So I had people that gave me plenty of ulcers, (Chuckles) but they did produce. And we had what I thought was a good organization.

I let a lot of the people do work that ordinarily the Chief of Operations would do. For instance, go out and meet the public, talk to the public so that they built a rapport up—especially for our operating group—with the people that were *on* the river: the farmers, the irrigation districts, and so on. So they could pick up the phone and talk about their problems and so on. So my thrust was really to develop a group that would participate, you know, that would have a full say. And when I had decisions to make my staff participated. I didn't always follow their advice, but I got the best I could out of them and then made my decision and pretty much worked on a consensus.

Petershagen: So you would say then, I'm sure, that you helped the Bureau's public image quite a bit by having your staff work much closer with the water users and the customers and so forth. (Ossofsky: I assume so.) And I think what I hear you saying is that was a new

approach as far as the Bureau was concerned?

Management Style New for Reclamation

Ossofsky: For our organization, yes. One of the things, I had a good rapport with Bob Pafford, our Regional Director. He gave me a very free hand. When they put me in there ... They wanted me there, I knew that. I would operate the project, you know, the way I felt it *should* be operated. When I thought I was impinging on policy or it may cause some public relations [problem], I would get up and walk into the Director's office and sit down and say, "Bob, we've got a problem to talk about." And we'd talk about it, and he was the type of Director that *wanted* to do that and wasn't negative about that kind of an aspect. So we'd work out our own approach and I'd go ahead, or he'd pick up the phone and call the Colonel at the Corps, and set the stage, or the state, and so on, which had to be at *his* level, instead of mine. So that worked out good, you know, that we were able to do that kind of thing without a lot of adverse publicity so that people understood what we were doing and why we were doing it. I think there was a lot of spin-off in terms of that.

But again, it depended on the people that were there. You can train people to death—it doesn't do any good unless they're ... I guess they're willing to risk, because I think a participative management is really a risk-type of operation because you put yourself on the line. You're responsible. You can't point your finger at somebody else and say, "It's his decision." It's *our* decision, you know? And I've been in that spot where the Assistant Regional Director came in and started to talk to me one time. I said, "I think you're trying to bawl me out." (Laughter) I said, "You know, we made a mistake"—one of my people made a bad mistake—I said, "We made a mistake, and all I can do is hope we won't do it again. But if you're trying to make me feel bad you're wasting your time. I feel bad as it is." And he left and that was it. So you had to go out and say, "Hey, I made a mistake." And that's a very difficult thing for someone to do because you're always protecting yourself. And I found that to be true.

In fact, Dave Coleman, I remember saying, "Jake, you shouldn't be talking that way. You know, there were a lot of people that wanted your job and didn't get it. You're too open with these people." And I didn't feel that way. I felt that you *had* to be open, and I didn't think it was that much of

a risk. So it's my style. It's my type of management. And I think it worked, because I think a *lot* of the people that went through my office ended up in some pretty responsible jobs, and that's because they had an opportunity to develop.

Petershagen: So you mentored along, (Ossofsky: Yes, I mentored.) you nurtured, quite a few careers.

Mentoring Careers

Ossofsky: I think so, and I also made sure they got paid. I made sure ... I fought tooth and nail with Personnel to recognize my people and so on. And I gave awards where I thought they were necessary because they were the ones that really ran the organization, you know. I was there just to facilitate them doing a good job. *That's* how I looked at myself. I think a leader is mostly a facilitator. He sets the policy, you know, the guidelines, helps the people do what they're supposed to. It's amazing how well they perform. And those that don't you move out of the way if you have to.

Petershagen: How about if we take a look at other changes that you might have seen in Reclamation? Over your career, it went

largely from a very exciting construction kind of an organization ...

Ossofsky: Yeah. See, I came to the Bureau when pretty much all the construction was over, actually.

Petershagen: Right. And it was making the transition from that sort of a thing to strictly an operation. (Ossofsky: Yes.) How did that influence employees and morale throughout the Bureau?

