

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

ROBERT (BOB) J RILEY



STATUS OF INTERVIEWS:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH



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Interviews conducted–1994, 1995.
Interviews edited and published–2010

Oral History Program
Bureau of Reclamation
Denver, Colorado

SUGGESTED CITATION:

RILEY, ROBERT (BOB) J. ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS. Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian, Bureau of Reclamation, in Boise, Idaho. Edited by Brit Allan Storey. Repository for the record copy of the interview transcript is the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland, or in the Denver, Colorado, regional office.

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Brief Chronology: Robert J. Riley

January 24, 1937–Born in Idaho Falls, Idaho, but lived in Ashton, Idaho, until graduation from high school in 1955

1955-1956–Spent his freshman year at Utah State University in Logan

1956–Transferred to Idaho State University and got married

1959–Graduated from Idaho State University with a major in history and a minor in biology

1959–Attended the University of Idaho on a National Defense Fellowship studying history and anthropology

1961–Received masters degree at the University of Idaho

1961–Returned to Ashton, Idaho, doing odd jobs.

June 1961–Joined the Reclamation region in Boise in the Planning Division

1962–Sent to the Snake River Development Office, a planning office in Boise, to broaden his experience

End of 1962–National Park Service offered him a job as a historian at Grand Portage National Monument, a new Park Service unit

c. 1966–Transferred to Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey

c. 1966–Transferred back to Reclamation in the Snake River Planning Office in Boise due to his daughter's health issues

1967–Moved to the Spokane planning office as Chief of the Reports Division

1973–Planning functions in the region moved to Boise, and he moved into the regional Planning Division

1973–Became Chief of the Reports Branch

1988–Became Regional Planning Officer

Late 1993–During the Dan Beard reorganization was asked to become the Regional Program Coordinator

April 1994–Retired from Reclamation

**STATEMENT OF DONATION
OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS OF
ROBERT J. RILEY**

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, Robert J. Riley, (hereinafter referred to as "the Donor"), of Boise, Idaho, 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 December 8, 1994, and March 20, 1995, at the Pacific Northwest Regional Office of the Bureau of Reclamation, and prepared for deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration in the following format: cassette tapes and transcripts. This donation includes, but is not limited to, all copyright interests I now possess in the Donated Materials.
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Date: 3/20/95

Signed: Robert J. Riley
Robert J. Riley

INTERVIEWER: Brit Allan Storey

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Archivist of the United States

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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.

A note on the nature of oral histories is in order for readers and researchers who have not worked with oral histories in the past. We attempt to process Reclamation's oral histories so that speech patterns and verbiage are preserved. Speech and formal written text vary greatly in most individuals, and we generally do not attempt to turn Reclamation's oral histories into polished formal discourse. Rather, the objective during editing of interviews is to convey the information as it was spoken during the interview. However, editorial changes often are made to clarify or expand meaning, and those are shown in the text. In Mr. Riley's case, as might be expected from a report writer, he requested more editorial clarification than is generally proposed. The result was that some edited sections of the manuscript would be very difficult to read. For that reason, all the normal editorial mark-up, as explained in footnotes 1 (page 1) and 23 (page 76), has been eliminated to ease reading the text. If the original text with mark-up is needed for some reason, it is included as the second section of this volume beginning on page 76.

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.

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Oral History Interviews Robert J. Riley

Storey: This is Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Robert J. Riley in the offices of the Bureau of Reclamation, Pacific Northwest Region in Boise, Idaho, on December the 8th, 1994, at about 10:45 in the morning. This is tape one.

I'd like to ask you where you were born and raised and educated and how you ended up at the Bureau of Reclamation.

Born in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and Lived in Nearby Ashton until Graduation from High School

Riley: Well, I was born in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and that's because that's where the hospital was, but my hometown is in a little town north of Idaho Falls called Ashton, Idaho, just before you go up on the Island Park Plateau. I was born there on a cold January day there in Idaho Falls, and I suppose I stayed there a couple of days and then went back to Ashton, and that's where I grew up until I graduated from high school.

I washed dishes in the café. I greased cars in the service station. I worked on a farm, my stepfather's farm, for four or five years before I went off to college. I liked to hunt and fish, and I knew just about every creek and river in northern¹ Fremont County up there, Henry's Fork, the Snake River— we used to call it the Snake River—Warm River, Robinson Creek, Fall River, Bechler River, and all of the little creeks in between.

Ashton Was in Farm Country with Both Dryland Farming and Irrigated Agriculture

So I had a love for that country. It's basically farm country. When I was a kid, the eastern part of the county was largely dry farm. There wasn't any sprinkler irrigation there then, and so the but many rolling dry farms. Down in the valley you did have irrigated farms.

“ . . . those irrigated farms depended on river diversions . . . projects like Island Park Dam and Reservoir, Grassy Lake, Palisades, hadn't been built yet. . . . ”

In the early part of my childhood, those irrigated farms depended on river diversions, because projects like Island Park Dam and Reservoir, Grassy Lake, Palisades, hadn't been built yet. So I really didn't pay much attention to what was going on with Reclamation or where the water came from. I was just a kid that hunted a lot and went to school and played football and basketball and went out on a few dates and that was it.

Went to College Hoping to Become a Football Coach

1. A note on our normal editorial conventions is in order. To assure ease of reading, normal Reclamation editorial conventions have not been followed in this first version of the document, but are included in the second version beginning on page 76 in this volume. For further explanation, please see the senior historian's introduction on page xxiii.

In the '50s, it was a privilege to go on to college. Of course, everybody that went to college thought they were going to be a great success. Some of my friends stayed on and worked in the timber for the Forest Service or on the farm, but I went off to college. I wanted to be a football coach, so I went off on a football scholarship.

“After I got hit any number, a hundred times, I decided that maybe I’d rather get married than play football. . . .”

After I got hit any number, a hundred times, I decided that maybe I’d rather get married than play football. So when I was about at the end of my sophomore year, I got married and quit football. And at that point, I didn’t want to be a football coach anymore, so I really started down the road of . . .

“I liked biology and I liked history. When I graduated from Idaho State University in 1959, I had a . . . major in history and a minor in biology. . . .”

I liked biology and I liked history. When I graduated from Idaho State University in 1959, I had a liberal arts degree with a major in history and a minor in biology.

Attended the University of Idaho on a National Defense Fellowship

I had a chance to go on to the University of Idaho on a National Defense Fellowship back in those days. The University of Idaho was just starting out with a doctoral program in history. So I went up there and spent two years.

“I received a master’s in American history, a minor in anthropology. . . .”

I received a master’s in American history, a minor in anthropology. I did my thesis on the Nez Perce Tribe in north central Idaho, and spent quite a bit of time out on the reservation.

So I had to make a decision whether I wanted to go on in history and try to be a history teacher or a history professor or do something else. I had a wife and a little girl, and I decided that maybe I should get a job.

Took the Federal Service Entrance Exam and Returned to Ashton

So I took the Federal Service Entrance Exam. I think it was on another cold January day. Then I left Moscow and went back to Ashton and fed cattle and sorted potatoes for that winter.

Interviewed for a Job on the Columbia Basin Project

Finally, one day I got a phone call from Mr. _____ Arnold the administrative assistant in the Columbia Basin Project in Ephrata, Washington, and he asked me if I would be interested in being interviewed for an administrative job with the Bureau of

Reclamation. I said, yeah, I would. I didn't tell him I was broke, but I was broke.

The Columbia Basin Project Office Referred His Name to Reclamation Staff in Boise, and He Was Hired to Work in the Planning Division

But, anyway, he asked me to meet him at Butte, Montana. So we drove to Butte and he interviewed me and I went back to Ashton. In about a month, he called me up and said, "I've got some good news and I've got some bad news. The good news is that I enjoyed our interview. The bad news is that you're not a veteran and there are a couple of guys that have got veterans' preference on the register, and so we've got two jobs and we need to take those fellows to work for us."

And I said, "Okay."

He said, "But I'm going to give your name to a couple of people in Boise with the Bureau and see if they have any opportunities there."

Gib Shirk

So a couple of weeks later, I got a phone call from Gib Shirk, who was head of reports and programs in the Bureau's regional office in Boise. He asked me to come over to Boise for an interview, and so I did that and he scared me to death. He was an extremely intelligent fellow, but he always loosened his tie and kept his top shirt button undone. Usually he had a cigarette hanging out the corner of his mouth, and he was pretty intimidating, and he scared me pretty bad. (laughter)

“ . . . he interviewed and showed me around what he called the sheep sheds. . . .”

But, anyway, he interviewed and showed me around what he called the sheep sheds. The main part of the regional office was in an old cement building, but the planning group was out back in some old Army barracks that we called the sheep sheds.

So in about a month or so, I hadn't heard anything and I called up Boise and I said, "Whatever happened on the interview?" And they said, "Well, we decided to hire you, but we haven't had time to call you back. So could you come to work about the first of June?" So I said I would.

Started Work for Reclamation in June of 1961

So I came to Boise, started my career with the Bureau in June of 1961 in the Planning Division, and Gib Shirk was my boss. He took me around the planning division and introduced me to all of the guys that had been there through the '40s and '50s, through kind of some of the glory days of the Bureau. They were kind of prima donnas.

Don Street, Harold Hafterson, Cliff Okeson, Darrell Affleck, Elwyn White, Norm Moore

The economist was well respected in the Bureau, Don Street. He was—I don't like to use the word scary, but when you're a young guy and you haven't got any experience in Reclamation, these guys are kind of intimidating. Harold Hafterson was the hydrologist. Cliff Okeson was the geologist. Darrell Affleck was the engineer. We didn't have any environmental group at that time, of course. Elwyn White was the regional planning supervisor, Norm Moore was his assistant. There were a lot of good people that worked there, and they'd get together every noon for lunch in the back room and argue politics and everything else.

“ . . . they put me to work editing reports. . . .”

So it was a real good learning experience for me, and they put me to work editing reports. I worked in the regional office for about six months, and they said, “You need some field experience.”

Sent Him to the Snake River Development Office in Boise for Field Experience

So they sent me over to the Snake River planning office. In those days, the region had three planning offices divided by hydrology. They had one in Boise called the Snake River Office; one in Spokane, the Upper Columbia Office; and one in Salem, Oregon, the Lower Columbia Office. So I went to the Snake River office.

Grande Ronde River Basin

They put me to work editing some reports on the Grande Ronde River Basin and a couple of others.

Sent to Get Permission Slips for Drillers to Go onto Private Land in Northwestern Wyoming

One of my first assignments in the field to get field experience was to go get some land-owner permission slips for our drill crew to go up on some ranches in the Salt River area in eastern—well, let's see. What is that? Northwestern Wyoming. These ranchers were pretty independent frontier type, and I kind of got the feeling afterwards that I was getting set up. But anyway, they flew me in the back of a Piper Cub over to Idaho Falls. Dave Crandall was the planning officer, and he was a great photographer. We had a little bitty—I guess it was a Cessna, not a Piper Cub. But he always took the door off to do his photography. He put me in the back seat and did all kinds of dives and flips on the way from Boise to Idaho Falls. I thought for sure I was done.

But, anyway, I got to Idaho Falls. He said, “We've rented you a car. You go over and pick up the car. Here are the permission slips. We'll be here to pick you up in two days.” So I went over to the little rental car place, and the car they had for me was a red Ford convertible with great big white sidewall tires. Now, having not seen but known the ranchers up in the area where I had to go, up there around Swan Valley and Star Valley, I was pretty sure they didn't have any love for government people and especially young guys that didn't know anything and drove red Ford convertibles. So I

went up there and, to my surprise, I was successful and the people were really very nice, a few ornery ones but generally nice. That was kind of my introduction to the field. I worked pretty diligently there in the field office. I went out with the survey crew and I floated the rivers with hydrologists. I got a fairly good general background of what Reclamation was doing those days in planning projects.

Offered a Job as a Historian by the National Park Service

At the end of my first year with the Bureau, I got three letters from the National Park Service. I guess, you know, my name was still on the register. I don't know why, but I was on the register as a historian, and the Park Service said, "We'd like to have you come and be a historian. You've got your choice. You can go to New York, or you can go to Nebraska, or you can go to northern Minnesota." I wanted to work in the history field, and I thought, "Well, gee, my mother was born in Minnesota and, you know, I've always wanted to be a historian. That's why I took history. Reclamation is okay, but, gee, I can see myself being something that I wanted to be."

Went to Newly Created Grand Portage National Monument in Northern Minnesota

So I went in and told Don Price,² the planning administrative officer, at the Bureau that I was going to leave. He asked that I reconsider, but I knew they could get along okay. Anyway, I went to work for the National Park Service at a little *brand-new* national monument on the north shore of Lake Superior called Grand Portage. It's an old fur trade post dated back to the 1700s. It was actually more closely associated with Canadian history than United States history, but it was an interesting place. We had the challenge to reconstruct an old fur trade post, to do a lot of archeology, a lot of historical interpretation and research.

Transferred to Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey Where His Daughter's Allergies Caused Problems So He Tried to Transfer to a Drier Climate in the West

So I stayed there about four years and got a call one day and said that they'd like to have me go to Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey—that was a Revolutionary War area—and be the historian there. So I went to Morristown and worked for a little less than a year. My little girl got pretty sick, had a lot of problems with allergies back there, so I asked the National Park Service if there was a chance to be transferred back to a drier climate in the West. They said, "Well, you can go to Bent' Old Fort or Walla Walla, Washington, or Philadelphia, or Washington, D.C. Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., had similar climates to New Jersey and I declined those.

And I said, "What's the medical availability at Bent' Old Fort?"

And they said, "Well, it's not very good." At that time, at least.

2. Don Price participated in Reclamation's oral history program.

Park Service Offers Involved a Two Grade Demotion So He Contacted Reclamation to See If Any Jobs Were Available

So I said, “Well, I’ll think about Walla Walla.” And they said, “Well, that’s a two grade demotion, but you could retain your pay and all that sort of thing.”

So I called up Don Price at the Bureau of Reclamation office in Boise, and asked if there was anything at all with the Bureau?

Offered a Job as a Technical Writer in the Snake River Development Office Planning Division

And he said he’d look around, and call me back.” He called me back within two weeks and said they could use me as a technical writer at the Snake River office in Boise.

“ . . . I knew that Boise would work health-wise . . . So we loaded up. I really had mixed feelings about leaving the National Park Service . . . ”

So I was relieved, because I knew that Boise would work health-wise for my little girl. So we loaded up. I really had mixed feelings about leaving the National Park Service, but I came back to Boise and I went to work. Let’s see, this was in about 1966.

Worked on the Burnt River Project and Teton Dam

I went to work at the Snake River planning office, and the project that I worked on there, a couple of them, the Burnt River Project in Oregon and did some work on the Lower Teton Division, which included the infamous Teton Dam.

Selected as Chief of the Reports Division in the Spokane Planning Office

Worked in Spokane from 1967 to 1973

After a year in Boise, the planning office in Spokane needed a chief of their Reports Division up there, and so I applied and I was selected and I went to Spokane and worked as chief of the reports group up there ‘til about 1973, from ‘67 to ‘73. We did a lot of work in eastern Washington and northern Idaho and western Montana, northeastern Oregon. Enjoyed the work up there.

Commissioner Ellis Armstrong and Warren Fairchild Stimulated the Region to Consolidate Planning in Boise, and He Became Chief of the Region’s Reports Branch

About 1973 Ellis Armstrong and one of his assistants by the name of Warren Fairchild³ decided that it would be good to centralize some Bureau activities. So the Pacific Northwest Region decided to centralize their planning function, and they closed

3. Warren Fairchild participated in Reclamation’s oral history program.

the Spokane Office and greatly diminished the size of the Salem Office, left a small staff over there, and closed the Snake River Office, and they put *all* of the remaining planning people in the Boise office. The regional office then basically did new project planning for the Bureau. That was in '73.

About that time, several of the old-timers retired, and there were some openings around. I applied for the regional reports' chief job and I was selected for that. I worked in that job as Chief of the Reports Branch from 1973 until 1988, when a major reorganization occurred.

Became the Region's Planning Officer in 1988

At that time, our regional planning officer, Larry Vinsonhaler, was really involved with the Yakima River Basin Enhancement Project in Washington, and he felt that with the demands of the reorganization and the demands of that Yakima enhancement project that he was personally doing, that he couldn't do both jobs, and so he decided to remove himself from the Planning Officer's job to concentrate full time on the Yakima work. The regional planning officer's position was advertised and I applied for that, and I was selected as the Regional Planning Supervisor. So I had the responsibility for the Pacific Northwest Region's planning program from 1988 until 1994.

Storey: Uh-huh.

During a Reorganization in 1993-1994 He Became the Regional Program Coordinator and Then Retired

Riley: In 1994, we had a major regional reorganization in the Pacific Northwest Region, and I was asked as a part of that reorganization to work as the Regional Program Coordinator. So I did that and I worked as the Regional Program Coordinator from—I guess the reorganization actually started at the end of '93—from the end of '93, from about December-January until the end of April of '94, when I threw in the towel. So out of a thirty-three-year career, I spent twenty-eight-, twenty-nine years with the Bureau of Reclamation, all of it in the Pacific Northwest Region, primarily in the regional office, but with about six years in field offices. So I've followed Reclamation in the Pacific Northwest for a long time, twenty-five years, and I've seen quite a number of changes occur in Reclamation, and in the people, and in the mission. That's brought me to where I am.

Storey: When were you born?

Born January 24, 1937

Riley: I was born January 24, 1937.

Storey: In Idaho Falls.

Riley: In Idaho Falls. So that makes me about fifty-seven.

Storey: Did you *live* on an irrigated farm, or was yours one of the dry farms you mentioned earlier?

Family Had Both a Dryland Farm and an Irrigated Farm

Riley: Well, we had dry farm and irrigated. We actually lived in town. Ashton is a little place with about 1,000 population, and a number of the farmers lived in town and drove back and forth to the farms. We had about 160 acres irrigated and about that much dry farm, so I worked on both.

Storey: What was *raised* on the dry farm?

The Dryland Farm Was Primarily Grains

Riley: The dry farm was primarily barley, wheat, and summer fallow, so it was primarily grains.

“Some of the dry farmers in the eastern part of the county in the higher elevations grew dry farm potatoes . . .”

Some of the dry farmers in the eastern part of the county in the higher elevations grew dry farm potatoes, but we didn't. We didn't try the potatoes.

Storey: This would have been winter wheat?

Riley: Yeah. Fall wheat, we called it. You plant it in the fall and hope it'd get a good start and then harvest it pretty early.

Storey: In the spring?

Riley: Well, we'd harvest it like in the end of July or early August.

Storey: What about when you raised barley? When did you plant that?

Riley: That was the spring. Spring we'd usually be able to get in the fields in May and plant it, harvest it usually in September.

Storey: How did you sell those crops?

Selling Grain at the Granary

Riley: We'd haul them into the granary. The granary would have a market price, and they'd weigh in your load, and you'd dump it, and that's the way we sold it. The railroad, Union Pacific Railroad, would come through and they'd take a lot of that grain, practically all of that grain, to milling plants around the country, and that was primarily the use for the grain. Barley, some was feed barley. That's the way it was in those days. Nowadays that area raises a lot of malting barley that they sell to Coors and to Anheuser-Busch, Budweiser.

Storey: Where was this granary that you sold to?

Riley: Well, you know, in that old farm country up there, about every ten miles you had a granary along the railroad tracks, and right in town you had three or four granaries located right along the railroad tracks. They were independently owned and operated. Farmers would take their grain in and sell it to the granaries.

Storey: Could you shop around for a price?

Riley: Yeah, you could, but basically the price was about like gasoline is today in town. There might be a penny-a-gallon difference, but it really boiled down to who you liked best and that sort of thing.

Storey: So your Dad wasn't a member of a co-op or anything.

Riley: No. No. Stepdad. He wasn't. No, the co-ops really weren't very big at that time. It was just basically individual farmers responsible for the whole farm operation and for selling, marketing their crops.

Storey: How much acreage in dry farming, do you think?

Riley: It was about 160 to 240, something like that. It was relatively small. There were big operators up there that farmed, you know, several hundred acres. We didn't. We were pretty small operators.

Storey: How many people worked on the farm?

He, His Stepdad, and His Two Stepbrothers Worked on the Farms

Riley: Well, there was my stepdad and my two stepbrothers and myself. So, we did the plowing, the discing, the ground preparation, the drilling of the wheat, the irrigating, and the harvesting. So I had experience in all of those things.

“I was started out on a harrow. It seems like most young guys are started out on the harrow, because that seems to be the one where you can cause the least amount of damage. . . .”

I was started out on a harrow. It seems like most young guys are started out on the harrow, because that seems to be the one where you can cause the least amount of damage. If you run over rock piles or miss a spot, there's really not much harm done, and you kind of graduate from the harrow to the duckfoot, to the disc, to the four bottom plow, to the grain combine, in that order of importance. My stepbrothers, who were a little older, they got to drive the wheeled tractors, which were up out of the dirt a little bit. But I got to drive an old worn-out D-2 CAT to harrow with. Not too many people harrowed with a CAT, because you're right down in the dirt and dust. It's kind of rough riding, but that's where I started.

Storey: Let's see, if I'm adding correctly, maybe a 250-, 300-acre farm?

Riley: Uh-huh.

Storey: Was it pretty much a full-time job for four of you?

The Farms Were Pretty Much a Full Time Job in the Summer

Riley: Yeah, it was in the summer. And then we all prayed for snow in the winter for two purposes—to get some water and to get some time off. But it was a full-time job. The big times, of course, were the spring preparation and planting and then the fall harvest and then the . . .

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. DECEMBER 8, 1994.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

Storey: You were talking about how you spent your time working on the farm.

Used flood irrigation on the irrigated farm “. . . which meant that we could probably irrigate maybe 60 percent of the farm. It was interspersed with lava beds and basalt outcrops, and sagebrush . . .”

Riley: The irrigation was quite a bit different. Even on the farm that we operated, the irrigated farm, in the ‘50s, we did all flood irrigation, which meant that we could probably irrigate maybe 60 percent of the farm. It was interspersed with lava beds and basalt outcrops, and sagebrush, so you had to do some land leveling. To flood irrigate, you had your main canal going through the area, and then your feeder ditches, and you used canvas dams.

“. . . you pretty much had a pair of hip boots and a shovel and you coaxed the water down through the fields. . . .”

And then you pretty much had a pair of hip boots and a shovel and you coaxed the water down through the fields.

Sprinkler Irrigation Later Increased the Area of the Farm That Could Be Irrigated and Income Increased

After we stopped running the farm, it was sold to a brother-in-law who got there about the same time that sprinkler irrigation arrived in Fremont County, so he was able to remove a lot of the ditches and to irrigate uneven land areas, I’d guess, probably 90 percent of that farm. The income level increased and it was just a lot better operation.

“. . . we did it the hard way. . . . a number of ditch breaks . . . spent a lot of time on our hands and knees trying to plug the gopher holes with grass and weeds. Irrigation was a tough job in July and August, out there in the field with hip boots and a shovel and the sun. . . .”

So we did it the hard way. We had a lot of—not a lot, but a number of ditch breaks, mostly caused by gopher holes, and we spent a lot of time on our hands and

knees trying to plug the gopher holes with grass and weeds. Irrigation was a tough job in July and August, out there in the field with hip boots and a shovel and the sun.

Storey: Did you irrigate at night?

Irrigating at Night

Riley: Usually what we'd do at night, we'd take an easy set, one that we were confident wouldn't cause much problem if there was a ditch break or if a dam fell out of the ditch, and we would irrigate alfalfa that way and some wheat, some of our grain crops. We'd put in a night set at about—oh, the daylight hours were pretty long, and we'd probably put the last set in at about eight or nine o'clock, about sundown. Then we'd be out there about five o'clock the next morning to move the water.

Storey: Now, when you put in a canvas dam which, if it's what I'm thinking it is, it's a board that rests on the top of the ditch and then the canvas goes down and holds back the water, how did you get the water from the ditch into the field?

Irrigating with Cuts in the Ditch Bank or Siphons

Riley: Well, you'd get to know the topography of your field, and so you knew where the dam sets would be. You'd just move your dams down the ditch as time went on. But you'd set your dam, and you'd have to anchor your dam. Before you removed the upstream dam, you'd set your next dam.

Storey: With mud?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: Or dirt.

Riley: Dirt and mud, and anchor the bottom of the dam. Then you'd carefully remove your upstream dam and let the water flow down. When the water got up to about the dam top, before it would over-top the dam, you'd cut the ditch bank with your shovel to let the water flow into the field. You would have three or four cuts like this above the dam. The shovel was the irrigator's best friend and you always kept it real sharp. You'd make cuts in the ditch bank and let that water flow out of those cuts. That was to irrigate the grain and the alfalfa. Potatoes, you used siphon tubes, which was a different operation.

The *ditches* that we're talking about here aren't the main ditch that ran through the farm, but feeder ditches that you made with a ditcher. A tractor pulled the ditcher and you had weight on the ditcher so it would dig in. You followed the contours and topography of the field.

Storey: How did you get the siphons to flow?

Riley: Well, when you're a kid, you didn't get them to flow very good on the first crack, but as

you got a little older and a little more experienced and watched the good ones do it, you could put those babies in the ditch and flip them over, and the gravity flow would just take her down. The first few times you'd get a dry siphon, but after a while, you get the hang of it, and it's kind of a quick wrist flip and works out all right.

“ . . . you don't have water all to yourself. You've got farmers upstream and downstream . . . what would be bad is if you had a farmer upstream . . . wanted to get his irrigating done a little quicker, so he'd turn his head gate up a little bit more and then your set was out of whack and you could dry up your siphons. That could bring the water down below your ditch cuts and you'd think you were irrigating and you'd be dry. So you always hoped for a good neighbor. . . .”

The thing that's disappointing, though, is, you know, you don't have water all to yourself. You've got farmers upstream and downstream and you've got a headgate. My stepdad would always say, “Okay, crank up the head gate three turns,” or four turns or crank it down a turn. He knew, based on the flow in the ditch, how many turns to turn the head gate. Well, what would be bad is if you had a farmer upstream that had to go somewhere shopping and wanted to get his irrigating done a little quicker, so he'd turn his headgate up a little bit more and then your set was out of whack and you could dry up your siphons. That could bring the water down below your ditch cuts and you'd think you were irrigating and you'd be dry. So you always hoped for a good neighbor. You always hoped for a good neighbor that if he had to do something out of the ordinary, he'd let you know.

Storey: These siphons that I'm familiar with are tubes maybe one and a half, two inches in diameter and maybe four foot long?

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: Okay.

Riley: That's right. Aluminum, plastic. In those days, most of them were aluminum.

Storey: And what crops were you irrigating in the irrigated part of the farm?

Riley: Barley, oats, wheat, and alfalfa.

Storey: What was your biggest crop?

Potatoes Were Particularly Labor Intensive

Riley: We did mostly grain, small grain—barley and wheat, because the potatoes were really labor-intensive. It required a lot of labor, specialized equipment. Of course, you had to have specialized equipment for all, but potatoes were labor-intensive because it meant cutting them in the spring, planting them, harvesting them, storing them in a spud cellar, sorting them in the winter, cutting them again in the spring. The market was really volatile, and my stepfather just felt more comfortable with the grain crops.

My wife, Lois, was raised in Ashton, also. Her father was a farmer, irrigated farmer. She grew up on the farm, and *their* primary crop was potatoes. So I observed and helped quite a bit in their potato harvest when I had the time.

Storey: When you say cutting, you mean cutting up the potatoes to plant?

Potato Cellars

Riley: Right. Yeah, potatoes, you take them in and store them in spud cellars. In those days, the potato . . . well, I call them spud cellars, were all, I think without any exception, dirt. They were a pole, lodge pole pine frame, dug down. The cellar was dug down probably six feet into the ground, and then the lodge pole pine frame above that, a gable-type roof. Then you'd cover that with bales of straw for insulation and then a layer of dirt over the bales of straw. So you'd kind of drive down into your potato cellar. They had a front entrance and a rear entrance, and you'd drive down into the excavated part of the cellar, and you could drive clear through. You had potato bins in there and you had conveyors.

Harvesting Potatoes

In those days, we didn't have potato combines as we do today. . . . The first thing you do is pray for a good frost to kill the vines. Then you had a beater, a vine beater, and you'd go out and beat the vines and try to pulverized them. And then most farmers had a two—some had a four, but mostly a two-row digger pulled behind a tractor. You dig the potatoes and they'd come out on the surface of the ground, two rows at a time.

The Pickers

Two ways to pick those. The little kids, when they let the school out for this activity, it was a big time. And, of course, all the kids were badly needed on the farms during harvest, so they'd let school out for two weeks during potato harvest. The little kids would pick with a basket. They'd work as a two-person team, and they'd each fill the basket, and then one would hold the potato sack and they dumped the basket, and then the other one. They'd get about five cents a basket to do that.

Then the older kids would pick with a belt. It was just a canvas or leather belt about six or eight inches wide that you buckled around your waist. Two leather straps hung down the front of your legs to which a board across your legs with a couple of hooks on the board to hook your potato sack on and some hooks in the back of your belt to hook empty potato sacks on. You'd hook your potato sack on the front board and it would drape between your legs and you'd bend over and you'd start picking.

If you picked on an irrigated farm, you could do really well. You'd usually get ten cents a sack when potatoes were thick. You'd fill those babies up to about, I'd say the sack about two-thirds full and take it off your belt and set it over to the side of the row and start up.

“On a dry farm, they usually paid by row, because the potatoes were so sparse and small and long, the rows were long, a quarter of a mile long. . . .”

On a dry farm, they usually paid by row, because the potatoes were so sparse and small and the rows were long, a quarter of a mile long. You’d take off picking and you were bent over forever. But good pickers, fast pickers, could make fifteen to twenty dollars a day, and that was kind of a status symbol. And there were a couple of champion potato pickers in the area that everybody knew and that set the records on how many sacks or rows they could pick in a day.

The Buckers

But, anyway, those were the pickers. Then you had the buckers. The buckers would pick up the sacks. You’d have a truck driver in a flatbed truck, and you would take out through the field and you’d have usually two, sometimes four, guys, two on each side of the truck bucking. We’d call it bucking. You’d pick the spud sack up and put it on your thigh and buck it, throw it up on the back of the truck, and you’d have one or two guys on the back on the truck that would stack the potato sacks on the truck. And that was an art, too, because you had to lay those sacks horizontally, and you had to know just how to interweave those and overlap them so that the load would hold.

“ . . . you graduated from a picker to a bucker. . . .”

So you graduated from a picker to a bucker.

Storing Potatoes in the Potato Cellar

Then you’d take the spuds into the cellar and you’d have a conveyor. Your guys on the back of the truck would dump the spuds into the conveyor, and the conveyor would move them back into the corners of the cellar.

“ . . . buckers would work until sometimes until ten-, eleven o’clock at night. . . . catch up for the next morning. . . . there was usually frost . . . You couldn’t really start harvesting . . . until the frost would go out of the ground. So you’d usually get started about ten o’clock in the morning with the diggers . . . ”

So the buckers would work until sometimes until ten-, eleven o’clock at night. The stars and the moon would be out. They were always trying to catch up for the next morning. In the mornings, there was usually frost, because you were harvesting in early October trying to beat the first snowfall. You couldn’t really start harvesting, digging the spuds, until the frost would go out of the ground. So you’d usually get started about ten o’clock in the morning with the diggers, and the buckers would go until sometimes, like I say, eleven o’clock at night cleaning up the fields.

Spud Combines Brought More Mechanization to Potato Harvesting

Then the first thing that came into that valley that was a step up was a spud combine. Instead of picking the potatoes, you’d have a two-row digger that would

bring spuds up on a conveyor, a long conveyor that was pulled along behind the tractor. You'd have usually two people on each side of the conveyor picking out clods and vines.

The Sacker

Then you'd have the sacker at the end so that when the potatoes go off the conveyor into a spud sack, the sacker would put them out onto the field. So that was the next step up.

Then, of course, what came after that was really the spud combine that eliminated the vine and clod pickers and actually conveys the potatoes right up into the back of the truck. The truck has a built-in conveyor and goes into the cellar. The cellars nowadays are really Quonset huts that are on ground level with good ventilation and well-controlled atmosphere. The trucks just convey the spuds onto a conveyor. So you've eliminated a lot of your hand labor. But that was the spud harvest.

“ . . . spud harvest was a good time. . . . earn some extra money. . . . work with other guys. . . . the guys liked, you know, to have the girls out there picking spuds. . . . Race against the snow. A few times you're out there in the snowstorm trying to get the last spuds in. . . . ”

That's a long story, but spud harvest was a good time.

Storey: Why?

Riley: Well, it was a time to earn some extra money. It was a time to work with other guys. The girls from high school would always come out and work in the spud field and, of course, the guys liked, you know, to have the girls out there picking spuds. (laughter) It was just a good time. Race against the snow. A few times you're out there in the snowstorm trying to get the last spuds in. But it was a good time.

Storey: So, now, you would have graduated about '54?

Graduated from High School in 1955

Riley: '55.

Storey: Had the original potato combines shown up in the fields by that time?

Riley: They had. Yeah. You know, I suppose that there were some around before, but Fremont County was pretty conservative, and I'd say probably in the late '40s the first combines started coming around.

Storey: When did you start working the potato harvest?

Started Working in the Potato Harvest When He Was about Eight

Riley: When I was about eight, eight years old. What's that? About third grade? Third-graders could go out and pick spuds in a basket. You'd get paid in one-dollar bills.

“If over the course of two weeks you made thirty dollars and you were a little kid and you got paid in one-dollar bills, you put them all in a big roll in your pocket. . .

If over the course of two weeks you made thirty dollars and you were a little kid and you got paid in one-dollar bills, you put them all in a big roll in your pocket. (laughter)

Storey: Now, was this working on your stepdad's farm?

Worked on His Stepdad's Farm While in High School

Riley: No. I didn't start working on my stepdad's farm until about '52. So I worked '52, '53, '54. I worked about four years on my stepdad's farm. . . . Let's see, from about the time I was eight until I was about fourteen, about six years, I'd just hire out to spud farmers around there. They were always anxious to get kids to pick and buck spuds.

Storey: Around Ashton?

Riley: Yeah. And that still continues on over there. They still have spud vacation, they call it, and kids are out for two weeks. They just do different work now. The littlest ones, I don't think, get out much any more, but the high school kids do. Junior high and high school.

Storey: The fancier potato combines, did they come in before you left high school?

Riley: No. The ones that would convey right into a truck didn't come in until after I'd left. There were a couple of really pretty sharp mechanical-type farmers up there. They weren't mechanical engineers, but they were really savvy, the Looslis and the Hesses. They did a lot of experimentation with early spud combines and that sort of thing. They had some pretty good operations. Seemed like the first thing they tried to do was to increase the number of rows of spuds that you could harvest at one time, from a single or a double row to four rows, you know, and that sort of thing.

Storey: Let's go back to field preparation, if we can.

Riley: Okay.

Storey: You mentioned harrowing, and harrowing is a big flat thing that basically sort of smoothes out the surface. I rode a harrow. I never drove one myself. (laughter) Then I believe you mentioned a duckfoot?

The Equipment Used on the Farms

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: Take me through the types of machines you mentioned and what they did.

Riley: Okay. Well, of course, you know, the basic thing was the plow.

“You didn’t plow a field every year, or at least we didn’t. Plowing usually occurred when you were changing crops . . .”

You didn’t plow a field every year, or at least we didn’t. Plowing usually occurred when you were changing crops, like going from alfalfa to a grain crop where you really had to break it up and go deep. So if you plowed a field, of course, you know, you waited in the spring until the ground got dry enough. That was sometimes pretty late, because that part of the country had a short growing season. It was usually May when you could get out and start to plow. The snow drifts, heavy snow up there, snow drifts would keep you out of some areas, but for most part, the fields were open. You’d go out and you’d plow.

The larger farmers, you know, would have a five-, maybe six-bottom plow.⁴ We had a four-bottom plow, and you had to—well, we used a Caterpillar. The big wheel tractors that we have today that you see, the great big four-wheel tractors, really we didn’t have them. You had pretty good-sized wheel tractors, but they were the traditional tractors with large rear tires and the small front tires. You had the Allis Chalmers and the John Deere and the Minneapolis Moline and the Case and Farmall and International Harvester. Those were the primary tractors. But if you wanted to get down into heavy-duty work like plowing and discing with big Wheatland disc, you usually went to a Caterpillar. So we used D-2 Caterpillars.

When you finished your plowing, of course, you had to clean off your plow shears every day, sometimes several times a day with a brick, to keep the mud and the rust at a minimum on them, and keep them sharp. We would take the shears into the blacksmith shop for sharpening, and this was an old-time blacksmith shop where you had the old forge and the hammer and the tongs. Old Claude Waugh was the blacksmith in Ashton, and he’d sharpen your plow shares. So you had to have, you know, three or four sets of plow shares, and you’d change those quite frequently to keep them sharp.

Out there in that part of the country, you had a lot of basalt. That’s the upper end of the Snake River aquifer. That big basalt flow, and some of the basalt is pretty close to the surface. You’d hit rocks, basalt, and bang up your plow shears. So it was a task.

Anyway, you’d plow the field. Plowing, you know, doesn’t do very fine work. After plowing we would go over the field with a harrow. Sometimes we would first use a “duckfoot.” The duckfoot is a tool bar that you’d pull behind a tractor. It was probably twelve feet wide, and it had spring tongs on it. Probably over that twelve-foot span it might have had fifteen or twenty tongs, spring tongs, that went down. On the end of those you could either put a spade-shaped implement or you could use a chisel-

4. Referring to the number of “bottoms,” i.e., plow shears (shares), on the plow.

shaped implement on the bar. You would drag your duckfoot diagonally or perpendicular to your plow pattern to cultivate the soil a little more.

When you broke up ground, you could also use a Wheatland disc, which was a great big heavy disk that went deep. Sometimes you'd have to harrow twice. You'd go two different directions with your harrow. So each stage broke the ground up into a finer condition. The soil up there was good. There wasn't a lot of clay. So when you finished harrowing the second time, a field looked really beautiful.

The last step was to drill or plant your seed. Then, of course, you would drill. If you were planting a grain, you would drill. In those days, we'd use, I think, about a three-or a four-bin drill, and you'd back up to it with a truck and empty your wheat sacks or your barley sacks into the drill, and then you'd drill, plant, your field. That took quite a bit of care, because you wanted to be sure to just barely overlap your rounds so that you didn't overplant and that you didn't leave big gaping spaces between your rounds.

Planting Fall Wheat and Alfalfa at the Same Time

In rotating crops you usually followed your wheat crop with an alfalfa crop, and the drill had a smaller set of bins on it so that you could drill in the alfalfa seed at the same time you were drilling your wheat so that in the fall after you harvested your grain crop, your small alfalfa plants would have sprouted, and then following year you would have your first year of alfalfa crop.

Weed Control

Usually during the summer, we'd spray for mustard, weeds, Canadian thistles. We didn't have too much trouble with insects, but you wanted to keep your weeds down, and so you'd spray. Now they do a lot of spraying commercially or with airplanes. In those days, we had two 55-gallon barrels on the front of a tractor and a spray rig that probably covered about twenty feet. Didn't ever wear a mask or anything, so probably most of us are badly in need of cleaner lungs.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

Storey: This is tape two of an interview by Brit Allan Storey with Robert J. Riley on December the 8th, 1994.

You were saying that you didn't wear any masks or anything when you sprayed.

Riley: No. No, we were kind of ignorant and tough. We just went to work. If you were plowing or harrowing or spraying or combining, you didn't wear any mask. We didn't have any closed cabs on our tractors. A few of the farmers around were starting to use closed cabs on their tractors. And then, of course, nowadays, you know, they're mostly all closed cabs, which is smart. So we breathed a lot of dust and probably a lot of 2-4-D spray and whatever else you got on the farm.

Storey: You mentioned leveling earlier. Did you do much of that?

Leveling a Field

Riley: Well, you could do some minor localized leveling yourself. We had an implement that we called a leveler. You'd build it out of 2-by-12 planks. The leveler was a rectangular shaped implement about ten feet by 12 feet. And you just drug that behind your Caterpillar and it smoothed out areas.

“ . . . if you had major leveling to do, there were contractors . . . It was expensive. But in those days of flood irrigation a lot of the irrigated farmers at one time or another used a commercial leveler to increase their irrigable acreage. . . . ”

So you could do some smoothing with that homemade-type outfit. But if you had major leveling to do, there were contractors around the valley that would use, you know, large Caterpillars and carryalls, scrapers, and they would actually go out and remove mounds, move earth from a high point to a low point, try to cover up some shallow areas for you, and that would do a remarkable job. It was expensive. But in those days of flood irrigation a lot of the irrigated farmers at one time or another used a commercial leveler to increase their irrigable acreage.

Storey: How long did you keep the alfalfa crop in before you plowed it under and replaced it?

Riley: Usually about three years. Three years.

Storey: So you were running a rotation like that?

“ . . . farmers that I knew in those days would go grain, alfalfa, potatoes, and then back to grain. . . . ”

Riley: Yep. Yeah. Most all of the farmers that I knew in those days would go grain, alfalfa, potatoes, and then back to grain. We did some commercial fertilization, but I don't think to the extent that they do today. So it was really a crop rotation. Alfalfa didn't sell for much in those days, not like it does today, so when you had a field in alfalfa, you know, it wasn't the cash crop that it is today. It was more or less good farm management.

Storey: And it sounds as if a good share of the farm would have been in alfalfa, the irrigated farm.

Riley: Well, no. I'd say that you'd probably have about a third of your farm in alfalfa.

Storey: What percentage in potatoes?

Riley: Well, potatoes would vary on how many years you had your alfalfa crop in. You know, if you had it in two or three years—we didn't grow very many potatoes. I'd say at the most we'd grow fifteen-, twenty acres.

Storey: What kind of a harvest would you get from that?

Riley: Well, most farmers would measure by sacks or hundredweight. In those days, if you could get between 150 and 175 sacks an acre, that's pretty good. Now I think they've increased that with different varieties. The refined varieties and fertilization, and improved irrigation methods you know, they do better.

Storey: Do you happen to remember what varieties of potatoes you grew?

Riley: Well, we just called them russets. (laughter) Beyond that I don't know. My dad-in-law, my wife's dad, was a good potato farmer, and all I've ever heard him talk about is russets. I don't know any more than that.

Storey: How did you get your seed? Did you save part of the crop for seed, or did you buy seed potatoes?

“Fremont County is a pretty famous seed potato area. That's where a lot of the farmers made their best money was on seed potatoes. So what farmers would do is that when they sorted their potatoes, they would sort into seed, which were usually smaller uniform potatoes, and then your number-one bakers, and number two, and then you had the culls. Culls would go to the starch factory. . . .”

Riley: Fremont County is a pretty famous seed potato area. That's where a lot of the farmers made their best money was on seed potatoes. So what farmers would do is that when they sorted their potatoes, they would sort into seed, which were usually smaller uniform potatoes, and then your number-one bakers, and number two spuds, and then you had the culls. Culls would go to the starch factory. The ones and twos would be sold commercially. They'd usually go out on the Union Pacific or on semitrailers. In those days, it was mostly train transportation rather than truck. But here ones and twos would go out commercially in burlap bags. And then your seed potatoes, you would hold back a portion of those for your own use, and then farmers from all across southern Idaho would come to Fremont County to buy their seed potatoes. They would come from Burley, Twin Falls, Jerome, all across south central Idaho, and buy their seed potatoes up there.

Storey: Did you ever do any of the sorting?

Riley: I did two or three years. That was my first introduction to making decisions. (laughter) You know, when you're a kid, you don't have to make too many decisions. But when the spuds start coming down the conveyor and you've got to make decisions, you make them pretty quick.

Storey: Uh-huh. What's the difference between a number-one and a number-two potato?

Riley: You know, if you go by today's standards in the grocery store, you have a real problem.

Storey: No. I want to talk about then.

Riley: Okay.

Storey: Back when you were doing it.

Riley: A number one was a potato that was from, I'd say, three to six inches long, uniform, no knots or cuts on it. You know, it was a relatively smooth, uniform-sized potato that would make a good baker. A number two would be about the same in terms of size, but it would be less uniform in shape. It could have knots, cuts or bruises. You've seen potatoes with little knots and cuts on them.

Storey: Sure.

Riley: Then the culls, of course, were either great big irregular-shaped potatoes or very small, walnut-sized potatoes, or potatoes that had been bruised or skinned real bad that could cause a problem in spoilage, you know, that sort of thing. They'd pretty much run off the end of the conveyor into a pile, and you'd have a guy back there shoveling them into a truck or into a larger pile to send to the starch factory where they'd be cooked up and turned into starch, potato starch.

Sewing up the Potato Sack

The good potatoes would be run to different parts of the conveyor line. In some cases, they were sacked. If they were ready and going out to market, the conveyor would carry them right into a sack. Then you'd have a sewer that would sew the top of the potato sack. I never did that. It took somebody with really nimble, quick fingers to sew the potato sacks. And then they'd be stacked in the warehouse and put on their refrigerated cars, Union Pacific freight cars.

The seed potatoes could either be sacked— the ones you saved for yourself, you ordinarily wouldn't sack. You would wait 'til it came time in the spring to cut those potatoes, and then you'd sack them as you cut them, and then the sacks would go out to the potato planter.

Storey: How were potatoes marketed?

Selling Your Potatoes

Riley: There weren't too many big contracts in those days like there are now, you know, Simplot or Ore-Ida, these big potato processors who go out and contract for large blocks of potatoes now. In those days, it was basically you're on your own to sell your potatoes. So each farmer would travel down through the country or put an ad in the paper, put a sign up out on the highway. Over a period of time, you know, you'd build up a clientele. In the case of seed potatoes, generally the same people would come back and do business with you. So you were pretty much on your own to market your crops.

Storey: So there weren't wholesalers or anything?

Riley: Yeah. There were wholesalers in Salt Lake and Idaho Falls and probably in Pocatello,

but it was your responsibility to, you know, to be aggressive in marketing. Those buyers would come up into the valley, and they would like meet at the farmer's home or at the local restaurant or—it wasn't a restaurant, it was a café. You know, they'd put an ad in the paper and say, "We'll be there. . ."

Storey: So you'd go sell.

Riley: Yeah. And some farmers, you know, it was interesting, you could make or break yourself on potatoes. Like if you started into the fall, late fall after harvest, and potatoes were selling for a dollar and a half a hundred-weight, a lot of farmers would hold on until the spring, hoping that they could get four or five dollars. Sometimes the market just wouldn't be there, so there were times that the farmers would have to haul their spuds to a starch factory. But there are other times that, you know, they'd get seven, eight dollars a hundred-weight. Back in those days, that was good.

"My dad-in-law . . . He'd come out from Kansas and worked . . . 'til he saved up enough money to make a down payment on a little farm, and he was worried about making the mortgage payments. His second potato crop, he was able to pay the farm off. It just happened to be . . . a good year. . ."

My dad-in-law was worried about paying his farm off. He'd come out from Kansas and worked different jobs, as a farmhand and as a snow plower and as a woodsman, 'til he saved up enough money to make a down payment on a little farm, and he was worried about making the mortgage payments. His second potato crop, he was able to pay the farm off. It just happened to be one of those years right after World War II when the potatoes, I think, were going for five-, six dollars a hundred-weight.

". . . when you could buy a farm in those days for around \$100 an acre, irrigated, you could pay them off pretty fast with a few good crops. . ."

You know, when you could buy a farm in those days for around \$100 an acre, irrigated, you could pay them off pretty fast with a few good crops.

Storey: Let's talk a little more about the irrigation. Potatoes, I presume, are a row crop.

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: So you were running water down rows there. What about grain? How is that irrigated? It isn't a row crop, is it?

Flood Irrigating Grain

"So you had your old hip boots and you were just kind of like a shepherd, only you were a water-herder. . ."

Riley: Well, there are basically two different types that I know of. There are corrugated grain

fields where you have real deep corrugations⁵ between your rows of wheat, and it almost looks like a row crop. I've seen that out through the central part of Idaho here, south central Idaho, and some in the Boise Valley. But over there we used a very fine drill, and you had very small corrugation between rows.

So what you did was flood the fields. When you cut your ditch, the water just rushed out and soaked the field. If you had a little bit of a high spot, you'd have to lead your water there with a shovel. In other words, you'd just cut a little trench with your shovel over to the high spot. If you had a low spot and your water was ponding up on you, you'd have to go with your shovel and dig a little outlet for it.

So you had your old hip boots and you were just kind of like a shepherd, only you were a water-herder. You just walked out through that field back and forth, observed, see how your water was flowing. When it went clear through the field, then you knew that you were done and you'd move your set and the water, you know, just absorbed into the field.

Storey: Was this Reclamation water?

Farmers Used Reclamation and Non-Reclamation Water in the Area

Farmers Began the Original Diversions from the Fall River

Riley: A lot of the surface water was not Reclamation water. A lot of the farmers up in that Ashton area started out with surface water. That means they built a diversion dam on Fall River. Fall River was a primary source, because the Snake River ran east and south of the valley. It was in a rather deep canyon and it was hard in that upper part to divert from the Snake River. You couldn't divert naturally. So Fall River, which heads up in the Yellowstone Park country and is at the northeastern end of the valley, elevation-wise it would allow you to divert from the river down into the valley through gravity canals.

So the farmers built a couple of diversions up on Fall River. They would divert into the main supply ditches. They had shares or stock in the local canal companies, and they each would own so many shares. The main ditches would travel down through the valley from the upriver diversions, and they would run feeder ditches off of those main ditches. The main ditches had head gates all along them into the feeder ditches. That's pretty much the way it was done.

“One of the problems was that that upper Snake River valley was opened up to irrigation after a considerable amount of irrigation had been developed in south central Idaho around Twin Falls. . . . Twin Falls farmers had priority water rights. . . the irrigators up in the upper valley usually had to shut off, even in an average year, by mid-July. . . .”

5. In this instance referring to relatively small furrows or grooves separated by relatively small ridges that guide water through a field.

One of the problems was that that upper Snake River valley was opened up to irrigation after a considerable amount of irrigation had been developed in south central Idaho around Twin Falls. So many Twin Falls farmers had priority water rights on the Snake River. Of course, Fall River is tributary to the Snake River, so the irrigators up in the upper valley usually had to shut off, even in an average year, by mid-July. So you had a long period *after* mid-July where your crops were trying to mature and would sometimes have to go without irrigation water.

“ . . . the Bureau was really called into that part of the country, not to develop a new irrigation project like the Columbia Basin Project, but rather to provide storage for supplemental water supplies. . . . ”

So then the Bureau was really called into that part of the country, not to develop a new irrigation project like the Columbia Basin Project, but rather to provide storage for supplemental water supplies. So the Bureau came into, really, southern Idaho on that basis. Southern Idaho, you know, a lot of early irrigation development over in the eastern part, a lot of the Mormon settlements moved up into the upper valley, and there was a lot of irrigation just from natural runoff. So then you had some of the farmers formed co-ops or stock groups and they'd build small crib work storage dams. But then they called the Bureau in.

“I remember as a little kid seeing the Bureau of Reclamation office in the bank building there at Ashton when they were doing work at Jackson Lake, Grassy Lake, Island Park. . . . and then later built Palisades. . . . ”

I remember as a little kid seeing the Bureau of Reclamation office in the bank building there at Ashton when they were doing work at Jackson Lake, Grassy Lake, Island Park. So the Bureau came in and then later built Palisades. So all of those reservoirs that I've just mentioned, along with the big one downstream at American Falls, you know, were basically built for supplemental water supplies. That extended your irrigation season from mid-July sometimes into mid-September.

Storey: Were your stepdad's water rights good?

Riley: They were good. He had some of the early Fall River rights that were reliable. Also he may have had some Island Park or Grassy Lake water, but I'm not sure.

Storey: Did I just hear you say Island Park was a Reclamation dam?

Riley: Uh-huh.

Storey: So he was getting Reclamation water rights.

Using Storage Reservoirs for Water Exchanges to Supplement Existing Water Supplies

Riley: Yeah, if he had Island Park or Grassy lake rights. You know, a lot of the storage was operated on an exchange basis where you know what I mean is that . . .

Storey: Keep talking.

Riley: Well, what had happened is if you were in the upper valley and physically it was impossible for you to divert water from a gravity standpoint to get to your farm, you know, you'd build storage and then you would have an exchange where you could divert natural flow and replace it with storage, like from Island Park, to a downstream user, if you could work out exchange agreements. A water exchange helps to make efficient use of water in an area.

Storey: So that's what he had? Island Park was used as exchange water?

Riley: I'm not sure what storage he might of had. From a general sense, I know that in the southern part of Fremont County many irrigators *can* divert from the Snake River system, Henry's Fork. Island Park Reservoir is, you know, in the Snake River drainage. So Fremont-Madison Irrigation District can work exchanges between lower valley and upper valley lands.

Storey: And your dad was involved in that—your stepdad?

Riley: Yeah. I think he may have had some storage shares in Fremont-Madison. I'm not sure if there was any exchange involved.

Storey: You mentioned earlier that irrigation was hard work. How often did you have to irrigate?

“ . . . you usually had to give your wheat crop about three or four irrigations, depending on the precipitation that you got. So when you had to use canvas dams and a shovel, you know, to cover a field that many times in a summer from June through the middle or end of July, that kept you hustling. . . . ”

Riley: Well, you usually had to give your wheat crop about three or four irrigations, depending on the precipitation that you got. So when you had to use canvas dams and a shovel, you know, to cover a field that many times in a summer from June through the middle or end of July, that kept you hustling.

Storey: And that was the irrigation season, basically, June and July?

Usually There Would Be Adequate Precipitation in May So Irrigation Would Begin in June

Riley: Well, like I say, the irrigation season in that country, because of the late springs, you know, if you get your crop planted in early May, by the first part of June, they were mature enough. You'd have pretty good precip usually in May. May was kind of a semi-wet month up there, because that's relatively high elevation, about anywhere from 5,200 to 6,000 feet elevation.