Transition from Construction to Water Management

Ossofsky: Well, we still had a pretty vigorous planning program, so you still had that group operating. A lot of the construction people moved into our Design and Construction Division. In fact, Mac McCrystle [William McCrystle] was, I think, the Construction Engineer at Shasta, and he ended up being the head of our Design and Construction Division in the Region here. So a lot of those people had hands-on experience in construction and moved into Design. So there was a lot of design going on for planning purposes with a lot of land acquisition—we were still buying land for canal locations and so on. A lot of planning money was still available.

And then we were growing in terms of Operations. And our Operations Branch in Sacramento was rather small because most of it was done in the field. What we did is just centralize the operation at Sacramento. All the orders went out to the various field offices and coordinated. What happened under the previous Chief of Operations and myself—there actually were only two Chiefs of Operations in all of the Region. There was the man before me, and I. They wiped that job out later, which I think was a mistake, not so much the title, but the way they operated. Under the Chief of Operations, each Field Division reported to the chief, and the chief reported to the Director.

And when I left, they broke that up eventually. Each Field Office reported to an Assistant Director, of course, different assistant directors. So there really wasn't the type of coordination. They were each independent, in effect. Under a Chief of Operations they weren't independent. They were part of an organization, and they made decisions as a group. At least when I was chief they made decisions as a group. And that meant that they *all* felt responsible for the entire project, and not just their phase of it. So I think that's changed for the worse.

I don't know how it's working now because I've been gone for twenty years.

Petershagen: But that organization style sounds more like the Field Offices have more autonomy and looked at themselves maybe more as separate organizations (Ossofsky: Yes.) whereas with your style they were more a part of the overall team.

Ossofsky: The overall team, yes. I felt that way. Because we *had* to. You know, if a generator failed we needed a half a million dollars to rewind it, where are we going to get the money? We had to coordinate our efforts, and that generator had to be rewound. You know, we had to do that. Of course, that money would come out of Denver or Washington, but people would realize that that would impinge on *their* O&M money, that they would have to give up something. And I'm sure it still works that way, but the thing is, I like the idea of them feeling that they're *one* organization, they just happen to be one part of an organization, and not just a separate entity, and operating on their own. And I think that fosters a better relationship with water users and power users.

Peripheral Canal

Petershagen: Let's take up the issue of the Peripheral Canal, just change subjects thoroughly now. Now you must have ... In the course of your career with the Bureau, as a planner and in your other jobs, at various times the idea of the Peripheral Canal, some version of it, has come up, so you must have had your hand in that at different times, correct?¹⁶

¹⁶ In the 1960s and 1970s, another canal was proposed, one that would divert the Sacramento River at Hood around the “periphery” of the Delta region. This canal would have been about 43 miles long and would have delivered canal water directly to the state and federal pumps near Tracy. The 1982 design for the canal would have enabled it to carry 15,000 cubic feet of water per second.

The “release points” designated on the plan would enable the Department of Water Resources to provide water from the canal into existing channels of the Delta to address flow needs for salmon migration and water quality and water level concerns. This required the public to trust DWR and its contractors to protect fish and water quality—a situation analogous to trusting the fox to protect the henhouse. Instead, the issue went to the voters for final disposition. Subsequently, a public referendum (Proposition 9) supporting the legislature's approval of bonds for the canal was defeated in June 1982 by a vote of 63 to 37 percent of the electorate.

By 1998, the CalFED Bay Delta Program developed three alternatives for moving water through or around the Delta, including a so-called “isolated conveyance facility.” This plan called for a canal smaller in capacity than the original peripheral canal (around 5,000 cubic feet per second). The CalFED plan also included an ecosystem restoration plan, a multi-species habitat conservation plan, a levee repair strategy, reservoir planning studies, an ambitious science program to study Delta estuarine and river systems, a water transfer program, an “environmental water account” program to mitigate export

Osofsky: Not too much. That was handled a lot by our planning, and I've been away from that. But you have to go back before that. There's an area that never was taken care of. When the state built their state canal to Southern California the Bureau built the Delta-Mendota Canal and the Friant-Kern Canal. We knew that there'd be drainage from these lands and that drainage had to be taken care of. So the Bureau, and the state, too, thought we needed a drain. We had to drain the San Joaquin Valley. The Bureau was willing to go ahead with that project as I understand it, but the state refused for some reason or other so the drain was never built.