The Irrigation Season on the Fremont-Madison Irrigation District

So then in June you'd start. Depending on the water supply availability, you would go until usually mid-July. But in a dry year, you know, you could get cut off in mid-July. But if you had a good water year, you could irrigate on out usually through August, about another six weeks. But by September, you know, you tapered off, because you'd have to start harvesting your grain. Your fall wheat, of course, you'd harvest in August. You didn't irrigate that anyway. But the spring wheat you would start harvesting in September. So you could have all your wheat out of the field before you had to start in your potatoes. So that's the way we did it.

Storey: So if you had water, and you were irrigating maybe 160 acres, as I recall, 120 acres . . .

Riley: Well, the farm was 160 acres and we probably irrigated a little more than half of that because of the topography and the rocks and so on.

Storey: How much of the time? Do you have any idea of what percentage of the time you'd be irrigating?

Riley: During those months?

Storey: Yeah.

Riley: You'd be irrigating about every day.

Storey: Okay. One place or another.

Riley: Yeah. Sometimes you'd get a weekend off, you know, that sort of thing. So you just kind of moved around.

Storey: That kept four of you busy?

“ . . . you've got to understand that stepdad kind of became a supervisor and the boys became the workers. . . . ”

Riley: Well, you've got to understand that stepdad kind of became a supervisor and the boys became the workers. Then, you know, we also had to work the dry farm place, we had summer fallow on that where, you know, you had it in the soil bank, and so you had to work that, and that was about a 160 acre place. If you had about sixty or eighty acres of that in, you'd have to go over that field at least twice in a summer usually with a duckfoot or a disc. So we kept pretty busy.

“ . . . you'd have your hay crops to harvest in between. Up there we'd usually get two crops of hay. So, you know, you'd have to mow your hay, bale it, stack it, then go back to irrigating that second hay crop. . . . ”

Then you'd have your hay crops to harvest in between. Up there we'd usually get two crops of hay. So, you know, you'd have to mow your hay, bale it, stack it, then go back to irrigating that second hay crop. And then cut, bale, and stack that.

Storey: When you say hay, do you mean alfalfa or . . .

Riley: Alfalfa.

Storey: Okay. Rather than meadow.

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: So the image I'm getting is that your stepdad had two farms. One was a dry farm and the other was an irrigated farm.

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: Ever remember any water disputes in your youth?

“Most of the disputes in those days were between the guys at the lower end of the canal and the guys at the upper end of the canal. . . .”

Riley: Yeah. Most of the disputes in those days were between the guys at the lower end of the canal and the guys at the upper end of the canal. Those were the disputes. You'd hear, you know, “Somebody's stealing water,” “Somebody's got their head gate cranked up,” “Somebody dried up my field, dried up my siphons last night.” So you had ditch riders. First thing you do is usually call the ditch rider and say, “Check here, check there.” And the ditch rider had the authority, you know, to turn a head gate up or down. But we didn't measure water.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

Storey: You were saying the ditch rider would go out and have the authority to open and close gates and so on, and you were talking about familiarity with the ditch.

Riley: Yeah. I think in those days, you know, you knew your ditch, you knew what the water levels were, you knew how many cranks on the head gate you needed for a certain flow of water. *I* didn't know that, but my stepdad did. He knew, you know, turn it up four, five, six, turn it down two. So that's the way you managed water. We were usually happy with the water we were getting. If something happened that the water went down in the ditch or you got too much water down the ditch, then you knew a neighbor had either cut off his irrigation or increased it. Sometimes it could be a main ditch failure or repair job. This “water management” was pretty much an expertise that developed over time—passed down from a grandpa to a son to a grandson.

Storey: And you didn't really measure the water?

Riley: Other than knowing where on your head gate you were supposed to be and how many inches of water a certain number of cranks on the head gate represented. I didn't know any of that. I just turned it according to instructions.

Storey: Do you ever remember any conversations about water and water disputes?

Coffee Breaks in Ashton

Riley: Not other than in the coffee break. Farmers would usually come in for coffee break or visit the pool hall. Shooting pool, you'd hear people complaining. But in those days, you had very few major disputes.

Effects of Flood Irrigation on the Snake Plain Aquifer and Thousand Springs

You had a lot of flood irrigation. The flood irrigation did a couple of things. If you understand the hydrology of the Snake River Basin, the flood irrigation in the upper end, a lot of that water percolated down into the basalts, became a part of the Snake Plain Aquifer. The Snake Plain Aquifer, a lot of it would exit into American Falls and a larger part in the Snake River at Thousand Springs farther downstream. So a lot of the water that was diverted up in Fremont County would come back into the river system downstream.

It seemed like I never did hear arguments between the upper and lower valley irrigators. Of course, you know, when you're a kid, you're not that attuned to that kind of stuff, but it wasn't obvious that upper valley and the lower valley were having arguments then. Then, of course, Palisades Reservoir was relatively new. It was built what, in the '50s. Island Park was built in the '40s, in the late '30s, early '40s. It just seemed to be a good balance.

In the late '60s, the Fremont-Madison Irrigation District said that in dry years the—I don't know, 100,000-plus acres in that upper valley could suffer at least 50 percent water shortage. So the district worked hard, lobbied, to get Teton Dam authorized and built. And you know the history of Teton Dam. It failed. So that upper valley, you know, didn't get that supplemental water supply.

Effects of Sprinkler Irrigation

Now there is a *major* concern between the upper valley and the lower valley, for a couple of reasons. The upper valley is converted heavily to sprinkler irrigation, the area where I grew up. A lot of the water supply that once percolated into the aquifer has been diminished, and, combined with greater groundwater pumping and about eight or nine years of drought, the outflow of the aquifer into the Thousand Springs area has suffered. So the lower valley people are, you know, starting to really insist on their water rights being honored, and the upper valley water users with later priority could be impacted by that, both in terms of restricted surface supply, diversions, and groundwater pumping.

But when I was growing up, that controversy didn't exist. It was pretty much, in my view, a local, "That S.O.B. is taking my water. Here I am at the end of the ditch and I'm dry." You know, it was farmer to farmer.

“ . . . the big head-to-head between the agricultural community and the other river

users, the fishermen, the floaters, didn't really start to occur until probably the late '70s . . ."

Really, the big—what would you say—the big head-to-head between the agricultural community and the other river users, the fishermen, the floaters, didn't really start to occur until probably the late '70s, in the '70s. NEPA was what? '69?

Storey: Yes. 1969.

Riley: '69. So in the '70s, you know, there started to be a little more contention between fishermen and boaters and the irrigators. Jackson Lake was one of the early areas of controversy, the drawdown of the lake in the national park and flow problems below Jackson Lake Dam for the rafters. Also, the South Fork of the Snake River below Palisades is a blue-ribbon trout fishery. That became an area of concern.

"Construction of Teton Dam did more than anything I know to raise an environmental awareness at Reclamation projects,, not only in southeastern Idaho but, throughout Reclamation. . . ."

Teton Dam. Construction of Teton Dam did more than anything I know to raise an environmental awareness at Reclamation projects,, not only in southeastern Idaho but, throughout Reclamation. It was a controversial dam to start with. The name of the dam, Teton Dam, was a red flag to start with. Then the environmental impact statement in those days was minimal. The nationally based environmental groups taking interest. There was great concern about the impacts of building it, and then when the dam failed and took out a large segment, of the Teton River, which was a blue-ribbon trout fishery and good big game habitat there was a great outcry from the environmental community.

". . . when the cotton-picking thing failed, it was a catastrophe, not only in terms of loss of life and the economic impacts, but the 'I told you so' atmosphere that followed. . . ."

And then when the cotton-picking thing failed, it was a catastrophe, not only in terms of loss of life and the economic impacts, but the "I told you so" atmosphere that followed. That had repercussions all through Reclamation.

Storey: Yeah. Do you ever remember any fist fights or hearing about any fist fights or anything like that over water?

Riley: Yeah. I do recall stories about a few fist fights, pulling people's dams out, taking the old rifle up to the head gate. You know, I can't really be specific, but those stories were around town.

"My dad-in-law . . . owned shares in . . . the Farmer's Own Canal. . . . He was right near the end of the ditch, and he was kind of the new kid on the block. . . . he had some really hard run-ins . . . dried up ditches, sleepless nights, trouble with neighbors that continues on to today. . . . he drilled a agricultural well and plowed his ditches in and said, 'I'm done with that turmoil and contention.' . . . for thirty

years or so, has irrigated with the well. . . .”

My dad-in-law was an example of a fellow that owned shares in a canal, and I think it's called the Farmer's Own Canal. It came out of Fall River. He was right near the end of the ditch, and he was kind of the new kid on the block. Even though the farm had been there for decades, he had just bought it, and so he was kind of a Johnnie-come-lately to the area, to that ditch service area, and he had some really hard run-ins, verbal, verbally abusive arguments, dried up ditches, sleepless nights, trouble with neighbors that continues on to today. Even though he's been retired for twenty years, the resentment is still there.

That led him to apply to the state to drill a well, and he drilled a agricultural well and plowed his ditches in and said, "I'm done with that turmoil and contention." And so he, for thirty years or so, has irrigated with the well.

Storey: When did he do that? When did he drill a well?

Riley: In the late '60s. Well, no, about 1961 or 1960.

Storey: So this turmoil, as you put it, was going on while you were there working on the farm?

Riley: Well, this was my father-in-law now.

Storey: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay.

Riley: My stepfather, on our farm, we never had a problem, contention.

Storey: Do you remember the name of the ditch your stepdad's farm was on?

Riley: I think it was called the Farmer's Own.

Storey: Oh, so both your father-in-law and your stepfather . . .

Riley: No, we were pretty much on what you would call the Marysville Ditch.

Storey: Your stepfather?

Riley: Yeah. My stepfather was pretty much on the Marysville Ditch side, and my father-in-law was on the Farmer's Own.

Storey: You mentioned something that's fascinated me that I think I got a glimmer of—coffee breaks. (Riley: Yeah.) Tell me about coffee breaks.

Coffee Breaks in Ashton

Riley: Well, you know, a farming community *is* a community. It's an economic, social, cultural whole. It's a piece of the world that's kind of protected. It's "everybody knows everybody." It's a good life. You've got the farmsteads all out through the

countryside, and then you've got the little community that's usually the focal point for churches, schools, small businesses, your retail community. And, of course, you've got the pool hall, the bars, and the cafes, and the coffee breaks were traditional for everybody. Whether you drank coffee or whether you didn't, you'd go to the café, and that was usually twice a day, mid-morning and mid-afternoon. The café was the gathering place for businessmen and farmers, either the café or the pool hall or the co-op. When I say co-op, I mean the place that sold diesel fuel, gasoline, oil, tires, that sort of thing.

So you had these gathering places. Depending on what your favorite was, you'd either go to the pool hall to have a beer or a pop, or play a hand of pinochle, or shoot pool or snooker; *or* you'd go to the café and you'd have a couple of cups of coffee and drive the waitresses crazy; or you'd go to the co-op and sit around in the co-op lobby talking about how good or how bad things were. So it was a social event every day for many farmers. People looked forward to coffee breaks. They go on year 'round. They get longer in the winter, shorter in the summer. It's a time to talk about politics, talk about the morality of the community, about intercounty problems between communities, about water problems. What do you call it? It's a "safety valve" to express opinions, gripe, celebrate, that sort of thing.

Storey: And Ashton had this?

Riley: Yeah, when we could take a break.

Storey: So you would drive in from the farms and do this?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: How far out were the two farms that you were working?

Riley: Well, one of them was about ten miles, and when we were working that dry farm place, we pretty much stayed out there. The irrigated place was about three miles, and you'd come in many days.

The other places were the drugstore. They had a fountain. Around the fountain, you know, you had people pull up with milk shakes or pop. And the barbershop, of course, was a gathering place. Two barber chairs. Chairs around all three walls, and they were usually at least half filled. And that was a place to complain, to talk, and whatever. So you either came in to get a haircut, a milk shake, a cup of coffee, a bottle of beer, or shoot a game of pool or something.

Storey: People who have never been in small communities, I don't think have ever seen this happen.

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: I've run across it a number of times. That's why I was interested in asking you about it.

You mentioned earlier that going to college was sort of special in those days. Why did you decide to go to college? How did that come about?

Why He Decided to Go to College

Riley: I hadn't been raised on a farm and Grandpa hadn't been a farmer and Dad wasn't a farmer. You know, I was kind of interjected into this thing when I was about fifteen, fourteen, something like that. So I really had no great sense of being a farm boy. Some of the guys I went to school with, two or three of them *were* "traditional" worked with dad, and they're still there.

Most of the guys saw college as a chance to go off and be something. You know, if you stayed in Ashton, you could be a farmer with dad and grandpa, or you could work for the Forest Service, or work in the timber, or you could stick around and sort spuds in the winter and work as a farmhand in the summer for somebody else or irrigate for somebody, teach school, or work for a small business. Most of the businesses were family businesses with the husband and wife, mom-and-pop operation, and a few people that have worked there forever. And, you know, there were few or no retail opportunities, so to speak. So, going to college was a chance to really make something of yourself, a big adventure to go to a different place, a different lifestyle.

I was able to go to college because I got a football scholarship. I don't know what I'd have done if I hadn't gotten a football scholarship. I'd probably gone anyway. You know, I didn't want to stay around and really work on the farm. So I went off to college and played football and didn't know what I wanted to do. (laughter)

Storey: You went to Idaho State University, I think you said.

Went to Utah State University as a Freshman

Riley: Well, I went to my first year at Utah State.

Storey: *Utah State?*

Riley: Utah. Well, now, Utah State my first year on a football scholarship, and I flunked football. What happened—this is not really that interesting, but I went to Utah State, played freshman football. The coach said, "Great. We had a great freshman season. What I want you to do now is transfer up to Ricks College at Rexburg," which had one building. In contrast Utah State is beautiful, beautiful campus, beautiful trees on a hill.

Storey: Where is that?

Riley: Logan.

Storey: Logan, Utah.

Transferred to Idaho State University in Pocatello

Storey: Logan, Utah. Beautiful. He says, “I want you to go up to Ricks College in Rexburg.” Rexburg, bare hill, one three-story building, that’s Ricks College, and that’s thirty miles from Ashton. I didn’t like Rexburg, I didn’t want that, so I said to myself, “I think I’ll get married instead.” So *then* I got married and I transferred to Idaho State in Pocatello. That’s where I got my bachelor’s degree at Idaho State. Then I went to the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho, to do graduate work.

Storey: Now, how did you get interested in history and biology? That’s quite a combination.

Riley: Yeah. Well, see, like I said, I didn’t go to school saying I want to be an engineer—I wanted to be a football coach. But when I stopped playing football, that’s what threw the monkey wrench in my plans. And so I said, “Well, I like biology and I do pretty well in biology. It’s orderly. The frogs and everything are orderly. It’s an orderly universe, and I like that.” History. I liked history. They had a couple of good history professors at Idaho State, believe it or not. One was Dr. Merrill Beal, who had written a history of Idaho and worked up at Yellowstone Park in the summers and knew all about the Indians and all of that sort of thing. I liked that. I liked the way he taught and the example he was.

I just about had “equal number of history courses and biology, zoology, botany courses. So I had to make a decision in my senior year whether I wanted to follow the biological science or the social science side. . . .”

So I went through my undergraduate years with about an equal number of history courses and biology, zoology, botany courses. So I had to make a decision in my senior year whether I wanted to follow the biological science or the social science side. I thought about going into medicine, a pre-med program, that sort of thing, but I was broke, really. I was working two jobs at college. About that time, like I say, the University of Idaho started a graduate program in history, and they offered me a fellowship, to go up there. So I had a wife and a little baby and that seemed like a way to—I enjoyed history and I needed the opportunity to pay my bills.

Wrote His Thesis on the History of Nez Perce Tribal Government

So I went up there, and I had some real good professors at Idaho. I got with my—what do you call them—advisor, Siegfried Rolland, and we figured out a good thesis would be to do the Nez Perce Tribe, the nature of the government of the Nez Perce Tribe from time immemorial to the present. So I spent a lot of time on the Nez Perce Reservation at Lapwai, and I took a real interest in that. I would say that I drifted into history. It turned out okay.

Storey: When you were first talking, it *sounded to me* like what you said was that you graduated from high school and then worked four or five years on the farm and then went to school. But I’m gathering that what I really should have heard was that you had worked four or five years on the farm before you went off to college and there wasn’t a gap in there.

Riley: Yeah. Usually most kids that I grew up with started working when you were old

enough to work, you know. So my farm years were primarily my high-school years. I spent one summer on the farm while in college. I also did the potato harvest thing from grade school through high school.

Storey: You mentioned earlier that you studied history and anthropology at Moscow. Were there any particular professors that influenced you?

Riley: Yeah. There were a couple. Dr. William S. Greever was the head of the history department. He was a good professor, very good. I enjoyed working with him. Dr. Rolland, Siegfried Rolland, was my advisor, and he probably had a greater influence. Greever was very professional, somewhat quiet. Rolland seemed to be hell-bent for election, quite outspoken, kind of reminded me of a football coach-type guy. And so I think he and I hit it off pretty well. He helped me a lot, helped me really get a good background in problem-solving. What I mean by that is, you know, the problem-solving process and gathering information and the research part. Research and writing were a big part of the graduate program and the experience was invaluable.

“ . . . I was one of the first ones that they had that was specifically hired to be a *planning report writer* versus an engineer writing a report or an economist or a hydrologist. . . . ”

So when I went to work for the Bureau as— they called them, report writers in those days, in the Bureau in this region, I guess I was one of the first ones that they had that was specifically hired to be *a planning report writer* versus an engineer writing a report or an economist or a hydrologist. The problem solving, research, and writing experience was critical. My job was to consolidate and summarize and simplify technical information. So my background in history and writing and research helped.

Storey: Well, you know, I'd like to talk about your Reclamation career, but we've already been talking two hours and fifteen minutes. (laughter)

Riley: Isn't that terrible?

Storey: No, it's great. I'd like to ask you whether or not researchers from inside and outside Reclamation can use the tapes and resulting transcripts from this interview.

Riley: Yes.

Storey: Good. Thank you.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 8, 1994.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 1. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: This is Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Robert J. Riley on March the 20th, 1995, at about one o'clock in the afternoon in the Pacific Northwest Regional Office of the Bureau of Reclamation in Boise, Idaho. This is tape one.

Last time when we talked, Mr. Riley, you mentioned that you had been working on a thesis on the Nez Perce, I believe. Could you tell me more about that? That was when you were at the University of Idaho at Moscow.

Wrote His Thesis on the Government of the Nez Perce Indians

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: And you were a history major, am I remembering correctly?

Riley: That's right. University of Idaho had just initiated a doctoral program in history, and they had offered a National Defense Fellowship. In fact, this was the first year that they started that. It would have been in '59. I worked with my major professor up there, who was Siegfried Rolland, and went through a list of possible thesis topics and decided to work with the Nez Perce Indian Tribe. The subject was "The Nez Perce: A Struggle for Self-Government."

The concept was to try to follow the way that the tribe governed itself from time immemorial to that present time. That required that I go to the Northern Idaho Indian Agency in Lapwai, Idaho and meet with Bureau of Indian Affairs people and, more importantly, to meet with the Nez Perce Tribal Council to get their approval and permission to use their library and their files, and sit in on their tribal council meetings, and to interview members of the tribal council and the general council.

So I did that and did the research. The University of Idaho had a pretty good library that included quite a number of early Indian Affairs documents and with the library there and the work at the Indian agency and with the tribal council, I did the thesis on tribal government.

Storey: What did you conclude?

Riley: Well, I concluded that the Nez Perce originally, or at least as far back as I could go and they could help me, the Nez Perce were never really an independent single tribe with a single head man or chief. The tribe was actually comprised of a number of bands. Each band had its own head man and occupied a different geographical area, either along the Snake River or the Wallowa River or the Salmon River, or the Clearwater River. Each one of those groups had a little bit different lifestyle that depended on a different seasonal food base.

When the Europeans came and the missionaries came to Lapwai, they were interested in getting these bands in closer proximity so that it would be more convenient, I think, for teaching purposes and that sort of thing. So they pretty much designated one or two head men for the tribe, without really much approval of the scattered-out bands of Nez Perce. That was a big contributor to the Nez Perce War in 1877. When the U.S. Army tried to bring the bands onto the reservation at Lapwai, a number of the band head men—Joseph's band from the Wallowa Valley and Looking Glass, Toohoolhoolzote, and White Bird—those were the primary ones—joined together and tried to move into Canada. The main group didn't make it, of course, and

surrendered at the Battle of Bear Paw in Montana. One small group under White Bird did make it.

After the Battle of The Bear Paw, the non-Christian Indians, those primarily led by Joseph since most other head men had been killed, were sent to the Indian territory and resided there for a number of years until they were eventually brought back to the Colville Indian Reservation near Grand Coulee Dam in Washington. The band never did return to their home country. So then after that, the tribal government was pretty much, for a number of years, influenced by, I think, the Bureau of Indian Affairs. However, as the tribes, I would guess in the '50s, early '50s, began to be more independent and there were some outstanding young men that reached out to take more responsibility for self-government. They established an effective executive committee and began to speak out and seek solutions to their concerns and move farther away, I think, from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

It's pretty much been a progression, then, for the last thirty years, I would say, thirty to forty years, strengthening that leadership talent, trying to develop greater educational and economic opportunities on the reservation, become more assertive in their natural resource management, their financial affairs, and there's been quite a move, I think, away from the old concept of assimilation—I can't remember the phrase exactly, but the integration of the Indian community into the non-Indian community, a move away from that to a stronger Indian community preserving more of their values and making the reservation more of a productive, cultural home for the Nez Perce.

Storey: Now, as I recall, you went from graduate school to the Columbia Basin Project?

Riley: No, I actually went from graduate to unemployment, and I fed cattle and sorted potatoes for about six months until I got a phone call from the Columbia Basin Project in Ephrata, and I didn't get that job. The man, I think his name was Ed Arnold, the administrative officer at Ephrata, interviewed me for a job, but I wasn't selected. He referred my name to the regional office in Boise. Gib Shirk, who was in the planning division at that time, hired me as a technical writer, and that would have been in '61.

Storey: In late '61, then.

Riley: About June or July.

Storey: And you referred to the planning office as being located in the sheep sheds, I believe.

Reclamation Offices in the "Sheep Sheds"

Riley: Uh-huh. At that time, the regional office was located on Orchard Street in Boise, and the main part of the regional office which housed the regional director and, a large part of the O&M and administrative services groups was in a two-or three-story concrete building on Orchard. And then behind that were a number of barrack-like structures that had been, I think, part of the old fairgrounds, Southwest Idaho Fairgrounds, that we called the sheep sheds, and that's where we worked.

Storey: Were these one-story? Two-story?

Riley: One-story. The low ceilings, squeaking floor, bad ventilation, and wood siding and kind of scary. (laughter)

Storey: Scary in what way?

“ . . . I had to actually kneel on another person’s desk to get to my desk, because there was no walk room to get through there. . . .”

Riley: Scary to me because it was crowded with people that all seemed to be middle-aged and really knowledgeable and knew everything about everything, kind of dark and crowded. I remember when I was taken to my office, I had to actually kneel on another person’s desk to get to my desk, because there was no walk room to get through there.

Don Street, Harold Hafterson, Doyle Affleck, Elwyn White, Gib Shirk, Clifford Okeson

But I’ll tell you, looking back on it, those were good days, because that would have been probably at the tail end of the Bureau’s real productive period, I believe, here in the Northwest, and there were a lot of fellows highly recognized for their expertise that worked there in economics. Don Street in economics; Harold Hafterson in hydrology; Doyle Affleck in engineering; Elwyn White, planning officer. Gib Shirk was a very knowledgeable person on Reclamation law, and Clifford J. Okeson was a knowledgeable geologist.

Regional Director Harold T. Nelson

It was just really a good group of people that knew their business, had come up through the ‘40s and ‘50s, worked on a lot of the projects in this region. The regional director was quite famous, or infamous, Harold T. Nelson, a very forceful-type person, politician. So it was a good group of people, but to a young fellow, it was kind of intimidating. To get around the lunch table and you didn’t dare say a word. (laughter) So that was the beginning.

Storey: Tell me about some of these folks. You mentioned a guy named Don Street. What was he like?

Don Street Review of Planning Documents

Riley: Well, Don Street was head of the economics group, and he was a prima donna in demanding accuracy and clear explanation. He was a critic in the sense of going through planning documents with a fine-toothed comb. I think he had a reputation as a pretty good forward-thinker. He was willing to challenge anybody in Reclamation. I think his group that included Ken Johnson and Wayne Peterson and Ed Lee was a highly recognized group of economists.

“ . . . in those days you’d do a planning report, and you’d have a clearing

conference . . . you'd distribute a draft of the planning report . . . to the staff for review. And then you'd all meet . . . like having an oral exam for a master's thesis or a doctoral oral exam . . ."

It seemed like in those days you'd do a planning report, and you'd have a clearing conference, and what you'd do about a month before you had the clearing conference is that you'd distribute a draft of the planning report, and each planning report had an engineering section and a water section and an economic section, and it would go around to the staff for review. And then you'd all meet in a room like this, like having an oral exam for a master's thesis or a doctoral oral exam, and you'd just start around the table. A guy like Don Street had his report full of paper clips and red marks, and you'd sit there and he would crucify the report writer usually, because in those days, well, Terry Lynott,⁶ Bob Riley, Fred Stillings, Chuck Laythe, I think we were the first of the report writers in this region. I don't remember, but it seems to me like Terry had a background in geography. I can't remember for sure. (Storey: He did.) Chuck Laythe was geography, Fred Stillings was English, and I was history. The Bureau of Reclamation was engineering and economics. Geography, English, history had a tough row to hoe.

So I don't think we were held in very high regard in those days as report writers. So a guy like Don Street would work us over pretty good. However, he was fair and he was right, usually right. I'll tell you, if you could get a report through Don Street, and the P-N Pacific Northwest regional office division heads, you usually had clear sailing from there on. So they were very good and they weren't reluctant—I mean, you know, no wavering. They knew where they wanted to go. They were positive, they were creative, and that's the way that kind of worked. It taught us much about planning.

Storey: Was there a nickname for Don Street, either one that was used with him or behind his back?

Riley: You know, I don't remember one. I don't remember one for Don. I really don't. No, I don't recall one for Don.

Storey: You mentioned was it a Harold Hafterson?

Harold Hafterson, Regional Hydrologist

Riley: Hafty. He had a nickname, Hafty. Harold Hafterson was the hydrologist.

Storey: What was he like?

Riley: Harold Hafterson was a deep thinker. He knew the hydrology of the Northwest like the back of his hand. Kind of a slow talker, and he would philosophize a lot. A very friendly guy. He was very professional and a credit to the Bureau. He ran his shop with a close hand. The hydrology information that came out of Hafterson's group was accurate, and it was well presented, clearly presented. It was readable to a layman, and

6. Terry Lynott participated in Reclamation's oral history program.

it was well done. He could go to a controversial meeting and explain to the public how water supply works and what water requirements are and operation studies and the interrelationships very well. He was kind of a soft-spoken fellow but very professional.

Storey: You mentioned a geologist, I believe.

Cliff Okeson Was Regional Geologist

Riley: Cliff Okeson was the geologist, and he had an outstanding geology crew. I remember one of the junior geologists was Dan Magleby, who was very competent. But Okeson was much like Ted Hafterson. He was quiet. They were both tall fellows, impressive in appearance. Okeson was very professional, could explain things clearly and knew geology very well and could explain the relationship of geology to major structures, dams, powerplants, canals.

As a report writer, you know, you had to look at everybody's work. Some of the GS-12-type people couldn't write very well, to be honest with you. I'm sure they were good scientists, but they couldn't write very well. But guys like Okeson and Hafterson and Street would make sure that the materials that came out of their respective offices was clear, supportable, not contradictory.

Storey: Do you remember how to spell Okeson's name?

Riley: O-K-E-S-O-N.

Storey: You mentioned several other people.

Gilbert (Gib) V. Shirk

Riley: Two characters that are worth reflecting on, for sure. One was Gib Shirk. Gib Shirk, his name was Gilbert V. Shirk and they called him Gib. He was the guy probably parallel today but maybe not quite as gruff would be Donald Glaser in the sense that Gib understood the history of Reclamation, Reclamation law and the politics of natural resources very well. He was a great student of laws that related to Reclamation. He was the *thinker* in the sense of trying to get the political skids greased. He knew how to help the technical people in the area of formulation. He was an expert in formulation and justifying conceptually different ways to make things work. He was very outspoken, usually went around in a dress shirt with sleeves rolled up to about his elbow, his tie loosened at the throat, a cigarette hanging from his mouth and his glasses down on his nose, and could speak freely to the regional director. The regional director depended heavily on Gib.

He was very fair. I remember more than once, after a clearing conference on a report when a report writer would be feeling down, you know, Gib would take you off to the side and console you and tell you you were doing a good job and to not let these other guys bother you too much. So I would say Gib really taught young people like myself. I guess you could say he would be a step beyond the graduate school in teaching the problem-solving process that you learn in graduate school. He'd take you

a step beyond that in terms of ability to think and reason. Terry Lynott, Bob Riley, Fred Stillings, Chuck Laythe, he taught us all, because he critiqued us. He taught us the importance of credibility, consistency, thorough investigation, work supported by the law or policy, and he was an outstanding Reclamation person.

Don Price served as administrative officer

One other one is Don Price. Don Price was the administrative officer for the planning group, and he was the guy that really kept the planning group going in terms of administrative business, funding, equipment, supplies, travel, personnel actions. He was the kind of guy that was so dominant, such a hard charger, that he could get things done. I mean, he was a doer. *All* of the ones that I've mentioned are gone now, except Don Price still lives here in Boise, and he's an expert on Reclamation, I'll tell you that.

Storey: I tried to contact him the last time I was here and couldn't get through. I wonder if he goes south for the winter or something.

Riley: Yes. Yeah, he does. He should be coming home now. When I left here, I gave him a whole folder full of photographs of these people that we're talking about and the old planning people, the old regional directors, that I gathered up through the years. And he's still sharp mentally. He's still clicking good. He's in his '80s, but he's still clicking.

Storey: Did Gib Shirk or Mr. Price have nicknames?

Riley: Just Gib.

Storey: Just Gib.

Riley: And Don. Donald Price. You know, some of their closer compatriots might have had names for them, but that's all I ever heard. It was pretty professional, I mean, in terms of calling them something behind their back. (laughter)

Storey: What about Nelson?

Harry Stivers and Norm Moore

Riley: H. T.? All I ever heard him called was H. T. Just looking from *my* perspective, he kept the region going. He had a couple of assistant regional directors that helped him quite a bit. I think one of his right-hand people was Harry Stivers, and the other one was Norm Moore. They both still live here in Boise. Stivers kind of started out as the public affairs officer and I think ended up as a special assistant to the regional director. Norm Moore was the other assistant regional director, handled, I think, planning and O&M.

Harold worked very well and closely with people he trusted, people whose technical capability he trusted. He had a number of people that he worked directly with like Don Street and Gib Shirk. He and Gib Shirk worked very closely together. Ken Johnson, an economist, and Stivers.

Harold T. Nelson “. . . was very, very close to the water and power interests in the Pacific Northwest states. . . .”

Harold was political, politically inclined. You know, he had a loyalty to Reclamation, but then, too, he was very, very close to the water and power interests in the Pacific Northwest states. He was highly respected, as I recollect, by those groups. Stayed on as regional director for at least twenty years.⁷ He was kind of *distant* to a lot of us. Like he'd get in an elevator and you'd say, "Good morning," and then if you got, "Good morning," that was it, you know. (laughter)

“He worked with a pretty close group of people, but highly respected . . .”

He worked with a pretty close group of people, but highly respected and, I think, effective, because the Northwest—I guess I'm kind of biased here, but the Pacific Northwest had a pretty good program, pretty strong program, some really good technical people and some effective projects and good projects, and he was the main person behind most of those.

Storey: What kind of projects did you work on? Do you remember any specifically?

Various Planning Projects He Worked On, Including Teton Dam

Riley: Yeah. Probably the first one that I got very closely involved in—I was only with Reclamation for a year the first time I was here. Most of that first year was editing reports that somebody else had written and just double-checking the numbers, and, you know, kind of a clerk-type guy. Then when I came back to Reclamation from the National Park Service, I got more deeply involved. I worked a little bit on the Teton Project. In the early years on the Teton Project and on the Burnt River Project, on the East Greenacres Project, and on the Lower Snake Project, on the Okanogan Project, and the Oroville-Tonasket Project.⁸ Those were in the early years.

“. . . after coming to the regional office, I worked mostly as a manager either in the reports division as head of the reports group, or as the planning officer. . . .”

Then after coming to the regional office, I worked mostly as a manager either in the reports division as head of the reports group, or as the planning officer. That was really more of a management position, and I didn't personally write reports after that point.

Storey: Tell me about Terry Lynott, whom you've mentioned a couple of times.

Riley: See, I came to the Bureau in 1961. Terry hadn't arrived yet.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. MARCH 20, 1995.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 20, 1995.

7. Harold T. Nelson served as regional director in Boise from 1949 until 1972. Both Floyd Dominy and Terry Lynott mentioned him in their oral history interviews.

8. The Oroville-Tonasket Unit, Okanogan-Similkameen Division, Chief Joseph Dam Project.

Storey: You were just saying that Terry Lynott had not yet arrived when you came.

Riley: Terry hadn't arrived yet. At the time I came, the technical writers were really mostly engineers or economists who had been assigned a technical writing job. Burt Malmquist and Bill Maughn, I think, were the main engineer-type technical writers when I came. Shortly after I left to go to the National Park Service, Don Price and Gib, I think, recruited Fred Stillings, Chuck Laythe, and Terry Lynott. I can't remember when Terry came. I would say it must have been '63, '64. I can't remember for sure.

Storey: But he was here when you came back then?

Terry Lynott

Riley: When I came back from the National Park Service in—well, what was it? '66 or '67? '66. When I came back in 1966, I went to the Snake River office and worked with Fred Stillings. Chuck Lake, I believe, was either in Spokane Washington, or Salem, Oregon. I think Terry, was at the regional office.⁹ That's so long ago I can't remember very well, but I know he worked in the regional office, and probably with Bill Maughn for a while. And I know he worked with Gib Shirk and Ed Lee.

“ . . . when Ed Lee took the head reports job in the regional office, [Don Street said] that that move strengthened both economics where Ed came from and the reports group where he was going. . . I know Don was ribbing Ed. . . .”

I think Terry worked most closely with Ed Lee for a number of years. Ed was an economist who came into the reports group. You remember Don Street. He said when Ed Lee took the head reports job in the regional office, that that move strengthened both economics where Ed came from and the reports group where he was going. I always thought that was kind of humorous. I know Don was ribbing Ed.

But, anyway, Terry was a young whippersnapper and smart. He can present himself well. He had a gift of being able to talk with people. You know, he was a smooth person in the sense that he didn't hem and haw, and he could express himself. I think he kind of was the regional office focal point for reports, even though I think Ed Lee at that time was the head of reports. Terry would go around to the area offices and meet with area planning people and go over our programs and our reports, report concepts, with us, so that when reports came in, you'd have a better understanding of those.

I think he was a political animal, so to speak. He was interested in, you know, being more than a technical writer. He wanted to get, I think, more into decision-making and plan formulation and program development and policy guidance and things like that. So I think the career track that he's followed has been suited to the talents that I recall that he had when he was a young guy here in this region.

9. Terry Lynott came to Reclamation in Boise in 1963 after graduating from the University of Oregon where he received his master's degree in geography.

After he left the P-N region, you know, I really didn't have much to do with Terry until the reorganization that brought him in to Denver. He was on a lot of special-type projects.

When Terry Lynott Became Assistant Commissioner—Resources Management the Planning Officers Met Quite Often with Him in Denver

But then, you know, when he got to be in the ACRM group,¹⁰ the planning officers would go down to Denver quite often and Terry was involved in the meetings, the planning officers' meetings and the budget meetings. Terry has always been, to me, an easy person to talk to, a person that sees the big picture. He can present himself well. I think, you know, he always felt pretty close to the administration, and that's understandable. When you're in a Denver office position like those he held or in a river basin commission or group, you're very politically sensitive. He became pretty politically sensitized, and that's understandable because of the type of work he did.

“ . . . I hoped that he [Terry Lynott] could do more forceful battle on some issues that the planning officers felt strongly about, but he was dealing with some really dominant personalities . . . I think it was hard to pound on the table an awful lot. . . ”

So personally I always was able to work with Terry. There were times that I hoped that he could do more forceful battle on some issues that the regional planning officers felt strongly about, but he was dealing with some really dominant personalities in the nature of the commissioners that we had and the assistant commissioners. I think it was hard to pound on the table an awful lot.

“ . . . Reclamation was in a defensive posture, and I think this makes a lot of difference in the way people have to do their job. . . . when you're a program that's under attack . . . you don't operate from a base of power. . . . It's pretty much a reactive, reactionary, defensive way to do business. . . . ”

Well, to be honest with you, Reclamation, for all of the time that I think Terry was in a management-type position, Reclamation was in a defensive posture, and I think this makes a lot of difference in the way people have to do their job. You know, if you're in an agency that has a majority of the support of the Congress, of OMB Office of Management and Budget, of the local politicians, the local people, you know, you can go into a room and pound your fist on the table and say, “This is what we think and this is what we want,” and there is enough wherewithal behind your program to make that heard. But when you're a program that's under attack, an agency that's under attack, you don't operate from a base of power. You don't operate from a base of power. It's pretty much a reactive, reactionary, defensive way to do business.

I know that made Reclamation difficult for me the last ten years, and I'm sure that it was true for Terry also. That's my guess.

10. Assistant Commissioner—Resources Management. Terry Lynott served as the Assistant Commissioner for Resources Management in 1988.

Commissioner Dan Beard

And so now with a guy like Commissioner Dan Daniel P. Beard,¹¹ whether you agree with his philosophy or his management style, *when* I left here, he seemed to be trying to speak from a position of strength rather than always being apologetic and defensive. I think he was trying to take the offense. Up until that time through the prior commissioners, it was difficult. I think Terry had to work and live through that.

“ . . . Terry was depended on heavily, I think, by the commissioner and others to do special projects. I think he was special projected to death. . . .”

Now, you know, I might be looking at it too negatively, but Terry was depended on heavily, I think, by the commissioner and others to do special projects. I think he was special projected to death. It sounds like he still is a special projects man. Maybe that's been part of his salvation, being able to move away a little bit and to have some independence to be able to manage his own destiny, so to speak.

Storey: Any nicknames for him?

Riley: No, not that I ever heard. Really, I never did hear any.

Storey: I have a note here that says “permission slips.” Does that ring any bells with you?

Riley: Permission slips?

Storey: Yeah.

Riley: What's around permission slips? What comes before that?

Storey: Planning office, and after it is Grand Portages in Morristown. It isn't something that's slipping up to the surface real quick.

Riley: No.

Storey: Tell me about the kind of hours you worked when you were in the planning office here in the region.

“I was pretty fortunate . . . I would guess that on the average I probably worked fifty hours, maybe fifty to fifty-five hours a week, on the average. In times of crisis, of course, you work longer. . . .”

Riley: I was pretty fortunate, because I always had a good staff that did good work. So I would guess that on the average I probably worked fifty hours, maybe fifty to fifty-five hours a week, on the average. In times of crisis, of course, you work longer. You know, I see people like Boise office Regional Director John W. Keys III,¹² who burns

11. Commissioner Daniel (Dan) P. Beard participated in Reclamation's oral history program.

12. Commissioner John W. Keys III participated in Reclamation's oral history program. He served as regional (continued...)

the midnight oil and the weekend oil. I never really had to do that except on occasion when there was a crisis. I never came to work like at six o'clock in the morning and stayed until six at night on a regular basis. I probably could have made a bigger contribution and been better versed and maybe had a different career if I'd done that, different career track, but I didn't do that.

Storey: But you still worked maybe ten to fifteen hours a week above normal hours.

“ . . . I'd get here and I'd work until, you know, five o'clock. I didn't eat lunch or I didn't take any breaks or anything. I just worked. When I came to work, I just kept going until it seemed like about everybody was gone except for John Keys and a few guys . . . ”

Riley: Well, I'd usually, you know, either ride my bike or walk to work, and I'd get here and I'd work until, you know, five o'clock. I didn't eat lunch or I didn't take any breaks or anything. I just worked. When I came to work, I just kept going until it seemed like about everybody was gone except for John Keys and a few guys that had to work their rear off every day or wanted to.

Storey: How does Reclamation handle that? Did they pay overtime?

Never Put Overtime on His Time Sheet when Working over Forty Hours a Week

Riley: No. Well, you know, I don't want to incriminate myself, but I had the bulk of the responsibility for the time sheets, and you just put down that you worked eight hours. Except in the more recent years under flextime, they had a little place for you to put, you know, when you actually came to work and when you actually went home. Then they had—what do they call it—credit hours and that sort of thing. It probably was not the right thing to do, because I asked the staff to do that, but I didn't really keep track of that. The credit hour thing or the overtime, I never did that. I think it's probably because I had enough daydreaming and looking out the window during the day that I didn't feel comfortable doing that. (laughter)

Storey: Do you ever remember working weekends on a regular basis?

Riley: Oh, yeah. There were times when we would have a report that we would have to get out or a speech. Wrote quite a few presentations and papers for the regional director through the years, not on a regular basis. Not on a regular basis, but occasionally weekends.

Actually, my observation is that most people I worked with worked, you know, an hour or two maybe a day extra and usually took the weekends off except in, like I say, critical times, budget preparation times or that sort of thing. But it was a good working condition. We weren't burned out from that.

12. (...continued)

director in Boise from 1986 to 1998, retired, and then served as Commissioner from 2001 to 2006.

Storey: Tell me about socialization in the office here in the region, and did it change over the years?

Riley: You mean how people interrelated?

Storey: Well, both within the office and outside of office hours. Was there a lot of socialization? Were there a lot of activities?

“ . . . the first ten years I worked with Reclamation, it was just like a family . . . we’d have picnics, Christmas parties, retirement dinners, and those were *all* well attended and it was a real family affair. But as time went on and as those older guys . . . retired and moved on, it became less of a close-knit group. New people started coming in. People started having more interests outside the Bureau. . . . the old close-knit Reclamation family thing, I think, has kind of faded. . . . ”

Riley: I’d say the first ten years I worked with Reclamation, it was just like a family, you know. Well, you know, the people we talked about earlier, the old-timers, were mostly working fathers, and then I think lots of cases the mother and the children were at home. The wife might have worked part time or something. But we’d have picnics, Christmas parties, retirement dinners, and those were *all* well attended and it was a real family affair.

But as time went on and as those older guys that came up through the ‘40s and ‘50s retired and moved on, it became less of a close-knit group. New people started coming in. People started having more interests outside the Bureau. Of course, I was part of my own problem, because the last several years I don’t think I went to any of the Christmas parties or any of the picnics. They had them.

The Reclamation Employees Association used to be a big thing. When I left a year ago, it was struggling to exist. I think John Keys has made an effort. Max Van Den Berg¹³ had made an effort to try to draw, you know, some of the social activity back. But the old close-knit Reclamation family thing, I think, has kind of faded.

In the office, on a day-to-day work basis, for most all of my career you had pretty much compartmentalized groups. The O&M people, they talked to each other, they worked together, they associated with each other. The planning people did the same, the environmental people, the engineering people. And to try to break in or to work with those groups to form teams, interdisciplinary teams, and try to really get close to those people was pretty tough. It took a *lot* of effort to kind of break down those barriers or to move them aside to where instead of a planning and an O&M person working together under kind of an uncomfortable situation, you could do it comfortably.

“ . . . when I left, I think that was one of the biggest challenges still ahead was to get different people working together, and that’s one reason why I supported restructuring at the regional level to identify some new associations and groups

13. Max Van Den Berg participated in Reclamation’s oral history program.

of people to kind of force them into a common environment. . . .”

So that when I left, I think that was one of the biggest challenges still ahead was to get different people working together, and that’s one reason why I supported restructuring at the regional level to identify some new associations and groups of people to kind of force them into a common environment. My suspicion is that may not have happened yet, but that was my *main hope* when I left here was to get, for example, the water conservation group in O&M and the water conservation group in planning to say, “We have one water conservation group in this region and it’s called the water conservation group. It isn’t planning; it isn’t O&M.” So that’s what I was trying to do when I left.

You’re asking about the socialization and, to me, that was the biggest thing that was needed and that would be helpful both in terms of Reclamation accomplishing its mission and also in trying to restore Reclamation togetherness. So if I was still here, that’s what I’d be working on. I’d be pounding the table to try to have that happen.

Storey: It’s always tough to keep it going. Well when you came back to the Snake River office in ‘66, you became a writer again. Now, the Snake River office is the project office here in Boise, isn’t it?

Riley: No. Let me just quickly tell you about our structure in those days.

Storey: Okay.

The Region I Structure in the 1960s

Riley: You had the regional office.

Under the Region Were Project Offices and Separate Development (Planning) Offices

You had the regional office, and then you had project offices, and then you had planning offices.

Most or All the Other Regions Had Planning Staff Integrated into Their Project Offices

A lot of the regions—I think most other regions at that time—had their planning staff integrated with their project staff. So that if you went to a project office and you wanted to talk to planning people, they had a planning contingent in that project manager’s office. In this region, you had the project managers that were responsible for project operation and maintenance. They had their separate offices. In addition, we had three *separate* planning offices that were *independent* from those project offices. Each of those planning offices had their own manager and staff. There was one in Spokane that handled what we called the Upper Columbia area, one in Boise that handled the Snake River area, and one in Salem that handled the Lower Columbia area. And they were responsible for formulating, directing, managing, programming the planning

program for this region—new project planning. A planning review staff was located in the regional office in Boise.

Storey: So how did they relate to the area offices or the project offices then?

Riley: That was not a very close relationship. The project manager had day-to-day management responsibility for a project—opening the gate, dealing with the clientele. But the planning manager was out drumming up new business and planning new projects, some which would interrelate with or impact on an existing project. The manager of the project, operations manager, was informed but was really, as I recall, *not* a close part of that activity. Informed but not closely involved. That was a point of some friction. In the later years we tried to eliminate that by actually getting the project operations staff involved in the planning team effort at the outset so that they were there from the word go.

So when I came back from the National park Service in 1966, I went to the Boise area planning office. Actually, they used to call them “development office.” There were three development offices, and they were managed by an area engineer. That engineer was in charge of new project development/planning for that area.

Storey: So you went to work for one of the development offices.

Riley: That’s right. The Snake River Development Office in Boise.

Storey: And then you subsequently transferred to another development office, the one in Spokane?

Riley: I went from the Snake River Development Office here in Boise to the one in Spokane. That’s right.

Storey: And then you came to the region.

Riley: Then I came back to the regional office planning staff. Let me just in one minute reiterate that. When I first came to work for the Bureau in ‘61, I went to work as a junior technical writer at the regional office. After six months, I went on detail to the Snake River Development Office in Boise for a six-month period to learn more about how the area planning offices worked. Then I left from that office to the National Park Service for about a four-and-a-half-year period.

Then I came back to Boise and went to work for the Snake River Development Office, and I worked there about one year, and then I went to the Spokane Development Office and worked there from ‘67 until ‘73. In ‘73, then I came back to the regional office as a technical writer, and after I’d been here probably six-, eight months, I was promoted to the head of the reports division in the regional office.

Storey: And stayed there until ‘88.

Riley: And then I became the regional planning officer.

Storey: Supervisor is what you told me last time.

Riley: Yeah. That's what it is. Regional planning supervisor.

Storey: From '88 to '94.

Riley: Yeah. '93.

Storey: '93, maybe?

Riley: Yeah. It's '93. And then from '93 to '94 I was . . .

Storey: The program coordinator for the region.

Riley: Yeah. Late '93.

Storey: What things were you planning to develop when you at the Snake River Development Office? Was this Teton and Burnt River and East Green Acres and Lower Snake?

The Snake River Development Office Mostly Worked on Supplemental Water Projects, Including the Teton Project

Riley: Well, the top projects that we did in the Snake River office were primarily supplemental irrigation projects, small projects to supplement late summer water supplies using conjunctive use—surface water and ground water. Some of the projects were pretty marginal in the sense that you were dealing with a lot of cattle, cattle operations, where you raised a lot of small grains, pasture, alfalfa, that sort of thing. Some of the areas were also marginal in the sense that because of either soil or climate conditions, they were limited in their cropping pattern to primarily forage and grain crops. The Burnt River Project was an example of this type of project.

The largest one that I was involved in would have been the Teton Project in southeastern Idaho on the Teton River. That was a project to supplement the water supply of the Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, which is about a 110,000-acre irrigation project that extends over Fremont and Madison counties in eastern Idaho. That did involve a sizeable storage dam and reservoir, a hydropower plant, and water exchange wells. That one *was* eventually authorized, constructed, and failed. The dam failed. So those were the kind of projects I worked on in the area office. The East Greenacres and Lower Snake projects were planned in the Upper Columbia Development Office in Spokane, and I worked on those.

Storey: And what were you doing exactly? You were writing the reports now?

Riley: Yes. But, you know, by that time the report write . . .

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 20, 1995.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: Tape two of an interview with Brit Storey with Robert J. Riley on March the 20th, 1995.

I was asking you what exactly you were doing in the Snake River office as a writer/editor.

By the Time He Returned to the Snake River Development Office, in 1966, Report Writers Were Responsible for Coordinating Development of Reports

Riley: Well, by that time, the role of the report writer changed somewhat from being strictly a technical writer to one of being kind of, I guess you'd say, more of a team coordinator, where even though you didn't have formal teams identified, the report writer had the responsibility, really, to keep the study on track.

Sometimes the area managers would designate a study manager. Study managers often didn't have the broad background. They'd usually come from a rather narrow technical discipline, and some of them were GS-12 journeymen, and while they were designated the study manager, they needed assistance in looking at all aspects of a project and considering the broad interrelationships, including the requirements for authorization, what goes into authorization, and generally how a planning document fits together.

So the report writer really became kind of an assistant study manager and, in some cases, depending on the report writer's personality, became actually, if not in fact—what would you call it—a shadow study manager. Usually the report writer had the responsibility for not only preparing the report, but for making sure that the technical appendixes supporting the planning report were consistent. The earlier tradition of letter-perfect excellence in appendixes started to fade somewhat as the old timers retired, and you'd oftentimes find different technical disciplines using inconsistent numbers, descriptions, and that sort of thing.

So the technical writer really became the shepherd of a lot of these studies, and that's what we did. We were called on to write a lot of the publications, a lot of the speeches, because of the understanding of the broad aspects of a planning study including the politics and the natural resource aspects, the public involvement aspects, that sort of thing.

Storey: Uh-huh. What grade were you when you came to the Snake River office?

Riley: An eleven.

Storey: Did you leave as an eleven?

Received a Promotion When He Moved to the Spokane Development Office

Riley: No. I applied on that reports chief job in Spokane, and I was selected for that job, and that's a GS-12. So I left with that promotion to go to Spokane to manage their reports program.

Storey: For about six years.

Riley: Yeah. Well, from '67 to '73, yeah.

Storey: How active was that program over there?

Riley: It was active. We had a number of good projects, primarily in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington. The Oroville-Tonasket Project in Washington and the East Greenacres Project in Idaho were authorized and constructed. The Bureau eventually had a heck of a time in the construction phase of the Oroville-Tonasket Project, probably partly because of some of the formulation decisions that were made.

Working to Authorize New Developments Around the Columbia Basin Project

Then, to be honest with you, there was some real reaching out to try to develop projects, marginal projects. I recall a couple adjacent to the Columbia Basin Project. One was called the East Banks. One was called West Banks. These projects envisioned all new irrigation developments adjacent to the existing Columbia Basin Project. They were supported by development leagues in the farm community out there, primarily dry farmers who wanted to increase their crop selection capability, or irrigated farmers whose groundwater supplies were declining, deteriorating. Those projects, none of them were authorized, and the plans went on the shelf there.

Comprehensive River Basin Planning Studies While He Was in the Spokane Development Office

Then that Spokane office also got involved in comprehensive river basin planning. There was a big push for basin planning in the later '60s and the early '70s. There were two or three, well, I guess I should say four that I'm aware of, these big comprehensive panacea-type planning projects going on at that time. One was the Willamette River Basin in Oregon. One was the the Puget Sound area and adjacent areas in Washington. One was the upper Snake River Basin in Idaho, Wyoming, and Oregon. Then the biggest of them all was the Pacific Northwest River Basin's Commission's Columbia North Pacific Comprehensive Planning Study.

So we, the Spokane office, contributed both staff and information to those big comprehensive studies. They took years and years and gathered a lot of information. Each of those ended up with a volume of recommended future actions. Many of the recommendations were valid and would have been effective. My guess is that less than 10 percent of those actions were ever taken, primarily because there was no real support at the time for water project development. It was really a dead period for water projects.

“. . . most of my career, about 25 years, was dead in the sense of not accomplishing anything of significant importance. We did a lot of planning studies. . . . most all of those studies, ended up on the shelf. . . .”

I hate to say it, but most of my career, about 25 years, was dead in the sense of

not accomplishing anything of significant importance. We did a lot of planning studies. A lot of those studies, most all of those studies, ended up on the shelf.

I came into Reclamation at the tail end of the good times in terms of new project development, and then worked for twenty years through a period of status quo. Nobody likes you. The administration doesn't like you; the environmentalists don't like you; the farmers don't like you; the people you work with don't necessarily like you; Denver doesn't like you. You don't like Denver. (laughter)

“ . . . the last five years . . . for the first time I felt a real *breath* of life in Reclamation, and I felt kind of weird because a lot of the people that I worked with felt even more of a depressed, dismal attitude in Reclamation because they could see the old structure, the old Reclamation emphasis fading fast. But for the first time, I saw an opportunity for Reclamation to *really* productively do something different than maintain the status quo . . . ”

But I'll tell you, the last five years, and particularly the last three years, for the first time I felt a real *breath* of life in Reclamation, and I felt kind of weird because a lot of the people that I worked with felt even more of a depressed, dismal attitude in Reclamation because they could see the old structure, the old Reclamation emphasis fading fast. But for the first time, I saw an opportunity for Reclamation to *really* productively do something different than maintain the status quo, and that was to go out at its existing projects and to look at today's demands and public preferences and try to do something different and better than it's done for decades. That's why I *strongly* favored a new, progressive area office concept and speaking out to the old clients and trying to do something that was productive for society. Boy, that's a long ways off the bat from what I did in Spokane, but . . .