So there was a lot of drainage water entering the San Joaquin River and draining towards the Delta. That was harmful to the environment, the fish, and various industries down along the Delta. For instance, in Contra Costa County there's a manufacturing plant that manufactures cartons for overseas shipment. The

pumping losses of fish and of water to contractors, and programs for water use efficiency and drinking water quality. This plan failed to receive sufficient funding, and (with the exception of the science program) essentially has been retired. See "Peripheral Canals, Way Past, Past and Present," <https://www.c-win.org/peripheral-canals-way-past-past-and-present.html>.

manufacture of cartons takes a lot of water. They manufactured some of these. They sent them overseas, and they found that the material in there rusted. There was too much salt in the water when they made the cartons, and that salt picked up moisture and that spoiled the product. So you had to be careful.

The drain was never built so they built the Kesterson Reservoir. They started to dump all of that horrible drainage water into Kesterson. That caused a lot of environmental problems—the ducks, you know, were just decimated and so on.¹⁷ So they had to have a way to get good water over to the pumps, and the Peripheral Canal was one of the schemes. And that's not an early plan. They'd talked about that years and years. I guess the state and the Bureau have worked on that, but I never really got

¹⁷ “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).

involved in that at all. It was before my bailiwick at the time.

Petershagen: It sounds like from what you've said, though, that you probably would find some combination of the Peripheral Canal and a drainage of the San Joaquin far superior to what eventually happened.

Ossofsky: I don't know now. See, one of the things that happened is that we selected an outflow from the Delta to repel salinity based on some old state studies. That was way too low. So that had to be increased. That reduced the water marketing program. To dump additional drainage into that, it would take maybe greater outflow—we don't have the water. Some way or other that water has to be reclaimed. See, I think eventually our thrust has to go into reclaiming water in California, whether its ocean water or drainage water. We're not going to have enough.

Never Enough Water

The problem in California eventually is going to be—it is now, but it's going to eventually be more so in water—there's just not going to be enough water. So we need to devise means of reclaiming our water and reusing it. We cannot afford to waste water

as we're doing now. We need better coordination. We need to coordinate our groundwater supply with our surface supply. We need to coordinate *all* of the reservoirs in California so that you get maximum use out of the resource we have of water. And the only one I think that could do that would be the State of California. They should take that kind of leadership. I don't see it. I don't hear of it. They may be doing it, but I'm not in touch with anyone that I know that's involved in that.

But we've got to make sure that we can get some adequate water over to the pumps, and if that takes a Peripheral Canal, well, maybe that's what we'll have to do. But I don't know that that's a solution or not. Or maybe we change it, the inlets, move them somewhere. There's so many ramifications, it's hard to say what the final solution would be. And the southern part of the state, the Los Angeles area, is clamoring for more and more water. They're building out in that desert continually. Maybe population control is an answer, too.

Petershagen: Okay, I think we've been through all the topics that I had identified. Is there anything else that you'd like to cover? I'll give you control of this thing if there's

something that you think needs to be said we haven't talked about.

Ossofsky: No, I don't think so. I think we've pretty much covered my career, as you asked. I don't think that a lot of little detail would be helpful.

Petershagen: Okay, there's one administrative thing that we need to do yet before we quit, and that is that I need to get your acknowledgment on the tape that you understand that this tape is going to become the property of the Bureau of Reclamation and eventually go to the National Archives, and that we will be producing a transcript of this tape.

Ossofsky: Yes, I understand that thoroughly. I read your requirements.

Petershagen: Thank you very much for participating with us, Jake.

Ossofsky: You're welcome.

Petershagen: This certainly is appreciated.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE 2.

END OF INTERVIEW.