Storey: That's okay.

Though the Planning Studies Seldom Went Anywhere, it Was Possible to Identify Small Operational Adjustments and Features That Didn't Require Authorization and Could Be Implemented

Riley: What I said about twenty-five years of status quo and producing planning reports, I'll tell you, the best thing to come out of planning reports in Spokane, Boise, wherever, is that you go through a planning process and you come up with ideas, concepts, measures, features. *But* by going through that learning process, and as years went by, by involving the public more closely and looking at the environmental needs more closely, we came up with operational adjustments, small features that didn't require an authorization, some productive things we could do, irregardless of where the report went, because it usually went to the dead-letter office, but there were these little things that you could see and do.

So where I think Reclamation is today, I hope, is a magnification of that. Instead of having those good little actions come out by accident, Reclamation's program focus needs to be one of going out and working with diverse groups to shape adjustments that will benefit the public. To do things through willing buyer/willing

seller, and generally cooperative programs.

Storey: What was the difference in responsibility between the development offices and the regional planning office?

Preparation and Review of Planning Studies

Riley: Well, the development offices worked with the regional planning office. The regional planning office was the technical clearinghouse for the planning reports and the planning programs that came in from the Pacific Northwest. So each development office had its own staff of engineers, hydrologists, economists, geologists, report writers, and they had their own local programs. They would formulate a project and prepare a field draft of a planning report, and that field draft would go into the regional planning office. The regional planning office staff then would review the report from a technical and policy perspective. When the area development office and the regional office staff reached agreement a more formal report—the Regional Director’s report—was prepared and sent to Denver and Washington, D.C., for review and processing.

The Region Consolidated its Planning Staff in Boise in 1973 and He Moved Back to Boise as Chief of the Reports Section

In 1973 the Pacific Northwest Region consolidated all of its planning staff and program in Boise and closed its three development offices. I should point out that there were a few people left in Salem, but they were mostly liaison people, you know, for political-public relations type purposes.

Storey: In ‘73. And that’s when you came back as the reports chief for the region. Was reports part of planning?

Riley: Yes.

Storey: So who was the supervisor then? Well, excuse me, let’s back up. Who was the supervisor in Spokane?

Riley: I was. Oh, you mean for the whole office?

Storey: For the whole office. For the development office.

Mangers in Spokane and Salem

Riley: Well, at the time I was there, the first supervisor was Rupert B. Spearman, and then the second one, after Rupert retired, was Roy Sipinen. They were the supervisors of that office. The supervisor of the Snake River Office at the time of the consolidation was Allen McGregor, and the supervisor in the Salem office was Carl Huish. So when those offices were consolidated, Kuish left the region, shortly thereafter retired. McGregor became the head of the plan formulation branch in the regional planning group, and Roy Sipinen became the head of the land classification and water quality branch in the regional office.

Storey: What were they like?

Riley: Those managers?

Storey: Yeah, the ones in Spokane that you worked directly with.

Riley: Well, "Rupe" Spearman was an old-time professional career-type Reclamation person that was strong on engineering and kind of a quiet fellow, had a hard time with public presentations. He was smart, very smart. He was a good supervisor in that he gave people a lot of latitude to be creative. But he was strong on structural solutions, structural solutions.

Roy Sipinen came on board after completing a foreign assignment in Thailand or . . . one of those Far Eastern countries. He came back to the States, and needed to be, you know, placed. At about that time Spearman retired, and Huish had moved to Salem to run that office.

So Sipinen was assigned to Spokane as the planning officer. Roy had a lot different ideas from the old line. I told you about some of those planning projects surrounding the Columbia Basin Project that were basically aimed at new irrigation developments. Well, Roy came in about midway on those, and he said, "Well, you know, we can't do much in the way of irrigation, but let's be creative and see if we can develop fish farms and that sort of thing out there, you know, use some of the area to raise fish commercially." He was more of a creative thinker, but I think he was viewed by a lot of people as kind of a far-out-type guy whose ideas didn't mesh very well with the older line structural solution-type people.

I remember one time we were at a banquet sponsored by the East Banks Development Association. They'd invited the regional director, H. T. Nelson, to come out and speak. They'd also invited the area manager, Roy Sipinen, to come and speak. H. T. got up, and he told them like it was. He said, "There's nothing we can do for you. We can't economically justify an irrigation project like this. It's been good working with you, but we're going to have to start to pull back from this."

And then the next speaker was Roy Sipinen, and he got up and he says, "Well, now, things might not look all this bad. We might be able to put fish farms in out here and do some things to try to get some non-irrigation benefits." And that caused an awful lot of problems, because H. T. was a kind of guy that didn't like to make that kind of a pronouncement and then have one of his managers come along and say, "Well, maybe we can be more creative than that." We closed up at Spokane shortly after that. (laughter)

Well, anyway, McGregor at the Boise area office was an engineer, had been in that office, worked, I think, most of his career in the Snake River area. He was a guy that was an outstanding writer and speaker. He had really a charisma about him. He was exceptional with public groups. He was a handsome sort of guy, you know. I mean, when he walks in, you know, he had a presence about him, and he was well liked, was an extremely hard worker and just a basically good guy. He liked to do the

right thing. I think he was more attuned to nonstructural-type things than some. So he was a good asset, and I think that's why he became the head of the plan formulation group in the regional office when they consolidated planning. That's one of the reasons. It fitted him well. There were seniority reasons, I think, but it fit him well.

Huish had a very short tenure over in Salem. He was much like Rupe Spearman, much like Rupert Spearman. Didn't really have much of an opportunity, I don't think, to exercise his abilities as an area manager. His predecessor—is that right? Does that come before or after? (laughter)

Storey: His predecessor was before, I think.

Riley: Yeah. See how stale I'm getting. John Mangan was the previous planning officer in Salem, area manager, over in Salem. He came as the regional planning officer in Boise. Mangan was a very good planner and well respected as regional planning officer.

Storey: And you became the reports chief. What kind of staff was there with this consolidation going on and everything?

“The three field planning offices and the regional office were similarly structured. So when they closed the field planning offices, they really just absorbed people of like disciplines into the regional office. . . .”

Riley: The three field planning offices and the regional planning office were similarly structured. So when they closed the field planning offices, they really just absorbed people of like disciplines into the regional office. Quite a number of people, I think, at both field and regional levels retired. I can't remember what percentage. I'd say maybe 20 percent retired. So there was some downsizing through attrition. Some field planning people transferred into project operations offices and some were assigned to regional office functions like O&M.

Storey: Was there a perception that they needed to downsize planning?

“. . . Ellis Armstrong was commissioner, Warren Fairchild was an assistant commissioner. Fairchild made a number of trips out to the regions, and he argued pretty strongly, forcefully, for office consolidation, for economies of staff to better support the large river basin-type studies . . .”

Riley: Yeah. I think, you know, the Reclamation program as far as new project development was concerned was going downhill. And about that time, I think, Ellis Armstrong was commissioner, Warren Fairchild was an assistant commissioner. Fairchild made a number of trips out to the regions, and he argued pretty strongly, forcefully, for office consolidation, for economies of staff to better support the large river basin-type studies that were popular and, I think to gain a little more control over what Reclamation planners were emphasizing in their programs. did. It's easier to control one or two offices than it is twenty.

During the Development Office Stage There Were about 200 People in Planning,

Then about 150 after Consolidation into Boise in 1973, and by 1988 There Were Only about Twenty

So I think at that time, 1973, the regional planning staff numbered about forty. Each of the area planning groups was around fifty. So you had about 200 people, and with the consolidation I think it came down to 150, something like that. Then it *gradually* went down to about twenty or thirty by '88. Even though the planning staff deteriorated in numbers, we still had a viable planning program. We would reach out more to other regional office staff people like the O&M people, the environmental people and the project people to assist. And then, of course, we'd have the service agreements with Denver to provide some technical services. In a way, we benefitted because the planning program became less isolated.

Storey: So when you became the regional reports chief, was that another promotion for you?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: To a thirteen? To a fourteen? To a twenty-two?

Riley: The head of the reports group in the area offices or development offices was a twelve and the regional office branches were thirteens.

Storey: And how many people were in the reports function?

Originally the Region Put Environmental Staff into the Reports Branch

Riley: Oh, let's see, at that time there were probably, I'd guess, eight-, ten reports people. Four editorial assistants and four writers. The environmental staffing had just started, and the first environmental people were assigned to the Reports Branch. This brought out group to thirteen.

Storey: And you were what, the chief of that? Was it a branch?

Riley: It was a branch, yeah.

Storey: For fifteen years then?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: Did the staff decrease while you were the chief? Did it increase?

Riley: It increased slightly because after McGregor retired as formulation branch chief, the plan formulation or study team leaders came into the branch. So when I first became branch chief we were pretty much a report writing function. Then we added the environmental specialists and study team leaders.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: While you were the chief of the reports branch, we had the failure of Teton. I guess my first question is, do you remember that, and do you remember how people in the office reacted to that?

Failure of Teton Dam

Riley: I remember it happened on a Saturday. I was driving down the street listening to the radio and heard that it failed. I went to the regional office, and there were people around, but the primary regional staff at that time was Harry Stivers, the Special Assistant to the Regional Director, and the Public Affairs Officer, Steve Wade. They boarded the Bureau plane and flew up to the project site immediately. And it was a real crisis in the office that involved primarily the Division of Design and Construction, the Division of O&M, the Field Solicitor, and the Project Manager for the Minidoka Project. This catastrophe, of course, occupied the managers' time for an enormous period, the tragedy that it was, and all the questions that had to be answered. There were numerous investigative panels from both within Reclamation and outside Reclamation.

As far as I'm concerned personally, it didn't involve me to a great extent. We did have to collect all technical reports and planning documents related to Teton along with all correspondence, place them in a special library, and manage their use.

Storey: Were any reports written?

Riley: The reports that were written on the Teton failure were not locally developed other than, you know, the records of events that occurred in the field by the project construction engineer, testimonies. What do you call those when the lawyers come around?

Storey: Oh, depositions.

“ . . . the Denver design group, the engineering group, construction group working with the regional office, design and construction and geology group, they were the ones on the hot seat. . . . ”

Riley: Depositions. But as far as reports on the failure, my recollection is that none were done at the regional level. I think the chief engineer—I don't know whether they were called chief engineer in those days still in Denver or not,¹⁴ but the Denver design group, the engineering group, construction group working with the regional office, design and construction and geology group, they were the ones on the hot seat. The reporting that was done, I think most of it was done through Denver and then by independent panels, at least one independent panel.

The Teton Dam failure changed Reclamation dramatically. And, the change

14. The title Chief Engineer was used beginning with the creation of Reclamation in 1902, but in 1963 the title changed to Director, Office of Design and Construction. In spite of the official name change, that position and its successor, the Assistant Commissioner for Engineering and Research (ACER), were unofficially known in Reclamation as the “chief engineer” until abolition of the position in 1994 during the reorganization undertaken by Commissioner Daniel (Dan) P. Beard.

was in the sense of there being a paranoia. Seems that people were afraid to do anything, double-checking, triple-checking in terms of engineering, economics, geology, hydrology, environmental impact. It added an enormous time-lost element to our work. Are you doing it right? Are you trying to justify projects without adequate data?

“ . . . we were trying . . . to do some meaningful environmental work. . . . And, when the Teton Dam failed and all of the people who strongly opposed Teton Dam because of the environmental impacts gained enormous stature and the Bureau's credibility went to zero. So the little progress we were trying to make along the environmental front was wiped out, totally wiped out. . . .”

Then, of course, it was a public relations disaster. The Bureau had been viewed as the old dam builder oblivious to environmental values. Following enactment of N-E-P-A our regional director had actually hired the ex-director of the Idaho Fish and Game Department to be our first environmental officer. Area offices had actually hired environmental people, and we were trying honestly, I think, to do some meaningful environmental work. And, when Teton Dam failed and all of the people who strongly opposed Teton Dam because of the environmental impacts gained enormous stature and the Bureau's credibility went to zero. So the little progress we were trying to make along the environmental front was wiped out, totally wiped out. So when you add that on top of an agency that was out struggling to define a modern mission, it was near disaster. It's amazing that the Bureau survived it, if it has.

Storey: Why do you say that we were struggling to find an existence? I'm not following your thinking.

Up to the early 1960s there were some small projects being built, but “ . . . then during the '60s and '70s . . . the projects were . . . operating on the status quo. . . .”

Riley: Well, okay. I'd say up through the '50s and maybe for a little while in the early '60s, the old projects had been built and there were still some— I'm talking about this region, I'm not talking about central Arizona or central Utah, but in this region—there were still a few small projects being built around, primarily for supplemental irrigation water.

So then during the '60s and '70s, it was really status quo. I mean, the projects were being operated for the purposes for which they were authorized. The Bureau and the project beneficiaries, which in this region were primarily agricultural, hydropower, and flood control, you know, were operating on the status quo.

“ . . . the Bureau had done little in the way of modifying traditional project operations. It had been mostly looking for *new* project development, you know *new* structural solutions to problems”

And the environmental, if you want to call it that, the environmental movement, was just starting to question river and reservoir operations and that sort of thing. But the Bureau had done little in the way of modifying traditional project operations. It had

been mostly looking for *new* project development, you know, *new* project development, *new* structural solutions to problems, and very few, if any, were being authorized.

So you had a condition where you operate as usual, hydropower and irrigation and flood control; operate as usual with some tweaks here and there; new project development; new studies being done but not going any place; trying to chip away a little bit in project planning and looking at other than traditional irrigation needs. So, you know, it was a status quo thing.

“ . . . when Teton comes along and fails, that just confirms in the public’s eye the Bureau’s longstanding role as a dam-builder and, you know, an agency in bed with hydropower and agriculture and incompetent and that sort of thing. . . .”

And then when Teton comes along and fails, that just confirms in the public’s eye the Bureau’s longstanding role as a dam-builder and, you know, an agency in bed with hydropower and agriculture and incompetent and that sort of thing.

“ . . . during that period, the Bureau was struggling . . . you couldn’t make major changes in operations, such changes were impossible or unlikely at best, for two reasons. One is that the beneficiaries of the project were strongly entrenched and not receptive and under no pressure to change anything. The other factor is that the West had not been ‘discovered.’ . . .”

So to me, during that period, the Bureau was struggling, at least the people in planning were struggling, for an identity or a role, because you couldn’t make major changes in operations, such changes were impossible or unlikely at best, for two reasons. One is that the beneficiaries of the project were strongly entrenched and not receptive and under no pressure to change anything. The other factor is that the West had not been “discovered.” This region had not really been discovered by non-agricultural, non-hydropower people. So *now*, you know, as the population has increased and you’ve had people move in that float the river; fish the river; fly fishermen; tubers; want water for domestic, municipal, and industrial uses; and want improved quality, you know, all of that stuff, you’ve got a new clientele. But that didn’t exist for all of those years that I remember.

“That’s why I say the last five years . . . was the first time, . . . even though a lot of people saw these changes in public emphasis as a negative, I saw it as a positive to finally push the Bureau into looking at water efficiency improvements, conservation measures, re-operation, you know, to get the cobwebs out and start to think. And, boy, that was a struggle to try to do that, but to me it was invigorating. . . .”

That’s why I say the last five years, especially the last three years, to me was—and maybe it was a mistake to retire so soon—but it was the first time, really, in my career that even though a lot of people saw these changes in public emphasis as a negative, I saw it as a positive, to finally push the Bureau into looking at water efficiency improvements, conservation measures, re-operation, you know, to get the cobwebs out and start to think. And, boy, that was a struggle to try to do that, but to me

it was invigorating.

I think it was a compliment to John Keys and to some of the other folks that you go to public meetings in the Northwest Planning Council and other people and they'd say, "Well, you know, the Corps is doing what it's always done. The Bureau appears to be doing something a little more creative, or at least trying to be responsive to the problem and the issue." You know, that was good, because I hadn't heard that for twenty-five years. So when you say struggling for—whatever I said—struggling for an existence, and Teton was a real swat against the cheeks.

Storey: And that happened about the time Jimmy Carter's "hit list"¹⁵ came out, wasn't it?

Riley: '76, as I recall.

Storey: And the hit list would have come out probably in '77, maybe '78.

Riley: So, you know, really the '60s and the '70s and the early '80s were a nightmare for me. I mean, a nightmare in the sense of not feeling good about our ability as an agency to solve a problem. Compelling public interests had not emerged which would encourage the Bureau to do something different. The hit list got out attention and serious public issues moved us away from our "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" attitude, you know, because the public was telling us, and even some of our clients, our clientele was saying, "Hey, we're under attack. You know, you're supposed to be our defender, so to speak, here. You're operating these projects. What are you going to do about these problems with competing water uses?" And the Bureau finally had to stand up and say "We've got to do some things differently." That was a big change. I think the Bureau was able to make that transition better than some agencies.

Storey: So your perspective, the perspective that I think I'm hearing you say, is that you thought that Reclamation was in bed with the water users?

How He Perceived Reclamation's Development of Decisions Regarding Projects

Riley: No. Well, that makes it sound like there was some kind of a slick deal going. What I'm saying is that the Bureau and its primary clientele had grown up together and generation after generation they did things a certain way to respond to a "project authorization" or a contract. The Bureau would often respond to issues with "Well, the project was authorized for this purpose, or, the contract is written this way, and we're obligated to operate our project accordingly."

15. Jimmy Carter served as President of the United States from 1977 until 1981 after his election in 1976. Within a few weeks of the beginning of the Administration, an internal discussion document accidentally fell into the hands of a reporter. The document proposed cancellation of a number of water projects considered environmentally or economically unsound. This proposal came to be known as Jimmy Carter's "hit list." This happened while Commissioner Daniel P. Beard worked in the Carter Administration, and he discussed his perspective on the issue in his Reclamation oral history interviews and in "The Passage of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, 1991-1992: The Role of George Miller," an Oral History interview by Malca Chall, 1996 for the Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California.

So when I say in bed, what I mean is that there was a commitment by the Bureau to meet the requirements of the authorizations and contracts for its projects. And in some cases, authorizations were quite non-specific, and other cases they were specific. And in the cases where they were not specific, the Bureau *usually* made the choice to support the traditional use of the water supply. Another consideration is that environmental science can be suspect—leading to a reluctance to overturning longstanding operational regimes. Where there is no consensus, or *little* consensus, it is difficult to justify significant shifts in operational emphasis. The major point here is that finally the Bureau is willing to pursue an issue rather than duck it.

The Bureau, I think, has started to say, “Well, let’s give the benefit of the doubt to the environmental need here and make some modifications that all parties can live with even if we aren’t popular.”

Reclamation Is Changing in the Way it Looks at its Responsibilities

So that’s why for a long time in my career it was the status quo. *Finally*, you get people saying, “Well, now, you know, there are other compelling issues and needs out there, and we have to do a little better job in looking at what our authorities are, what our commitments are, being more, much more, creative working with these groups to try to do something a little better.”

So I would have felt better about my Bureau career if what has happened in the last three years had happened thirty years ago. I tried to encourage the young people that I worked with here by telling them that for *once* they’ve got a *real* opportunity with public interest and congressional support behind them to do something productive with your time for society.”

Storey: Good. But you do see that there have been real changes?

John Keys Has Been Fostering Flexibility but Some Middle Managers in the Region Are Harder to Change than the Regional Director Has Been

Riley: I’ll tell you, it’s been very difficult. It’s very difficult. The key, I think Regional Director John Keys has been outstanding, outstanding in—now, recognizing this guy came up through the ranks and worked through this same period I’m talking about—he’s been outstanding in trying to be flexible and honestly responsive to public interests. So have some of our project managers. I’ve seen growth in John Keys. He can say “no” to tradition for tradition’s sake. John Keys, I’ve seen the growth in him in being able to be an objective viewer of what’s going on and and in making a commitment to try to fix it.

But he was struggling when I was here with some of his middle managers. In spite of a regional director’s good intentions managers at the GS-13, 14, 15 level are really going to have to be committed to just what we’ve been talking about here, about trying to do more with what you’ve got rather than sitting back and saying, “We’ve got an authorization, we’ve got a contract, we’ve got to meet it come hell or high water. All of this other stuff is crap. Things are going to come around. Wait and see. People are going to get fed up, and it’ll come back to where it was.”

Contrary to the views of some managers, “It’s not going to go back to where it was, because Idaho isn’t what it used to be, and Washington and Oregon and Montana *aren’t* what they used to be. . . .”

It’s not going to go back to where it was, because Idaho isn’t what it used to be, and Washington and Oregon and Montana *aren’t* what they used to be. None of the Western states are. I mean, all I’ve got to do is drive home now and I don’t recognize anybody, when I used to drive home I’d at least recognize some of the people. Many of those people that I *don’t* recognize want to use the reservoirs and the rivers for a lot of different purposes.

The Bureau’s middle managers have to be committed—and the Bureau has been a nice place to work, for me, because people were always very professional. Nobody liked to *chew* anybody out. I mean, that was the last resort was to, you know, talk turkey. However, we went—when Lynott¹⁶ was there, I think, we had something down in Tucson where we were supposed to be new thinkers, and we called it “Talking Turkey in Tucson.” (laughter)

When He Left He Was Trying to Foster Cross-office Teamwork among Younger Workers

My last effort in the Bureau was trying to get the people that had been compartmentalized into traditional organizational units all of their career, try to reach out and work within a team, to be assertive, and forget “turf.” To be the problem-solvers, to want to lead a problem solving effort, to be innovative, to catch fire. When I left, there were still middle managers that were dragging their feet that would argue or withdraw, or gripe behind-the-scenes.

So now in this region you’ve got three area managers and a power service manager. Jerry Gregg¹⁷ out here at the Snake River Area Office, I think he’s trying to do the right thing, and I think he’s got a couple of pretty sharp people working with him now. I’m not saying that the old people weren’t sharp, but some had an approach that couldn’t be budged come hell or high water. Jim Cole has the Upper Columbia Area Office; Ron McKown has the Lower Columbia Area Office; and Steve Clark has the power service center. These are all sharp people and will do a job at the Grand Coulee.

Storey: What’s at the Lower Columbia? I’m not aware that we have—well, we have these little things like Tualatin, maybe.

Riley: Do you remember the old planning concept of the three area offices that split the region up geographically?

Storey: And Salem was one of them.

Organization of the Region after the 1993-1994 Reorganization under

16. This refers to a planning meeting held when Ellis Armstrong was Commissioner and Warren Fairchild was Assistant Commissioner— Resource Planning.

17. Jerrold (Jerry) D. Gregg has participated in Reclamation’s oral history program.

Commissioner Dan Beard

Riley: Okay. So we've got the same thing now, only it's called—when I left here, it was called Lower Columbia Area Office, and it handles all of the water-related issues west of the Cascade Mountains in Oregon and Washington. It's located in Vancouver, a brand-new office. It's got two people. Last I heard, two people there, the manager and one of planning's old activity managers, an environmental specialist and an old planning activity manager, Ron McKown and Eric Glover. So they're our liaison. They're the Bureau's liaison in the Lower Columbia area.

What's happening over in that coastal area is transition from agriculture to M&I and in-stream flow. We have the Rogue River Project, Tualatin Project, the Umpqua River Project. So there are a number of projects over there.

Storey: What I'm wondering is, I notice that you became regional planning supervisor in 1988 and, of course, 1988 is when Reclamation went through reorganization. The assistant commissioner for resources management was created. Did your becoming regional planning supervisor have anything to do with any kind of a reorganization in the office here?

In 1988 the Region's Planning Officer Decided to Devote Full Time to the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project and to Let Someone Else Take over as Planning Officer

Riley: In a way, Larry Vinsonhaler, the regional planning officer, chose to work full time on the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project in Washington State. It was a demanding and important project and required his full attention. Regional Director John Keys advertised the planning officer job. I applied and was selected.

In retrospect, that was a good decision by Vinsonhaler. It was a good decision on his part and on the part of John Keys, because last year Congress authorized that project, and that's one of the very few that's been authorized in this region in the last twenty years. The reason it was authorized is because it was a project full of new, positive concepts on water efficiency and water management.

Storey: That was a division chief?

Riley: Yeah. Division of Project Planning and Program Development or something.

Storey: So that was a promotion for you?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: From a what?

Riley: Thirteen to a fourteen.

Storey: Now, when you moved into that office, how many staff did you end up with?

Staff in the Planning Division

Riley: I'm trying to remember. I got into that job on an acting basis just at the time that there were some RIFs occurring and transfers to Denver under the consolidation. And I think we ended up with—gee, I should remember that, but just roughly I would say around thirty.

Storey: What was the regional vision of what the reorganization was all about in 19 . . .

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 3. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: This is Brit Storey interviewing Robert Riley on March the 20th, 1995. This is tape three.

I was trying to ask you, when the other tape ran out, what your perception of the reorganization was in 1988, the creation of ACRM¹⁸ and all of that?

The 1988 Reorganization Intended to Consolidate Planning Functions for Reclamation in the Assistant Commissioner–Resources Management Office in Denver

Riley: Well, my perception of it was that it really tied to two things, I guess.

“ . . . the Bureau’s program, particularly in the area of planning, was declining to the point where . . . it was near impossible to maintain staffs . . . with the funding that was available. . . . there was a feeling on the part of managers that you could get a bigger bang for your buck by consolidating technical staff in a central point while leaving some of your management staff out in the field. . . . ”

One thing is is that I had observed, since I was closely involved in program development, that the Bureau’s program, particularly in the area of planning, was declining to the point where independent Denver, regional, and field planning staffs capable of doing quality work under the stringent technical requirements that were being placed on Reclamation, where it was near impossible to maintain staffs of that level with the funding that was available. So my view was that the reorganization was partly driven by this budget constraint and that there was a feeling on the part of managers that you could get a bigger bang for your buck by consolidating technical staff in a central point while leaving some of your management staff out in the field.

“ . . . there was concern by senior Bureau managers . . . that the regions and . . . some of the field offices . . . were continuing to push programs and projects . . . not responsive to the changing conditions in an area and that those programs were really a continuation of what the Bureau had been doing for a couple of decades . . . And I think there was a desire to have more control in a central location . . . over the conceptual formulation of programs and projects so that the

18. Assistant Commissioner–Resources Management or Assistant Commissioner for Resources Management.

commissioner and his staff would not be confronted with programs and projects that had cost hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars to formulate and that had gathered some degree of public support to be confronted with a decision of having to say, ‘Those won’t fly, folks.’ . . .”

Another thing that I felt, though, was that there was concern by senior Bureau managers outside of the regions that the regions and, in particular, some of the field offices within the regions were continuing to push programs and projects that were not responsive to the changing conditions in an area and that those programs were really a continuation of what the Bureau had been doing for a couple of decades with some window-dressing on the side to make them look a little more multipurpose. And I think there was a desire to have more control in a central location like Denver over the conceptual formulation of programs and projects so that the commissioner and his staff would not be confronted with programs and projects that had cost hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars to formulate and that had gathered some degree of public support to be confronted with a decision of having to say, “Those won’t fly, folks.”

If we’d known sooner, we would have done something different, because now here we are. You’ve got all these folks pumped up about something and you’ve got your own development groups out there going to Congress to get these things authorized. We’re political animals here, and we’re between a rock and a hard place, between some segment of the public interest and then having to hold a straight face to our secretary and our assistant secretary and so on.

So I think it was budget-driven and there was maybe distrust or discomfort with the capability of the regions and the area offices to be objective in some of the work they were doing. That’s the way I saw it.

Storey: Do you think it was good or bad?

Riley: Well, I think . . .

Storey: Maybe you don’t want to make that kind of judgment.

Liked the Concept Behind the Planning Reorganization but Felt it Somewhat Missed the Mark Because it Was Too Sophisticated and Aimed at the Wrong Needs

Riley: It’s a mixed answer here, because I think that the idea, the basic concept behind it, had some validity. *However*, in the *actual* workings of it, it appeared to me that the way that the organization had been structured was to perpetuate the highly technical in-depth study-type evaluation thing that would be responsive to new project development, and be responsive to principles and guidelines, you know, the type of work that needed to be done to formulate a new Columbia Basin Project or a new Central Utah or Central Arizona Project and some of the more complex smaller projects. It was a highly compartmentalized, specialized structure that was developed in that reorganization. And, to me, that would have been *perfect* for what the Bureau was doing decades ago.

But for the *demands* that I can see personally out in the field, the demands for that kind of sophistication were few and far between in this region.

“ . . . it was negative in the sense that it was overkill for some of the challenges we had here. It was overkill in terms of review time, cost, and staff being separated geographically. It was positive in the sense . . . that it shook Reclamation out of its slumber and caused the blood to flow and the arguments to rage and the thoughts to be developed. . . .”

So it was negative in the sense that it was overkill for some of the challenges we had here. It was overkill in terms of review time, cost, and staff being separated geographically. It was positive in the sense, maybe more strategically, in the sense that it shook Reclamation out of its slumber and caused the blood to flow and the arguments to rage and the thoughts to be developed. So it was positive in that it did that. It shook the Bureau up. It was kind of like a C-P-R¹⁹ exercise. But for our particular case, it was not that beneficial.

Storey: Did you see any changes in your planning office as a result of the reorganization when you came in? Had things changed?

The Regional Planning Office Changed from Doing Technical Work to Managing and Directing Studies and Plan Formulation

Riley: Yeah. The planning office became no longer a doer of technical work, but primarily one of study management and directing plan formulation and the movement of the environmental staff to the environmental office.

“ . . . it was a . . . significant downsizing of the planning staff. *But* at the same time, an addition of responsibility, a different kind of responsibility, more complex pain-in-the-neck type of responsibility . . . you had a manager in Boise, a public interest hundreds of miles somewhere else, and a technical staff hundreds of miles the other direction. . . .”

So it was a downsizing, a significant downsizing of the planning staff. *But* at the same time, an addition of responsibility, a different kind of responsibility, more complex pain-in-the-neck type of responsibility in learning to do project management where you had a manager in Boise, a public interest hundreds of miles somewhere else, and a technical staff hundreds of miles the other direction. For example, a planning study manager would be located in Boise, the study area could be, say, in eastern Oregon, and the technical staff in Denver. So there was a downsizing and an increasing level of frustration.

Storey: So overall maybe not an improvement?

“You could learn to work with it. But the question is, would the time and the cost involved in it allow you to continue to exist? Could you continue to be

19. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

responsive to the public need? . . .”

Riley: I would say if I had to continue to work under the ACRM thing that was created in ‘88, that you could learn to live to work with it. You could learn to work with it. But the question is, would the time and the cost involved in it allow you to continue to exist? Could you continue to be responsive to the public need? In several cases, we found very good people in Denver that were savvy, not that we were always savvy, but people in Denver who could come out to the field, spend considerable amount of time with the public meetings with other groups, working with technicians from other agencies and from non-federal groups, and do an overall excellent job. In other cases it was not good, and when that happened, it was a additional level of management baggage to try to deal with that, because you had no direct management responsibility.

A Good Benefit of the New System Was More Frequent Meetings and Sharing of Ideas among the Planning Officers

Good? Some of the good was that the planning managers had more frequent meetings. Bob Lanky and, I think, Terry Lynott helped institute this, too. But we had more frequent meetings of planning officers, we could share ideas and concepts and set budget direction, and there were some good planning officers from other regions that. . . they were just good, good thinkers. That was very beneficial. And I think that a lot of what came from those sessions kind of got reflected in the Commissioner’s—what do you call that paper he put out?

Storey: The CPORT?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: Commissioner’s Program Organization and Review Team,²⁰ I think it was?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: This is Commissioner Beard.

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: Right. Yeah.

“ . . . those years from ‘88 . . . it was a struggle. It was a struggle, and I heard a lot more complaining than I did support. Not just complaining in this region, but every place I went. . . .”

Riley: So I see those years from ‘88 until—well, for a couple of years there, it was a struggle. It was a struggle, and I heard a lot more complaining than I did support. Not just

20. The “Report of the Commissioner’s Program and Organization Review Team” which Reclamation published in 1993 is commonly known as the CPORT (pronounced “see port”) report. It was one of two major 1993 documents produced during Commissioner Beard’s reorganization of Reclamation. Another document was Commissioner Daniel P. Beard’s *Blueprint for Reform: The Commissioner’s Plan for Reinventing Reclamation*.

complaining in this region, but every place I went.

Storey: Do you remember a specific project that Pacific Northwest had to implement where you used the Denver technical staff?

Planning Undertaken Using Denver Planning Staff

Riley: Well, I don't know about implementation. That implies that you actually put something on the ground and did it. But in the planning area we did use Denver technical staff in, I think, every study we did. I think some where we had a pretty darn good response were our studies in Oregon where we used the Denver hydrology staff, since most of our needs were directed at stream flow restoration. We depended pretty heavily on the Denver hydrology group because that's where the hydrologists were, and we got some pretty good service out of those folks in the hydrology group.

“ . . . I think that the planning group here, even though we didn't give it 100 percent, we supported ACRM, tried to make the ACRM approach work . . . ”

Really, to be honest with you, I think that the planning group here, even though we didn't give it 100 percent, we supported ACRM, tried to make the ACRM approach work, to much, much, much greater extent than some of the other divisions or offices here. Part of that, I think, is because I had respect for Bob Lanky and knew Terry and knew Bill McDonald. I thought Terry Lynott and Bill in ACRM were trying hard to work it out. Some of our technical people were down there in economics and hydrology, and I had respect for them and wanted to try to make it work.

“ . . . I've been a believer . . . that the best place to try to solve the problem is right out where the problem is, and I have hope that the new area manager concept, directed away from the new project development and more towards better project operation, is going to do some good. . . . ”

But I've been a believer, I guess, because of my background, in that the best place to try to solve the problem is right out where the problem is, and I have hope that the new area manager concept,²¹ directed away from the new project development and more towards better project operation, is going to do some good.

Storey: Now, if I recall correctly, part of the reorganization was moving people from the

21. Note that a couple of different reorganizations are involved in this discussion.

In 1988 under Commissioner C. Dale Duvall and Deputy Commissioner Joe D. Hall the planning staff consolidation in Denver occurred.

In 1993-1994 under Commissioner Dan Beard there was a move toward decentralization which involved consolidation within regions of project operations offices, construction offices, and planning offices into fewer "area offices" which were responsible for projects in specified geographic areas. Many functions also transferred from the regional offices to the area offices so it was a new approach to management of Reclamation projects.

Oral histories, gathered by the Reclamation history program, of Commissioner John W. Keys III, Commissioner Bob Johnson, Commissioner Daniel (Dan) P. Beard, Assistant Commissioner and Regional Director J. William (Bill) McDonald, Max Van Den Berg, and others contain particularly relevant information relative to aspects of these reorganizations since many oral history interviews occurred soon after the 1988 reorganization and during the 1993-1994 reorganization.

regions to Denver.

Riley: Uh-huh.

Storey: Could you talk about that a little bit, the people who went and *why* they went instead of other people, that kind of thing?

“ . . . we had been downsizing . . . every year since 1973 to the point where we . . . had a relatively small staff. . . . good hydrology people are a premium in the Bureau. So our hydrology people . . . I think one or two went to our O&M division to work . . . on operations . . . Two of our environmental people . . . went to our regional environmental officer, because . . . under the reorganization, the regions were to do all but the large, more complex environmental impact statements. . . . ”

Riley: Well, if I can recollect. On the planning side, I think the number of people that went to Denver was limited. I can't remember the exact number. I know there were two or three economists and one or two hydrologists. I don't believe there were any engineers. We didn't have any sociologists. There were no environmental specialists. One of the, I guess you could call it fortunate—one of the things about being on the planning side is that we had been downsizing and downsizing and downsizing every year since 1973 to the point where we didn't have a very large staff in the region. We didn't have any planning people in the project offices or field offices, so we had a relatively small staff impacted by the reorganization.

A couple of our hydrology people—I'll tell you now that good hydrology people are a premium in the Bureau. So our hydrology people that didn't go to Denver, I think one or two went to our O&M division to work with our project managers on operations, because experienced hydrologists are extremely, extremely scarce. Two of our environmental people that we had went to our regional environmental officer, because, as I recall, under the reorganization, the regions were to do all but the large, more complex environmental impact statements. So since planning wasn't going to be doing the impact statements anymore, the regional environmental officer took that responsibility on and took the staff to do it.

Now, what was the rest of your question? Why . . .

Storey: I was just asking about who moved and why. How was it thought of in terms of the reorganization that this person would go and that one wouldn't?

Riley: I think there was general agreement, general agreement that economics could be done well in Denver, and so a couple of economists did, in fact, go. It was felt that hydrologists, like I have said, to be repetitive, were at a premium. We were short of hydrologists in the operating offices and also in the O&M group, and they were just not going to get lost to the region. So they were put either in O&M to work with the project managers. Our project offices truly were *not* staffed *adequately* in the area of hydrology to meet the demands that were being placed on our projects for minimum flows and that sort of thing. It was a wise move to have those people stay.

I told you about the environmental specialists. We had no engineers, because previously we had consolidated our engineering expertise in this region into the Division of Design and Construction. So we had no engineers in '88 to send away.

Storey: Well, tell me about your transition from planning supervisor to program coordinator for the region.

Riley: Well, the regional director said after—when did Dan Beard come into office, do you remember?

Storey: Must have been about March of '93.

Riley: Yeah. So the regional directors, I think, were challenged through the E-M-C²² or whatever. What is that called now anyway? Or does it even exist any more.

Storey: To be honest, it exists, but I've lost track of what they're calling it now.

The Futures Team and Report

Riley: Okay. The regional directors were challenged by Commissioner Beard and the EMC (Executive Management Committee) to look at their organization, to look at their mission, to see what their business is about. So John Keys put together a review team. I think it was called the Futures Team or something like that, and I was a member of that. We put together a report that talked about what we believed the region's mission to be, what the challenges to the region were, what the needs, what the organization of the region was at the time and what the organizational challenges or problems appeared to be, and what we would recommend as some possible future actions to take in regard to the regional organization and staffing and program direction and program priority.

John Keys Proceeded with Reorganization of the Region

So we put that report together, for the regional director, and John Keys shared it with the other managers in the region and with all of the staff in the region. And then, through a series of meetings with all of the managers in the region, he adopted an action plan to move ahead with, and that plan included some realignment of the old traditional divisions within the regional office and also recommended creation of new area offices.

The action plan proposed creation of the position of regional program coordinator and then the area managers and two new program managers to run technical services and one to run environmental operations and that sort of thing. So the regional director asked if I would assume that position, regional program coordinator, as a directed reassignment. It was one of the directed reassignments that he made, and I said, "I have a headache and I want to go home, but I'll do it. I'll try it." So that's how that happened.

22. Executive Management Committee. This is a coordination and policy meeting, generally held three to six times a year, of the executive staff of Reclamation which varies slightly in make-up dependent upon the current Commissioner's thinking. It has also been known over the years by various titles such as the PMC, Permanent Management Committee, and the RLT, Reclamation Leadership Team.

Storey: What was the program coordinator position?

There Were Three Program Directors for Administrative Services, Technical Services, and Environment and Operations and the Regional Program Coordinator Was Responsible to Facilitate the Meetings and Work of the Program Directors and the Regional Director

Riley: Under the regional director's new organization he had the area managers, the three area managers, and the regional power service center manager. He had three directors. I'll call them directors. They were program directors. There's one for administrative services, one for technical services, and then one for environment and operations. All of these people that I've just mentioned along with the regional finance manager, regional personnel manager, and public affairs officer, formed a board of directors. We used to sit down at least monthly to set program direction, discuss budget, and deal with critical issues, review staffing needs, and so on.

So the program manager was really the—at least I served that role as a facilitator for that group and also monitored the program development and accomplishment. I consulted with the regional director, area managers, and the program directors about where I saw their programs going, where there were still conflicts and duplications, where there were accomplishments—what I thought needed to be tweaked, some things they might consider. I pretty much developed the agenda for the board of directors meetings in consultation with members of the board, facilitated those meetings, worked with the regional finance manager on budgeting.

It was kind of an interesting job. I had no direct supervisory responsibility. I didn't have any authority over any of the directors or office managers or any staff. But it was a good and worthwhile job. But, when we designed that position, it had kind of a "sunset" concept. We saw that it would be pretty traumatic to make the changes we were making; and to do away with the old division identities; and try to form some new associations with people; and to get the board of directors working; and to understand the big picture; and to try to work as a board to take this region somewhere. That had never been done before. We'd had regional staff meetings once a year, but this was a whole new—so the regional program coordinator was to try to, I guess, be the ramrod, I think John Keys wanted me to be the ramrod—the prompter, to try to get this thing in place and going and to try to deal with some of the negativism . . .

Storey: And the idea, then, was that the position would disappear?

Riley: Well, that was one option, was for it to then disappear after a time.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 3. MARCH 20, 1995.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 3. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: You were saying the first option was for it to disappear.

Riley: Yeah. I would say for it to disappear after two or three years, because you didn't want another layer of some kind of "executive" level. The idea was for the area managers to,

by that time, have developed their programs and their staffing levels and for those staffing changes to have been transferred from the region to the area offices, so that the area managers were, in fact, pretty much self-contained operating entities that understood the big picture. And when I say the big picture, unlike other regions, in this region the old project managers were O&M people. They didn't do problem-solving in the sense of new projects. I mean, you know, they would tweak their operations, and they were good at that, but they didn't deal with some parts of the Reclamation issue. Same for the regional office functions. Then the board of directors would serve as the arena for coordination.

“ . . . the commissioner wanted the area offices . . . [to] deal with the full range of Reclamation issues and mission . . . So in this region, that was a new thing. It was taking . . . an O&M organization and trying to mold it into a . . . more comprehensive-type operation in the field. . . .”

So now the commissioner wanted the area offices, or suggested that they deal with the full range of Reclamation issues and mission and problems and problem-solving.

Area Managers Differed in Their Ideas about the Boundaries of Their Responsibilities

So in this region, that was a new thing. It was taking basically an O&M organization and trying to mold it into a bigger—or you could do more comprehensive-type operation in the field. So our first board meetings, it was interesting to see the different perspectives of the area and regional managers. Some, you know, this big in their thinking, and others, you know, not that big.

Storey: Some very large and some small in the way they envisioned it.

Riley: Yeah. Yeah.

Storey: So you were there a year, a little more, a little less?

Riley: I'd say that, yeah. I'm just trying to think. Boy, the years go by so fast. I don't know if it was much over six or eight months. I'm trying to remember when I first started. It seems like it was in—we did the future report, I think, in August, and by maybe November I was kind of working in that job. So it wasn't very long.

Storey: Did Mr. Keys pretty much accept the futures report?

Regional Director Keys Was Concerned about Some of the Reorganization Suggestions

Riley: Pretty much. He struggled with abolishment of some of the old division identity. Not much, though. He could see that there was kind of little pockets of—well, I don't know what you'd call it. What do you call that? Turf?

Storey: Um-hmm.

Riley: He could see turf. When a job would come in or a problem would come in, you know, O&M could do it or planning could do it or environment could do it. There was duplication in the offices. He and the assistant regional directors would struggle frequently and try and decide who should do that job, because planning worked on water conservation and environmental enhancement, O&M worked on the same things. So I guess he was pretty receptive to dealing with that. He was kind of interested in having a deputy regional director, and the futures report didn't recommend that. I think since that time, though, that's happened. So I think he was, at least outwardly, pretty receptive to it. Quite a number of people weren't.

Storey: Was there quite a bit of struggle on your committee, your work group, whatever it was called?

On the Futures Committee the Tensions Were More Between Field and Regional Staff than among the Regional staff

Riley: Not so much. I think if there was a struggle, it was probably between those members of the committee that were from the regional office and those that were from the field office, and the field office people seeing that they had a mandate to take over more and the regional office people, even though they were good-intentioned, being somewhat reluctant to give away too much. So that was one of the issues that consumed a lot of time and probably still is, is balancing the transfer of capability from the regional office to the area offices. But generally it was pretty smooth.

The Main Conflicts Were Between People Who Were Put on the Futures Committee and Those Who Were Not

Where the conflict was, was between the people that were on the committee and the people who were not. Some parts of the organization felt left out of the process, and some of those people were disappointed enough that . . . they were pretty negative from the beginning of when they first saw the product because of its impact on traditional branches and divisions and its request to transfer staff from the region to the area offices. John Keys tried to prevent this by having all review the transition team report and discuss it openly, but tension existed still.

“The board of directors worked pretty well together, but there was a lot of flak from managers who were not on the board of directors. . . .”

The board of directors worked pretty well together, but there was a lot of flak from managers who were not on the board of directors. So I think there was a feeling by some that you had this elite group of people who unilaterally were setting program direction, and then you had these other folks that were being impacted but not contributors.

Storey: How many were on the committee?

The Futures Committee

Riley: Oh, boy. You know, I'm trying to remember. I apologize. I just haven't thought about these things for a long time.

Storey: It doesn't matter.

Riley: It seems to me like there were about twelve.

Storey: How long did it take you and how often did you meet?

Riley: Oh, I think we met once a month for two days usually.

Storey: Were there any specific areas or specific people who felt left out?

Riley: That weren't on the committee?

Storey: Yeah.

Groups Not Represented on the Futures Committee

Riley: Yeah. I think the Division of Design and Construction, which was the bread and butter of the Bureau from the beginning, didn't have a representative, *per se*, on there. The O&M people who were mainstay didn't have a regional office representative on there, and the regional environmental office didn't have a representative on there. They carried a big part of the weight of the regional program.

“ . . . John Keys had a distinct feeling what he wanted to do to try to encourage some new . . . different thought, and so he leaned heavily on the project managers, and some of them have become area managers, and he leaned heavily on the public relations staff and the program, finance, budget staff, and the human resources staff, the managers. . . .”

But John Keys had a distinct feeling what he wanted to do to try to encourage some new thought or some different thought, and so he leaned heavily on the project managers, and some of them have become area managers, and he leaned heavily on the public relations staff and the program, finance, budget staff, and the human resources staff, the managers. So I just hope it works for John, because I still honestly, basically, believe it's the best thing to do with what the Bureau's got to do. I hope it works.

Storey: What else should we talk about? Who was the regional director before John Keys?

Riley: I'm trying to remember if it was—we had H. T.,²³ Ed Edwin F. Sullivan, John Keys. Has somebody told you who it was?

Storey: No, I don't know. I don't have a list for this region.

23. After Harold T. Nelson came Edwin F. Sullivan (1972-1974), Rodney J. Vissia (1974-1980), Lester W. Lloyd (1980-1986), John W. Keys III (1986-1998), J. William (Bill) McDonald (1998-2010), and Karl Wirkus (2010-2011).

Riley: Oh, I know. There was one after Ed. Bill. He went to work for a consulting firm. I can't think of his last name. That's an embarrassment. But I can't think it. I'll think of it tomorrow.

Storey: Tell me about Ed Sullivan.

Regional Director Ed Sullivan

Riley: Ed Sullivan was a pretty much structural solution-type guy, very outspoken, tall, pretty loud voice, big bushy eyebrows, and pretty definite on what he wanted done. I didn't work very closely with him. And, that's about my recollection of Ed.

Storey: Well, let me ask you then if you're willing for these tapes and the resulting transcripts to be used by researchers?

Riley: Sure.

Storey: Good. Thank you. Appreciate it.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.
END OF INTERVIEWS.

Oral History Interviews—Showing Edits
Robert J. Riley

Storey: This is Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Robert J. Riley in the offices of the Bureau of Reclamation, Pacific Northwest Region in Boise, Idaho, on December the 8th, 1994, at about 10:45 in the morning. This is tape one.

I'd like to ask you where you were born and raised and educated and how you ended up at the Bureau of Reclamation.

Born in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and Lived in Nearby Ashton until Graduation from High School

Riley: Well, I was born in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and that's because that's where the hospital was, but my hometown is in a little town north of Idaho Falls called Ashton, Idaho, just before you go up on the Island Park Plateau. I was born there on a cold January day there in Idaho Falls, and I suppose I stayed there a couple of days and then went back to Ashton, and that's where I grew up until I graduated from high school.

I washed dishes in the café. I greased cars in the service station. I worked on a farm, my stepfather's farm, for four or five years before I went off to college. I liked to hunt and fish, and I knew just about every creek and river in [northern]²⁴ Fremont County up there, Henry's Fork, the Snake River— we used to call it the Snake River—Warm River, Robinson Creek, Fall River, Bechler River, and all of the little creeks in between.

24. A note on our normal editorial conventions. In order to assure ease of reading, these editorial conventions have not been followed in this first version of the document, but are included in the second version, following the first volume in this document.

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 struck out material is readable. In this instance editorial requests were so extensive that clear text is provided and a printout of the edited text may be obtained from the National Archives.

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 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.

Ashton Was in Farm Country with Both Dryland Farming and Irrigated Agriculture

So I had a love for that country. It's basically farm country. When I was a kid, the eastern part of the county was largely dry farm. There wasn't any sprinkler irrigation [there] then, ~~and so the~~ [but many] rolling dry farms. Down in the valley you did have irrigated farms.

“ . . . those irrigated farms depended on river diversions . . . projects like Island Park Dam and Reservoir, Grassy Lake, Palisades, hadn't been built yet. . . . ”

In the early part of my childhood, those irrigated farms depended on river diversions, because projects like Island Park Dam and Reservoir, Grassy Lake, Palisades, hadn't been built yet. So I really didn't pay much attention to what was going on with Reclamation or where the water came from. I was just a kid that hunted a lot and went to school and played football and basketball and went out on a few dates and that was it.

Went to College Hoping to Become a Football Coach

In the '50s, it was a privilege to go on to college. Of course, everybody that went to college thought they were going to be a great success. Some of my friends stayed on and worked in the timber for the Forest Service or on the farm, but I went off to college. I wanted to be a football coach, so I went off on a football scholarship.

“After I got hit any number, a hundred times, I decided that maybe I'd rather get married than play football. . . . ”

After I got hit any number, a hundred times, I decided that maybe I'd rather get married than play football. So when I was about at the end of my sophomore year, I got married and quit football. And at that point, I didn't want to be a football coach anymore, so I really started down the road of . . .

“I liked biology and I liked history. When I graduated from Idaho State University in 1959, I had a . . . a major in history and a minor in biology. . . . ”

I liked biology and I liked history. When I graduated from Idaho State University in 1959, I had a liberal arts degree with a major in history and a minor in biology.

Attended the University of Idaho on a National Defense Fellowship

I had a chance to go on to the University of Idaho on, ~~they called them,~~ a National Defense Fellowship back in those days. The University of Idaho was just starting out with a [doctoral] ~~graduate~~ program in history. So I went up there and spent two years.

“I received a master's in American history, a minor in anthropology. . . . ”

I received a master's in American history, a minor in anthropology. I did my thesis on the Nez Perce Tribe in north central Idaho, and spent quite a bit of time out on the

reservation.

So I had to make a decision whether I wanted to go on in history and try to be a history teacher or a history professor or do something else. I had a wife and a little girl, and I decided that maybe I should get a job.

Took the Federal Service Entrance Exam and Returned to Ashton

So I took the Federal Service Entrance Exam. I think it was on another cold January day. Then I left Moscow and went back to Ashton and fed cattle and sorted potatoes for that winter.

Interviewed for a Job on the Columbia Basin Project

Finally, one day I got a phone call from [Mr. _____ Arnold] the administrative assistant in the Columbia Basin Project in [Ephrata,] Washington, and he asked me if I would be interested in being interviewed for an administrative job with the Bureau of Reclamation. I said, yeah, I would. I didn't tell him I was broke, but I was broke.

The Columbia Basin Project Office Referred His Name to Reclamation Staff in Boise, and He Was Hired to Work in the Planning Division

But, anyway, he asked me to meet him at Butte, Montana. So we drove to Butte and he interviewed me and I went back to Ashton. In about a month, he called me up and said, "I've got some good news and I've got some bad news. The good news is that I enjoyed our interview. The bad news is that you're not a veteran and there are a couple of guys that have got veterans' preference on the register, and so we've got two jobs and we need to take those fellows to work for us."

And I said, "Okay."

He said, "But I'm going to give your name to a couple of people in Boise with the Bureau and see if they have any opportunities there."

Gib Shirk

So a couple of weeks later, I got a phone call from Gib Shirk, who was head of reports and programs in the Bureau's regional office in Boise. He asked me to come over to Boise for an interview, and so I did that and he scared me to death. He was an extremely intelligent fellow, but he always ~~undid~~ [loosened] his tie and kept his top shirt button undone. Usually he had a cigarette hanging out the corner of his mouth, and he was pretty intimidating, and he scared me pretty bad. (laughter)

“ . . . he interviewed and showed me around what he called the sheep sheds. . . .”

But, anyway, he interviewed and showed me around what ~~we~~ [he] called the sheep sheds. The main part of the regional office was in an old cement building, but the planning group was out [back] in some old Army barracks that we called the sheep

sheds.

So in about a month or so, I hadn't heard anything and I called up Boise and I said, "Whatever happened on the interview?" And they said, "Well, we decided to hire you, but we haven't had time to call you back. So could you come to work about the first of June?" So I said I would.

Started Work for Reclamation in June of 1961

So I came to Boise, started my career with the Bureau in June of 1961 in the Planning Division, and Gib Shirk was my boss. He took me around the planning division and introduced me to all of the guys that had been there through the '40s and '50s, through kind of some of the glory days of the Bureau. They were kind of prima donnas.

Don Street, Harold Hafterson, Cliff Okeson, Darrell Affleck, Elwyn White, Norm Moore

The economist was well respected in the Bureau, Don Street. He was—I don't like to use the word scary, but when you're a young guy and you haven't got any experience in Reclamation, these guys are kind of intimidating. Harold Hafterson was the hydrologist. Cliff Okeson was the geologist. Darrell Affleck was the engineer. We didn't have any environmental group at that time, of course. Elwyn White was the regional planning supervisor, Norm Moore was his assistant. There were a lot of good people that worked there, and they'd get together every noon for lunch in the back room and argue politics and everything else.

“ . . . they put me to work editing reports. . . . ”

So it was a real good learning experience for me, and they put me to work editing reports. I worked in the regional office for about six months, and they said, "You need some field experience."

Sent Him to the Snake River Development Office in Boise for Field Experience

So they sent me over to the Snake River planning office. In those days, the region had three planning offices divided by hydrology. They had one in Boise called the Snake River Office; one in Spokane, the Upper Columbia Office; and one in Salem, Oregon, the Lower Columbia Office. So I went to the Snake River office.

Grande Ronde River Basin

They put me to work editing some reports on the Grande Ronde River Basin and a couple of others.

Sent to Get Permission Slips for Drillers to Go onto Private Land in Northwestern Wyoming

One of my first assignments in the field to get field experience was to go get some land-owner permission slips for [our drill crew] ~~the drillers~~ to go up on some ranches in the Salt River area in eastern—well, let's see. What is that? Northwestern Wyoming. These ranchers were pretty independent frontier type, and I kind of got the feeling afterwards that I was getting set up. But anyway, they flew me in the back of a Piper Cub over to Idaho Falls. Dave Crandall was the planning officer, and he was a great photographer. We had a little bitty—I guess it was a Cessna, not a Piper Cub. But he always took the door off to do his photography. He put me in the back seat and did all kinds of dives and flips on the way from Boise to Idaho Falls. I thought for sure I was done.

But, anyway, I got to Idaho Falls. He said, “We’ve rented you a car. You go over and pick up the car. Here are the permission slips. We’ll be here to pick you up in two days.” So I went over to the little rental car place, and ~~here’s a young guy that didn’t know anything about anything.~~ The car they had for me was a red Ford convertible with great big white sidewall tires. Now, having not seen but known the ranchers up in the area where I had to go, up there around Swan Valley and Star Valley, [I was pretty sure] they didn’t have any love for Bureau [government] people and especially young guys that didn’t know anything ~~driving~~ [and drove] red Ford convertibles. So I went up there and[, to my surprise,] I was successful and the people were really [very] nice, a few ornery ones but generally nice. That was kind of my introduction to the field. I worked pretty diligently there in the field office. I went out with the survey crew and I floated the rivers with hydrologists. I got a fairly good general background of what Reclamation was doing those days in planning projects.

Offered a Job as a Historian by the National Park Service

At the end of ~~the year~~ [my first year with the Bureau], I got three letters from the National Park Service. I guess, you know, my name was still on the register. I don’t know why, but I was on the register as a historian, and the Park Service said, “We’d like to have you come and be a historian. You’ve got your choice. You can go to New York, or you can go to Nebraska, or you can go to northern Minnesota.” [I wanted to work in the history field, and] I thought, “Well, gee, my mother was born in Minnesota and, you know, I’ve always wanted to be a historian. That’s why I took history. Reclamation is okay, but, gee, I can see myself being something that I wanted to be.”

Went to Newly Created Grand Portage National Monument in Northern Minnesota

So I went in and told ~~the guys~~ [Don Price,²⁵ the planning administrative officer,] at the Bureau that I was going to leave. ~~They didn’t seem to have any great concern over that. They said they wished that I could stay, but I think~~ [He asked that I reconsider, but I knew] they could get along okay. Anyway, I went to work for the National Park Service at a little ~~brand-new, actually,~~ **brand-new** national monument on the north shore of Lake Superior called Grand Portage. It’s an old fur trade post dated back to the 1700s. It was actually more closely associated with Canadian history than United States history, but it was an interesting place. We had the challenge to

25. Don Price participated in Reclamation’s oral history program.

reconstruct an old fur trade post, to do a lot of archeology, a lot of historical interpretation and research.

Transferred to Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey Where His Daughter's Allergies Caused Problems So He Tried to Transfer to a Drier Climate in the West

So I stayed there about four years and got a call one day and said that they'd like to have me go to Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey—that was a Revolutionary War area—and be the historian there. So I went to Morristown and worked for a little less than a year. My little girl got pretty sick, had a lot of problems with allergies back there, so I asked the National Park Service if there was a chance to be transferred back to a drier climate in the West. They said, “Well, you can go to Bent’ Old Fort or Walla Walla, Washington, or Philadelphia, or Washington, D.C. [Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., had similar climates to New Jersey and I declined those.

And I said, “What’s the medical availability at Bent’ Old Fort?”

And they said, “Well, it’s not very good.” At that time, at least.

Park Service Offers Involved a Two Grade Demotion So He Contacted Reclamation to See If Any Jobs Were Available

So I said, “Well, I’ll think about Walla Walla.” And they said, “Well, that’s a two grade demotion, but you could retain your pay and all that sort of thing.”

So I called up Don Price at the Bureau of Reclamation [office] in Boise, and [asked if there was] I said, “Don, is there anything at all with the Bureau?”²²

Offered a Job as a Technical Writer in the Snake River Development Office Planning Division

And he said [he’d] , “~~Let me~~ look around, and I’ll call you [me] back.” He called me back [within two weeks] and said [they could use me] , “~~We could use you as a technical writer in our planning division at the Snake River office [in Boise].~~”²²

“ . . . I knew that Boise would work health-wise . . . So we loaded up. I really had mixed feelings about leaving the National Park Service . . . ”

So I was relieved, and [because] I knew that Boise would work good for health-wise [for my little girl.] , and So we loaded up. I really had mixed feelings about leaving the National Park Service, but I came back to Boise and I went to work. Let’s see, this was in about 1966.

Worked on the Burnt River Project and Teton Dam

I went to work at the Snake River planning office, and the project that I worked on

there, a couple of them, the Burnt River Project in Oregon and did some work on the Lower Teton Division, which included the infamous Teton Dam.

Selected as Chief of the Reports Division in the Spokane Planning Office

Worked in Spokane from 1967 to 1973

After a year in Boise, the planning office in Spokane needed a chief of their Reports Division up there, and so I applied and I was selected and I went to Spokane and worked as chief of the reports group up there 'til about 1973, from '67 to '73. We did a lot of work in eastern Washington and northern Idaho and western Montana, northeastern Oregon. Enjoyed the work up there.

Commissioner Ellis Armstrong and Warren Fairchild Stimulated the Region to Consolidate Planning in Boise, and He Became Chief of the Region's Reports Branch

About 1973 Ellis Armstrong and one of his assistants by the name of Warren Fairchild²⁶ decided that it would be good to centralize some Bureau activities. ~~The Bureau's mission seemed to be changing from a lot of new project construction, and they thought centralization would be a good idea.~~ So the Pacific Northwest Region decided to centralize their planning function, and they closed the Spokane Office and greatly diminished the size of the Salem Office, left a small staff over there, and closed the Snake River Office, and they put *all* of the remaining planning people in the Boise office. The regional office then basically did new project planning for the Bureau. That was in '73.

About that time, several of the old-timers retired, and there were some openings around. I applied for the regional reports' chief job and I was selected for that. I worked in that job as Chief of the Reports Branch from 1973 until 1988, when ~~the~~ [a major] reorganization occurred.

Became the Region's Planning Officer in 1988

At that time, our regional planning officer, Larry Vinsonhaler, was really involved with the Yakima [River] Basin [Enhancement] Project in Washington, and he felt that with the demands of the reorganization and the demands of that Yakima [enhancement] project that he was personally doing, that he couldn't do both jobs, and so he decided to remove himself from the Planning Officer's job [to concentrate full time on the Yakima work.] , ~~and that~~ [The regional planning officer's position] was advertised and I applied for that, and I was selected as the Regional Planning Supervisor. So I ~~pretty much~~ had the responsibility for the Pacific Northwest Region's planning program from 1988 until 1994.

Storey: Uh-huh.

26. Warren Fairchild participated in Reclamation's oral history program.

During a Reorganization in 1993-1994 He Became the Regional Program Coordinator and Then Retired

Riley: In 1994, we had a [major] regional reorganization [in the Pacific Northwest Region], and I was asked as a part of that reorganization to work as the Regional Program Coordinator. So I did that and I worked as the Regional Program Coordinator from—I guess the reorganization actually started at the end of '93—from the end of '93, from about December-January until the end of April of '94, when I threw in the towel. So out of a thirty-three-year career, I spent twenty-eight-, twenty-nine years with the Bureau of Reclamation, all of it in the Pacific Northwest Region, primarily in the regional office, but with about six ~~or seven~~ years in field offices. So I've followed Reclamation in the Pacific Northwest for a long time, twenty-five years, and I've seen quite a number of changes occur in Reclamation, and in the people, and in the mission. That's brought me to where I am.

Storey: When were you born?

Born January 24, 1937

Riley: I was born January 24, 1937.

Storey: In Idaho Falls.

Riley: In Idaho Falls. So that makes me about fifty-seven.

Storey: Did you *live* on an irrigated farm, or was yours one of the dry farms you mentioned earlier?

Family Had Both a Dryland Farm and an Irrigated Farm

Riley: Well, we had dry farm and irrigated. We actually lived in town. Ashton is a little place with about 1,000 population, and a number of the farmers lived in town and drove back and forth to the farms. We had about 160 acres irrigated and about that much dry farm, so I worked on both.

Storey: What was *raised* on the dry farm?

The Dryland Farm Was Primarily Grains

Riley: The dry farm was primarily barley, wheat, and summer fallow, so it was primarily grains.

“Some of the dry farmers in the eastern part of the county in the higher elevations grew dry farm potatoes . . .”

Some of the dry farmers in the eastern part of the county in the higher elevations grew dry farm potatoes, but we didn't. We didn't try the potatoes.

Storey: This would have been winter wheat?

Riley: Yeah. Fall wheat, we called it. You plant it in the fall and hope it'd get a good start and then harvest it pretty early.

Storey: In the spring?

Riley: Well, we'd harvest it like in the end of July or early August.

Storey: What about when you raised barley? When did you plant that?

Riley: That was the spring. Spring we'd usually be able to get in the fields in May and plant it, harvest it usually in September.

Storey: How did you sell those crops?

Selling Grain at the Granary

Riley: We'd haul them into the granary. The granary would have a market price, and they'd weigh in your load, and you'd dump it, and that's the way we sold it. The railroad, Union Pacific Railroad, would come through and they'd take a lot of that grain, practically all of that grain, to milling plants [around the country,] ~~in northern Utah,~~ and that was primarily the use for the grain. Barley, some was feed barley. That's the way it was in those days. Nowadays that area raises a lot of malting barley that they sell to Coors and to Anheuser-Busch, Budweiser.

Storey: Where was this granary that you sold to?

Riley: Well, you know, in that old farm country up there, about every ten miles you had a granary along the railroad tracks, and right in town you had three or four granaries located right along the railroad tracks. They were independently owned and operated. Farmers would take their grain in and sell it to the granaries.

Storey: Could you shop around for a price?

Riley: Yeah, you could, but basically the price was about like gasoline is today in town. There might be a penny-a-gallon difference, but it really boiled down to who you liked best and that sort of thing.

Storey: So your Dad wasn't a member of a co-op or anything.

Riley: No. No. Stepdad. He wasn't. No, the co-ops really weren't very big at that time. It was just basically individual farmers responsible for the whole farm operation and for selling, marketing their crops.

Storey: How much acreage in dry farming, do you think?

Riley: It was about 160 to 240, something like that. It was relatively small. There were big

operators up there that farmed, you know, several hundred acres. We didn't. We were pretty small operators.

Storey: How many people worked on the farm?

He, His Stepdad, and His Two Stepbrothers Worked on the Farms

Riley: Well, there was my stepdad and my two stepbrothers and myself. So, we did the plowing, the discing, the ground preparation, the drilling of the wheat, the irrigating, and the harvesting. So I had experience in all of those things.

“I was started out on a harrow. It seems like most young guys are started out on the harrow, because that seems to be the one where you can cause the least amount of damage. . . .”

I was started out on a harrow. It seems like most young guys are started out on the harrow, because that seems to be the one where you can cause the least amount of damage. If you run over rock piles or miss a spot, there's really not much harm done, and you kind of graduate from the harrow to the duckfoot, to the disc, to the four bottom plow, to the grain combine, in that order of importance. My stepbrothers, who were a little older, they got to drive the wheeled tractors, which were up out of the dirt a little bit. But I got to drive an old worn-out D-2 CAT to harrow with. Not too many people harrowed with a CAT, because you're right down in the dirt and dust. It's kind of rough riding, but that's where I started.

Storey: Let's see, if I'm adding correctly, maybe a 250-, 300-acre farm?

Riley: Uh-huh.

Storey: Was it pretty much a full-time job for four of you?

The Farms Were Pretty Much a Full Time Job in the Summer

Riley: Yeah, it was in the summer. And then we all prayed for snow in the winter for two purposes—to get some water and to get some time off. But it was a full-time job. The big times, of course, were the spring preparation and planting and then the fall harvest and then the . . .

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

Storey: You were talking about how you spent your time working on the farm.

Used flood irrigation on the irrigated farm “. . . which meant that we could probably irrigate maybe 60 percent of the farm. It was interspersed with lava beds and basalt outcrops, and sagebrush . . .”

Riley: The irrigation was quite a bit different. Even on the farm that we operated, the irrigated

farm, in the '50s, we did all flood irrigation, which meant that we could probably irrigate maybe 60 percent of the farm. It was interspersed with lava beds and ~~rock-out~~, basalt out-crops, and sagebrush, so you had to do some land leveling. To flood irrigate, you had your main canal going through the area, and then your feeder ditches, and you used canvas dams.

“ . . . you pretty much had a pair of hip boots and a shovel and you coaxed the water down through the fields. . . .”

And then you pretty much had a pair of hip boots and a shovel and you coaxed the water down through the ~~grain~~ fields and the potato rows.

Sprinkler Irrigation Later Increased the Area of the Farm That Could Be Irrigated and Income Increased

After we, ~~the boys~~, stopped running the farm, it was sold to a brother-in-law who got there about the same time that sprinkler irrigation arrived in Fremont County, so he was able to remove a lot of the ditches and to irrigate [uneven land areas,] I'd guess, probably 90 percent of that farm. The income level increased and it was just a lot better operation.

“ . . . we did it the hard way. . . . a number of ditch breaks . . . spent a lot of time on our hands and knees trying to plug the gopher holes with grass and weeds. Irrigation was a tough job in July and August, out there in the field with hip boots and a shovel and the sun. . . .”

So we did it the hard way. We had a lot of—not a lot, but a number of ditch breaks, mostly caused by gopher holes, and [we] spent a lot of time on your hands and knees trying to plug the gopher holes with grass and weeds. Irrigation was a tough job in July and August, out there in the field with hip boots and a shovel and the sun.

Storey: Did you irrigate at night?

Irrigating at Night

Riley: Usually what we'd do at night, we'd take an easy set, one that we were confident it wouldn't cause much problem if there was a ditch break or if a dam fell out of the ditch, and we would irrigate alfalfa that way and some wheat, some of our grain crops. We'd put in a night set at about—oh, ~~the nights were pretty long over there.~~ Or, the daylight hours were pretty long, and we'd probably put the last set in at about eight or nine o'clock, about sundown. Then we'd be out there about five o'clock the next morning to move the water.

Storey: Now, when you put in a canvas dam which, if it's what I'm thinking it is, it's a board that rests on the top of the ditch and then the canvas goes down and holds back the water, how did you get the water from the ditch into the field?

Irrigating with Cuts in the Ditch Bank or Siphons

Riley: Well, you'd get to know the topography of your field, and so you knew where the dam sets would be. You'd just move your dams down the ditch as time went on. But you'd set your dam, and you'd have to anchor your dam. Before you removed the upstream dam, you'd set your next dam.

Storey: With mud?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: Or dirt.

Riley: Dirt and mud, and anchor the bottom of the dam. Then you'd carefully remove your upstream dam and let the water flow down. When ~~you~~ [the water] got up to about the dam top, before ~~you'd~~ [it would] over-top the dam, you'd cut [the ditch bank] with your shovel [to let the water flow into the field. You would have three or four cuts like this above the dam]. The shovel was the irrigator's best friend and you always kept it real sharp. You'd make cuts in the ditch bank and let that water flow out of those cuts. That was to irrigate the grain and the alfalfa. Potatoes, you used siphon tubes, which was a different operation.

The *ditches* that we're talking about here aren't the main ditch that ran through the farm, but feeder ditches that you made with ~~an old Chatham [phonetic] [a] ditcher~~. A tractor pulled the ditcher and you had weight on the ditcher so it would dig in.] ~~and just plowed them out through a field following~~ [You followed] the contours and topography of the field.

Storey: How did you get the siphons to flow?

Riley: Well, when you're a kid, you didn't get them to flow very good on the first crack, but as you got a little older and a little more experienced and watched the good ones do it, you could put those babies in the ditch and flip them over, and the gravity flow would just take her down. The first few times you'd get a dry siphon, but after a while, you get the hang of it, and it's kind of a quick wrist flip and works out all right.

“ . . . you don't have water all to yourself. You've got farmers upstream and downstream . . . what would be bad is if you had a farmer upstream . . . wanted to get his irrigating done a little quicker, so he'd turn his head gate up a little bit more and then your set was out of whack and you could dry up your siphons. That could bring the water down below your ditch cuts and you'd think you were irrigating and you'd be dry. So you always hoped for a good neighbor. . . .”

The thing that's disappointing, though, is, you know, you don't have water all to yourself. You've got farmers upstream and downstream and you've got a headgate. My stepdad would always say, “Okay, crank up the head gate three turns,” or four turns or crank it down a turn. He knew, based on the flow in the ditch, how many turns to turn the head gate. Well, what would be bad is if you had a farmer upstream that had to go somewhere shopping and wanted to get his irrigating done a little quicker, so he'd

turn his headgate up a little bit more and then your set was out of whack and you could dry up your siphons. ~~You~~ [That] could bring the water down below your [ditch] cuts and you'd think you were irrigating and you'd be dry. So you always hoped for a good neighbor. You always hoped for a good neighbor that if he had to do something out of the ordinary, he'd let you know.

Storey: These siphons that I'm familiar with are tubes maybe one and a half, two inches in diameter and maybe four foot long?

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: Okay.

Riley: That's right. Aluminum, plastic. In those days, most of them were aluminum.

Storey: And what crops were you irrigating in the irrigated part of the farm?

Riley: Barley, oats, wheat, [and] alfalfa ~~and potatoes~~.

Storey: What was your biggest crop?

Potatoes Were Particularly Labor Intensive

Riley: We did mostly grain, small [grain-] barley and wheat, because the potatoes were really labor-intensive. It required a lot of labor, specialized equipment. Of course, you had to have specialized equipment for all, but potatoes were labor-intensive because it meant cutting them in the spring, planting them, harvesting them, storing them in a spud cellar, sorting them in the winter, cutting them again in the spring. The market was really volatile, and my [step]father-in-law just felt more comfortable with the grain crops.

My wife, Lois, was raised in Ashton, also. Her father was a farmer, irrigated farmer. She grew up on the farm, and *their* primary crop was potatoes. So I observed and helped quite a bit in their potato harvest when I had the time.

Storey: When you say cutting, you mean cutting up the potatoes to plant?

Potato Cellars

Riley: Right. Yeah, potatoes, you take them in and store them in spud cellars. In those days, the potato . . . well, I call them spud cellars, were all, I think without any exception, dirt. They were a pole, lodge pole pine frame, dug down. The cellar was dug down probably six feet into the ground, and then the lodge pole pine frame above that, a gable-type roof. Then you'd cover that with bales of straw for insulation and then a layer of dirt over the bales of straw. So you'd kind of drive down into your potato cellar. They had a front entrance and a rear entrance, and you'd drive down into the excavated part of the cellar, and you could drive clear through. You had potato bins in there and you had conveyors.

Harvesting Potatoes

In those days, we didn't have potato combines as we do today. . . . The first thing you do is pray for a good frost to kill the vines. Then you had a beater, a vine beater, and you'd go out and beat the vines and try to pulverized them. And then most farmers had a two—some had a four, but mostly a two-row digger pulled behind a tractor. You dig the potatoes and they'd come out on the surface of the ground, two rows at a time.

The Pickers

Two ways to pick those. The little kids, when they let the school out for this activity, it was a big time. And, of course, all the kids were badly needed on the farm[s during harvest], so they'd let school out for two weeks during potato harvest. The little kids would pick with a basket. They'd work as a [two-person] team, and they'd each fill the basket, and then one would hold the potato sack and they dumped the basket, and then the other one. They'd get about five cents a basket to do that.

Then the older kids would pick with a belt. It was just a canvas [or leather] belt [about six or eight inches wide] that you ~~put~~ [buckled] around your waist[. Two] ~~with a couple of~~ leather straps [hung] down the front of your legs ~~and~~ [to which] a board across your legs ~~and~~ [with] a couple of hooks on the board to hook your potato sack on and some hooks in the back of your belt to hook empty potato sacks on. You'd hook your potato sack on the front board and it would drape between your legs and you'd bend over and you'd start picking.

If you picked on an irrigated farm, you could do really well. You'd usually get ten cents a sack when potatoes were thick. You'd fill those babies up to about, I'd say the sack about two-thirds full and take it off your belt and set it over to the side of the row and start up.

“On a dry farm, they usually paid by row, because the potatoes were so sparse and small and long, the rows were long, a quarter of a mile long. . . .”

On a dry farm, they usually paid by row, because the potatoes were so sparse and small and ~~long~~; the rows were long, a quarter of a mile long. You'd take off picking and you were bent over forever. But good pickers, fast pickers, could make fifteen to twenty dollars a day, and that was kind of a status symbol. And there were a couple of champion potato pickers in the area that everybody knew and that set the records on how many sacks [or rows they could pick in a day].

The Buckers

But, anyway, those were the pickers. Then you had the buckers. The buckers would pick up the sacks. You'd have a truck driver in a flatbed truck, and you would take out through the field and you'd have usually two, sometimes four, guys, two on each side of the truck bucking. We'd call it bucking. You'd pick the spud sack up and put it on your thigh and buck it, throw it up on the back of the truck, and you'd have

one or two guys on the back on the truck that would stack the potatoes [sacks] on the truck. And that was an art, too, because you had to lay those [sacks] horizontally, and you had to know just how to interweave those and overlap them so that the load would hold.

“ . . . you graduated from a picker to a bucker. . . .”

So you graduated from a picker to a bucker.

Storing Potatoes in the Potato Cellar

Then you'd take the spuds into the cellar and you'd have a conveyor. Your guys on the back of the truck would dump the spuds into the conveyor, and the conveyor would move them back into the corners of the cellar.

“ . . . buckers would work until sometimes until ten-, eleven o'clock at night. . . . catch up for the next morning. . . . there was usually frost . . . You couldn't really start harvesting . . . until the frost would go out of the ground. So you'd usually get started about ten o'clock in the morning with the diggers . . .”

So the buckers would work until sometimes [until] ten-, eleven o'clock at night. The stars and the moon would be out. They^{re} [were always] trying to catch up for the next morning. In the mornings, there was usually frost, because you were harvesting in early October trying to beat the [first] snowfall. You couldn't really start harvesting, digging the spuds, until the frost would go out of the ground. So you'd usually get started about ten o'clock in the morning with the diggers, and the buckers would go until sometimes, like I say, eleven o'clock at night cleaning up the fields.

Spud Combines Brought More Mechanization to Potato Harvesting

Then the first thing that came into that valley that was a step up was a spud combine. Instead of picking the potatoes, you'd have a two-row digger that would bring spuds up on a conveyor, a long conveyor that was pulled along behind the tractor. You'd have usually two people on each side of the conveyor ~~or the spud combine~~ picking out clods and vines.

The Sacker

Then you'd have the sacker at the end [so] that when the potatoes go off the conveyor into a spud sack, the sacker would put them out onto the field. So that was the next step up.

Then, of course, what came after that was really the spud combine that eliminated the vine and clod pickers and actually conveys the potatoes right up into the back of the truck. The truck has a built-in conveyor and goes into the cellar. The cellars nowadays are really Quonset huts that are on ground level with good ventilation and well-controlled atmosphere. The trucks just convey the spuds onto a conveyor. So you've eliminated a lot of your hand labor. But that was the spud harvest.

“ . . . spud harvest was a good time. . . . earn some extra money. . . . work with other guys. . . . the guys liked, you know, to have the girls out there picking spuds. . . . Race against the snow. A few times you’re out there in the snowstorm trying to get the last spuds in. . . . ”

That’s a long story, but spud harvest was a good time.

Storey: Why?

Riley: Well, it was a time to earn some extra money. It was a time to work with other guys. The girls from high school would always come out and work in the spud field and, of course, the guys liked, you know, to have the girls out there picking spuds. (laughter) It was just a good time. Race against the snow. A few times you’re out there in the snowstorm trying to get the last spuds in. But it was a good time.

Storey: So, now, you would have graduated about ‘54?

Graduated from High School in 1955

Riley: ‘55.

Storey: Had the original potato combines shown up in the fields by that time?

Riley: They had. Yeah. You know, I suppose that there were some around before, but Fremont County was pretty conservative, and I’d say probably in the [late ‘40s] ~~early ‘50s~~, the first combines started coming around.

Storey: When did you start working the potato harvest?

Started Working in the Potato Harvest When He Was about Eight

Riley: When I was about eight, eight years old[.] ~~, probably. I don’t know.~~ What’s that? About third grade? Third-graders could go out and pick spuds in a basket. You’d get paid in one-dollar bills.

“If over the course of two weeks you made thirty dollars and you were a little kid and you got paid in one-dollar bills, you put them all in a big roll in your pocket. . . . ”

If over the course of two weeks you made thirty dollars and you were a little kid and you got paid in one-dollar bills, you put them all in a big roll in your pocket. (laughter)

Storey: Now, was this working on your stepdad’s farm?

Worked on His Stepdad’s Farm While in High School

Riley: No. I didn’t start working on my stepdad’s farm until about ‘52. So I worked ‘52, ‘53, ‘54. I worked about four years on my stepdad’s farm. . . . Let’s see, from about the time

I was eight until I was about fourteen, ~~thirteen~~, about ~~five~~ [six] years, I'd just hire out to spud farmers around there. They were always anxious to get kids to pick [and buck] spuds.

Storey: Around Ashton?

Riley: Yeah. And that still continues on over there. They still have spud vacation, they call it, and kids are out for two weeks. They just do different work now. The littlest ones, I don't think, get out [much] any more, but the high school kids do. Junior high and high school.

Storey: The fancier potato combines, did they come in before you left high school?

Riley: No. The ones that would convey right into a truck didn't come in until after I'd left. There were a couple of really pretty sharp mechanical-type farmers up there. They weren't mechanical engineers, but they were really savvy, the Looslis and the Hesses. They did a lot of experimentation with early spud combines and that sort of thing. They had some pretty good operations. Seemed like the first thing they tried to do was to increase the number of rows of spuds that you could harvest at one time, from a single or a double row to four rows, you know, and that sort of thing.

Storey: Let's go back to field preparation, if we can.

Riley: Okay.

Storey: You mentioned harrowing, and harrowing is a big flat thing that basically sort of smoothes out the surface. I rode a harrow. I never drove one myself. (laughter) Then I believe you mentioned a duckfoot?

The Equipment Used on the Farms

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: Take me through the types of machines you mentioned and what they did.

Riley: Okay. Well, of course, you know, the basic thing was the plow.

“You didn't plow a field every year, or at least we didn't. Plowing usually occurred when you were changing crops . . .”

You didn't plow a field every year, or at least we didn't. Plowing usually occurred when you were changing crops, like going from alfalfa to a grain crop where you really had to break it up and go deep. So if you plowed a field, of course, you know, you waited in the spring until the ground got dry enough. That was sometimes pretty late, because that part of the country had a short growing season. ~~I don't remember what it was, but it seemed like in May, sometimes late April,~~ [It was usually May when] you could get out and start to plow. The snow drifts, heavy snow up there, snow drifts would keep you out of some areas, but for most part, the fields were open. You'd go

out and you'd plow.

The larger farmers, you know, would have a five-, maybe six-bottom plow.²⁷ We had a four-bottom plow, and you had to—well, we used a Caterpillar. The big wheel tractors that we have today that you see, the great big four-wheel tractors, really [we] didn't have them. You had pretty good-sized wheel tractors, but they were the traditional tractors with large rear tires and the small front tires. You had the Allis Chalmers and the John Deere and the Minneapolis Moline and the Case and Farmall and International Harvester. Those were the primary tractors. But if you wanted to get down into heavy-duty work like plowing and discing with big Wheatland disc, you usually went to a Caterpillar. So we used D-2 Caterpillars.

When you finished your plowing, of course, you had to clean off your plow shears every day, sometimes several times a day with a brick, to keep the mud and the rust at a minimum on them, [and] keep them sharp. [We would] take [the shears] ~~them~~ into the blacksmith shop [for sharpening], and this was an old-time blacksmith shop where you had the old forge and the hammer and the tongs. Old Claude Waugh was the blacksmith in Ashton, and he'd sharpen your plow shares. So you had to have, you know, three or four sets of plow shares, and you'd change those quite frequently to keep them sharp.

Out there in that part of the country, you had a lot of basalt. That's the upper end of the Snake River aquifer. That big basalt flow, and some of the basalt is pretty close to the surface. You'd hit rocks, basalt, and bang up your plow shears. So it was a task.

Anyway, you'd plow the field. Plowing, you know, doesn't do very fine work. [After plowing we would go over the field] ~~You could go over it with a harrow[.] , but usually what we'd do then is take a—we'd call it a~~ [Sometimes we would first use a "duckfoot." [The duckfoot is a tool bar] ~~It was an implement that you'd pull behind a tractor[.] that was probably—ours wasn't very big,~~ It was probably twelve feet wide, and it had spring tongs on it. Probably over that twelve-foot span it might have had fifteen or twenty tongs, spring tongs, that went down. On the end of those you could either put a spade-shaped implement ~~on, a blade,~~ or you could use a chisel-[shaped] ~~like implement [on the bar].~~ So you'd put those across. You'd attach those to your duckfoot and then you'd trip your duckfoot and it would penetrate into the earth. If you'd plowed a field, you could go [You would drag your duckfoot] diagonally or perpendicular to your plow pattern [to cultivate the soil] ~~and break that up a little more.~~ So it was really kind of a fine-tune-type implement that was kind of a step up from a plow in terms of fine-tune.

When you broke up ground, you could [also] use a Wheatland disc, which was a ~~great big heavy disk that really went deep[.] , or a plow.~~ Then you'd usually follow that with what we called the duckfoot, and then you would harrow. Sometimes you'd have to harrow twice. You'd go two different directions with your harrow. So each stage broke the ground up into a finer condition. The soil up there was good. There

27. Referring to the number of "bottoms," i.e., plow shears (shares), on the plow.

wasn't a lot of clay. So when you finished harrowing the second time, a field looked really beautiful.

[The last step was to drill or plant your seed.] ~~Then, of course, you would drill. If you were planting a grain, you would drill.~~ In those days, we'd use, I think, about a three-or a four-bin drill, and you'd back up to it with a truck and empty your wheat sacks or your barley sacks into the drill, and then you'd drill[, plant,] your field. That took quite a bit of care, because you wanted to be sure to just barely overlap your rounds ~~on your drill~~ so that you didn't overplant and that you didn't leave big gaping spaces between your ~~drill~~ rounds.

Planting Fall Wheat and Alfalfa at the Same Time

[In rotating crops] you usually followed your wheat crop with an alfalfa crop, and the drill had a smaller set of bins on it [so] that you could drill in the alfalfa seed at the same time you were drilling your wheat so that in the fall after you harvested your grain crop, your small alfalfa plants would have sprouted, and then following year you would have your first year of alfalfa crop. ~~So that was pretty much the ground preparation.~~

Weed Control

Usually during the summer, we'd spray for mustard, weeds, Canadian thistles. [We] didn't have too much trouble with insects, but you wanted to keep your weeds down, and so you'd spray. Now they do a lot of spraying commercially or with airplanes. In those days, we had two 55-gallon barrels on the front of a tractor and a spray rig that probably covered about twenty ~~or thirty~~ feet. Didn't ever wear a mask or anything, so probably most of us are badly in need of cleaner lungs.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

Storey: This is tape two of an interview by Brit Allan Storey with Robert J. Riley on December the 8th, 1994.

You were saying that you didn't wear any masks or anything when you sprayed.

Riley: No. No, we were kind of ignorant and tough. We just went to work. If you were plowing or harrowing [or spraying or combining], you didn't wear any mask. We didn't have any closed cabs [on our tractors]. A few of the farmers around were starting to use closed cabs on their tractors. And then, of course, nowadays, you know, they're mostly all closed cabs, which is smart. So we breathed a lot of dust and probably a lot of 2-4-D spray and whatever else you got on the farm.

Storey: You mentioned leveling earlier. Did you do much of that?

Leveling a Field

Riley: Well, you could do some minor localized leveling yourself. ~~What we'd do is that We had [an implement that we called a leveler.] a big thing that we called it a level. It wasn't a commercial level, but You'd build it out of big planks. As I recall, they were about 2-by-12 planks. And if you could visualize it, you'd have about a twelve-foot long plank. On each side, if you were going to build this thing, you could visualize a—oh, what would we call it—oblong, rectangular-shaped thing that had one side of it and your boards would be vertical, 2-by-12 vertical on each side, and then you'd join those by another probably 2-by-12-by-10 in the front and the back. So you really just had a box. Then in the middle of that, you'd have another vertical board that ran from side to side that you could adjust. You could elevate it. [The leveler was a rectangular shaped implement about ten feet by 12 feet.] And you just drug that behind your Caterpillar and it smoothed out areas.~~

“ . . . if you had major leveling to do, there were contractors . . . It was expensive. But in those days of flood irrigation a lot of the irrigated farmers at one time or another used a commercial leveler to increase their irrigable acreage. . . . ”

So you could do some smoothing with that homemade-type outfit. But if you had major leveling to do, there were contractors around the valley that would use, you know, large Caterpillars and carryalls, scrapers, and they would actually go out and remove mounds, move earth from a high point to a low point, try to cover up some shallow areas for you, and that would do a remarkable job. It was expensive. ~~I don't remember what it was, but it was expensive.~~ But in those days of flood irrigation and trying to minimize problems with rocks, I'd say a lot of the irrigated farmers at one time or another used a commercial leveler [to increase their irrigable acreage].

Storey: How long did you keep the alfalfa crop in before you plowed it under and replaced it?

Riley: Usually about three years. Three years.

Storey: So you were running a rotation like that?

“ . . . farmers that I knew in those days would go grain, alfalfa, potatoes, and then back to grain. . . . ”

Riley: Yep. Yeah. Most all of the farmers that I knew in those days would go grain, alfalfa, potatoes, and then back to grain. We did some commercial fertilization, but I don't think to the extent that they do today. So it was really a crop rotation. Alfalfa didn't sell for much in those days, not like it does today, so when you had a field in alfalfa, you know, it wasn't the cash crop that it is today. It was more or less good farm management.

Storey: And it sounds as if a good share of the farm would have been in alfalfa, the irrigated farm.

Riley: Well, no. I'd say that ~~for many~~ you'd probably have about a third of your farm in alfalfa.

Storey: What percentage in potatoes?

Riley: Well, potatoes would vary on how many years you had your alfalfa crop in. You know, if you had it in two or three years—we didn't grow very many potatoes. I'd say at the most we'd grow fifteen-, twenty acres.

Storey: What kind of a harvest would you get from that?

Riley: Well, most farmers would measure by sacks [or hundredweight]. In those days, if you could get between 150 and [175] ~~200~~ sacks an acre, that's pretty good. Now I think they've increased that with different varieties. The refined varieties and fertilization, [and improved irrigation methods] you know, they do better.

Storey: Do you happen to remember what varieties of potatoes you grew?

Riley: Well, we just called them russets. (laughter) Beyond that I don't know. My dad-in-law, my wife's dad, was a good potato farmer, and all I've ever heard him talk about is russets. I don't know any more than that.

Storey: How did you get your seed? Did you save part of the crop for seed, or did you buy seed potatoes?

“Fremont County is a pretty famous seed potato area. That's where a lot of the farmers made their best money was on seed potatoes. So what farmers would do is that when they sorted their potatoes, they would sort into seed, which were usually smaller uniform potatoes, and then your number-one bakers, and number two, and then you had the culls. Culls would go to the starch factory. . . .”

Riley: Fremont County [is] ~~was~~ a pretty famous seed potato area. That's where a lot of the farmers made their best money was on seed potatoes. So what [farmers] ~~they~~ would do is that when they sorted their potatoes, they would sort into seed, which were usually smaller uniform potatoes, and then your number-one bakers, and number two [spuds], and then you had the culls. Culls would go to the starch factory. The ones and twos would be sold commercially. They'd usually go out on the Union Pacific or on semitrailers. In those days, it was mostly train transportation rather than truck. But here ones and twos would go out commercially in burlap bags. And then your seed potatoes, you would hold back a portion of those for your own use, and then farmers from all across southern Idaho would come to Fremont County to buy their seed potatoes. They would come from Burley, Twin Falls, Jerome, all across south central Idaho, and buy their seed potatoes up there.

Storey: Did you ever do any of the sorting?

Riley: I did two or three years. That was my first introduction to making decisions. (laughter) You know, when you're a kid, you don't have to make too many decisions. But when the spuds start coming down the conveyor and you've got to make decisions, you make them pretty quick.

Storey: Uh-huh. What's the difference between a number-one and a number-two potato?

Riley: You know, if you go by today's standards in the grocery store, you have a real problem.

Storey: No. I want to talk about then.

Riley: Okay.

Storey: Back when you were doing it.

Riley: A number one was ~~probably~~ a potato that was from, I'd say, three to six inches long, uniform, no knots or ~~[cuts]~~ ~~eyes~~ on it. You know, it was a relatively smooth, uniform-sized potato that would make a good baker. A number two would be about the same in terms of size, but it would be less uniform in shape. It could have knots, ~~eyes~~ ~~[cuts or bruises]~~. You've seen potatoes with little knots and ~~eyes~~ ~~[cuts]~~ on them.

Storey: Sure.

Riley: Then the culls, of course, were either great big irregular-shaped potatoes or very small, walnut-sized potatoes, or potatoes that had been bruised or skinned real bad that ~~would~~ ~~either~~ ~~[could]~~ cause a problem in spoilage, you know, that sort of thing. They'd pretty much run off the end of the conveyor into a pile, and you'd have a guy back there shoveling them into a truck or into a larger pile to send to the starch factory where they'd be cooked up and turned into starch, potato starch.

Sewing up the Potato Sack

The good potatoes would be run ~~into~~ different parts of the conveyor [line]. In some cases, they were sacked. If they were ready and going [out] to market, the conveyor would carry them right into a sack. Then you'd have a sewer that would sew the top of the potato sack. I never did that. It took somebody with really nimble, quick fingers to sew the potato sacks. And then they'd be stacked in the warehouse and put on their refrigerated cars, Union Pacific freight cars.

The seed potatoes could either be sacked— the ones you saved for yourself, you ordinarily wouldn't sack. You would wait 'til it came time in the spring to cut those potatoes, and then you'd sack them as you cut them, and then the sacks would go out to the potato planter.

Storey: How were potatoes marketed?

Selling Your Potatoes

Riley: There weren't too many big contracts in those days like there are now, you know, Simplot or Ore-Ida, these big potato processors who go out and contract for large blocks of potatoes now. In those days, it was basically you're on your own to sell your potatoes. So each farmer would travel down through the country or put an ad in the paper, put a sign up out on the highway. Over a period of time, you know, you'd build

up a clientele. In the case of seed potatoes, generally the same people would come back and do business with you. So you were pretty much on your own to market your crops.

Storey: So there weren't wholesalers or anything?

Riley: Yeah. There were wholesalers in Salt Lake and Idaho Falls and probably in Pocatello, but it was your responsibility to, you know, to be aggressive in marketing. Those buyers would come up into the valley, and they would like meet at [the farmer's home] ~~the local Legion hall~~ or at the local restaurant or—it wasn't a restaurant, it was a café. You know, they'd put an ad in the paper and say, "We'll be there. . ."

Storey: So you'd go sell.

Riley: Yeah. And some farmers, you know, it was interesting, you could make or break yourself on potatoes. Like if you started into the fall, late fall after harvest, and potatoes were selling for a dollar and a half a hundred-weight, a lot of farmers would hold on until the spring, hoping that they could get four or five dollars. Sometimes the market just wouldn't be there, so there were times that the farmers would have to haul their spuds to a starch factory. But there are other times that, you know, they'd get seven, eight dollars a hundred-weight. Back in those days, that was good.

"My dad-in-law . . . He'd come out from Kansas and worked . . . 'til he saved up enough money to make a down payment on a little farm, and he was worried about making the mortgage payments. His second potato crop, he was able to pay the farm off. . . ."

My dad-in-law was worried about paying his farm off. He'd come out from Kansas and worked different jobs, as a farmhand and as a snow plower and as a woodsman, 'til he saved up enough money to make a down payment on a little farm, and he was worried about making the mortgage payments. His second potato crop, he was able to pay the farm off. It just happened to be one of those years right after World War II when the potatoes, I think, were going for five-, six dollars a hundred-weight.

". . . when you could buy a farm in those days for around \$100 an acre, irrigated, you could pay them off pretty fast with a few good crops. . . ."

You know, when you could buy a farm in those days for [around \$100] ~~\$70-~~, \$80 an acre, irrigated, you could pay them off pretty fast [with a few good crops].

Storey: Let's talk a little more about the irrigation. Potatoes, I presume, are a row crop.

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: So you were running water down rows there. What about grain? How is that irrigated? It isn't a row crop, is it?

Flood Irrigating Grain

“So you had your old hip boots and you were just kind of like a shepherd, only you were a water-herder. . . .”

Riley: Well, there are basically two different types that I know of. There are corrugated grain fields where you have real deep corrugations²⁸ between your rows of wheat, and it almost looks like a row crop. I’ve seen that out through the central part of Idaho here, south central Idaho, and some in the Boise Valley. But over there we used a very fine drill, and you had very small corrugation between rows.

So what you did was flood ~~them~~ [the fields]. When you cut your ditch, the water just rushed out and ~~it just found its way out through~~ [soaked] the field. If you had a little bit of a high spot, you’d have to lead your water there with a shovel. In other words, you’d just cut a little trench with your shovel over to the high spot. If you had a low spot and your water was ponding up on you, you’d have to go with your shovel and dig a little outlet for it.

So you had your old hip boots and you were just kind of like a shepherd, only you were a water-herder. You just walked out through that field back and forth, observed, see how your water was flowing. When it went clear through the field, then you knew that you were done and you’d move your set and the water, you know, just absorbed into the field.

Storey: Was this Reclamation water?

Farmers Used Reclamation and Non-Reclamation Water in the Area

Farmers Began the Original Diversions from the Fall River

Riley: A lot of the surface water was not Reclamation water. A lot of the farmers up in that [Ashton] area started out with surface water. That means they built a diversion dam on Fall River. Fall River was ~~the~~ [a] primary source, because the Snake River ran ~~to the north~~ [east and south] of the valley. It was in a rather deep canyon and it was hard in that upper part to divert from the Snake River. You couldn’t divert naturally. So Fall River, which heads up in the Yellowstone Park country and is at the northeastern end of the valley, elevation-wise it would allow you to divert from the river down into the valley through gravity canals.

So the farmers built a couple of diversions up on Fall River. They would divert into the main supply ditches. They had [shares or stock] ~~shareholders or stockholders~~ in the [local] canal ~~company~~ [companies], and they each would own so many shares. The main ditch[es] would travel down through the valley [from the upriver diversions], and they would run feeder ditches off of those main ditches. The main ditches had head gates all along them into the feeder ditches. That’s pretty much the way it was done ~~in the beginning~~.

28. In this instance referring to relatively small furrows or grooves separated by relatively small ridges that guide water through a field.

“One of the problems was that that upper Snake River valley was opened up to irrigation after a considerable amount of irrigation had been developed in south central Idaho around Twin Falls. . . . Twin Falls farmers had priority water rights. . . the irrigators up in the upper valley usually had to shut off, even in an average year, by mid-July. . . .”

One of the problems was that that upper [Snake River] valley was opened up to irrigation after a considerable amount of irrigation had been developed in south central Idaho around Twin Falls. So [many] Twin Falls farm[ers] ~~area, they~~ had priority water rights [on the Snake River]. Of course, Fall River is tributary to the Snake River, so the irrigators up in the upper valley usually had to shut off, even in an average year, by mid-July. So you had a long period *after* mid-July where your crops were trying to mature [and] ~~that~~ would sometimes have to go without irrigation [water].

“. . . the Bureau was really called into that part of the country, not to develop a new irrigation project like the Columbia Basin Project, but rather to provide storage for supplemental water supplies. . . .”

So then the Bureau was really called into that part of the country, not to develop a new irrigation project like the Columbia Basin Project, but rather to provide storage for supplemental water supplies. So the Bureau came into, really, southern Idaho on that basis. Southern Idaho, you know, a lot of early irrigation development over in the eastern part, a lot of the Mormon settlements moved up into the upper valley, and there was a lot of irrigation just from natural runoff. So then you had some of the farmers formed co-ops or stock groups and they'd build small crib work storage dams. But then they called the Bureau in.

“I remember as a little kid seeing the Bureau of Reclamation office in the bank building there at Ashton when they were doing work at Jackson Lake, Grassy Lake, Island Park. . . . and then later built Palisades. . . .”

I remember as a little kid seeing the Bureau of Reclamation office in the bank building there at Ashton when they were doing work at Jackson Lake, Grassy Lake, Island Park. So the Bureau came in and ~~re-did Jackson Lake, enlarged Jackson Lake, built Grassy Lake, built Island Park,~~ and then later built Palisades. So all of those reservoirs that I've just mentioned, along with the big one downstream at American Falls, you know, were basically built for supplemental water supplies. That extended your irrigation season from mid-July sometimes into mid-September.

Storey: Were your stepdad's water rights good?

Riley: They were good. He had some of the early [Fall] River rights that were [reliable.] ~~good, and then I believe he had some shares in Island Park. Fremont-Madison Irrigation District owned a large part of the storage in Island Park. I think he had some shares in Fremont-Madison.~~ [Also he may have had some Island Park or Grassy Lake water, but I'm not sure.]

Storey: Did I just hear you say Island Park was a Reclamation dam?

Riley: Uh-huh.

Storey: So he was getting Reclamation water rights.

Using Storage Reservoirs for Water Exchanges to Supplement Existing Water Supplies

Riley: Yeah[, if he had Island Park or Grassy lake rights]. You know, a lot of the storage was operated on an exchange basis where you know what I mean is that . . .

Storey: Keep talking.

Riley: Well, what had happened is if you were in the upper valley and physically it was impossible for you to divert water from a gravity standpoint to get to your farm, you know, you'd build storage and then you would have an exchange where you could divert natural flow and replace it with storage[, like from Island Park,] to a downstream user, if you could work out exchange agreements. [A water exchange helps to make efficient use of water in an area.]

Storey: So that's what he had? Island Park was used as exchange water?

Riley: ~~Fremont-Madison. See, you've got a lower [I'm not sure what storage he might of had. From a general sense, I know that in the southern] part of Fremont County where you [many irrigators] *can* divert from [the Snake River system,] Henry's Fork. Island Park [Reservoir] is, you know, in the Snake River drainage. So Fremont-Madison [Irrigation District can work exchanges between] , in part, does divert directly in the lower part of the valley [and upper valley lands.] , lower part of the county, Fremont-Madison counties. But in the upper part, they do some exchange.~~

Storey: And your dad was involved in that—your stepdad?

Riley: Yeah. I think he [may] ~~did~~ have [had] some [storage] shares in Fremont-Madison. [I'm not sure if there was any exchange involved.] ~~Then, of course, Palisades came later and that was, you know, largely supplemental water supply. Grassy Lake is a small reservoir up by Island Park that's also supplemental.~~

Storey: You mentioned earlier that irrigation was hard work. How often did you have to irrigate?

“. . . you usually had to give your wheat crop about three or four irrigations, depending on the precipitation that you got. So when you had to use canvas dams and a shovel, you know, to cover a field that many times in a summer from June through the middle or end of July, that kept you hustling. . . .”

Riley: Well, you usually had to give your wheat crop about three or four irrigations, ~~your crop about three or four irrigations,~~ depending on the precipitation that you got. So when you had to use canvas dams and a shovel, you know, to cover a field that many times in a summer from June through the middle or end of July, that kept you hustling.

Storey: And that was the irrigation season, basically, June and July?

Usually There Would Be Adequate Precipitation in May So Irrigation Would Begin in June

Riley: Well, like I say, the irrigation season in that country, because of the late springs, you know, if you get your crop planted in early May, by the first part of June, they were mature enough. You'd have pretty good precip usually in May. May was kind of a semi-wet month up there, because that's relatively high elevation, about anywhere from 5,200 to 6,000 feet elevation.

The Irrigation Season on the Fremont-Madison Irrigation District

So then in June you'd start. Depending on the water supply availability, you would go until usually mid-July. But in a dry year, you know, you could get cut off in mid-July. But if you had a good water year, you could irrigate on out usually through August, about another six weeks. But by September, you know, you tapered off, because you'd have to start harvesting your grain. Your fall wheat, of course, you'd harvest in August. You didn't irrigate that anyway. But the spring wheat you would start harvesting in September. So you could have all your wheat out of the field before you had to start in your potatoes. So that's the way we did it.

Storey: So if you had water, and you were irrigating maybe 160 acres, as I recall, 120 acres . . .

Riley: Well, the farm was 160 acres and we probably irrigated [a little more than] half of that because of the topography and the rocks and so on.

Storey: How much of the time? Do you have any idea of what percentage of the time you'd be irrigating?

Riley: During those months?

Storey: Yeah.

Riley: You'd be irrigating about every day.

Storey: Okay. One place or another.

Riley: Yeah. Sometimes you'd get a weekend off, you know, that sort of thing. So you just kind of moved around.

Storey: That kept four of you busy?

“. . . you've got to understand that stepdad kind of became a supervisor and the boys became the workers. . . .”

Riley: Well, you've got to understand that stepdad kind of became a supervisor and the boys became the workers. Then, you know, [we also had to work] the dry farm place, we

had summer fallow on that where, you know, you had it in the soil bank, and so you had to work that, and that was about a 160 acre place. If you had about sixty or eighty acres of that in, you'd have to go over that field at least twice in a summer usually with a duckfoot or a disc. So we kept pretty busy.

“. . . you'd have your hay crops to harvest in between. Up there we'd usually get two crops of hay. So, you know, you'd have to mow your hay, bale it, stack it, then go back to irrigating that second hay crop. . . .”

Then you'd have your hay crop[s to harvest] in between. Up there we'd usually get two crops of hay. So, you know, you'd have to mow your hay, bale it, stack it, then go back to irrigating that [second] hay crop. And then cut, bale, and stack that.

Storey: When you say hay, do you mean alfalfa or . . .

Riley: Alfalfa.

Storey: Okay. Rather than meadow.

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: So the image I'm getting is that your stepdad had two farms. One was a dry farm and the other was an irrigated farm.

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: Ever remember any water disputes in your youth?

“Most of the disputes in those days were between the guys at the lower end of the canal and the guys at the upper end of the canal. . . .”

Riley: Yeah. Most of the disputes in those days were between ~~farmers, and the disputes would come usually from~~ the guys at the lower end of the canal ~~with~~ [and] the guys at the upper end of the canal. Those were the disputes. You'd hear, you know, “Somebody's stealing water,” “Somebody's got their head gate cranked up,” “Somebody dried up my field, dried up my siphons last night.” So you had ditch riders. First thing you do is usually call the ditch rider and say, “Check here, check there.” And the ditch rider had the authority, you know, to turn a head gate up or down. But we didn't measure water.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 8, 1994.

Storey: You were saying the ditch rider would go out and have the authority to open and close gates and so on, and you were talking about familiarity with the ditch.

Riley: Yeah. I think in those days, you know, you knew your ditch, you knew what the water levels were, you knew how many cranks on the head gate you needed for a certain flow of water. *I* didn't know that, but my stepdad did. He knew, you know, turn it up four,

five, six, turn it down two. So that's the way you managed water. ~~If you were~~ [We were usually] happy with the water ~~you~~ [we] were getting, ~~you were happy~~. If something happened that the water went down in the ditch or you got too much water down the ditch, then you knew a neighbor, ~~that something was happening~~. The neighbor had either cut off his irrigation or [increased it. Sometimes it could be a main ditch failure or repair job.] ~~he'd had a big rainstorm, or, you know, something~~. But it [This "water management"] was pretty much an expertise that developed over time—[passed down] from a grandpa to a son to a grandson.

Storey: And you didn't really measure the water?

Riley: Other than knowing where on your head gate you were supposed to be and how many inches of water a certain number of cranks on the head gate represented. I didn't know any of that. I just turned it according to instructions.

Storey: Do you ever remember any conversations about water and water disputes?

Coffee Breaks in Ashton

Riley: Not other than in the coffee break. Farmers would usually come in for coffee break or ~~in~~ [visit] the pool hall. Shooting pool, you'd hear people complaining. But in those days, you had very few major disputes.

Effects of Flood Irrigation on the Snake Plain Aquifer and Thousand Springs

You had a lot of flood irrigation. The flood irrigation did a couple of things. If you understand the hydrology of the Snake River Basin, the flood irrigation in the upper end, a lot of that water percolated down into the basalts, became a part of the Snake Plain Aquifer. The Snake Plain Aquifer, a lot of it would exit into American Falls and a larger part in the Snake River at Thousand Springs ~~down here~~ [farther downstream]. So a lot of the water that was diverted up ~~there~~ [in Fremont County] would come back ~~down here~~ [into the river system downstream].

It seemed like I never did hear arguments between the [upper and lower valley irrigators.] Of course, you know, when you're a kid, you're not that attuned to that [kind of stuff], but it wasn't obvious that upper valley and the lower valley were having arguments [then]. Then, of course, Palisades [Reservoir] was relatively new. It was built what, in the '50s. Island Park was built in the '40s, in the late '30s, early '40s. It just seemed to be a good balance.

In the late '60s, the Fremont-Madison Irrigation District said that in dry years the—I don't know, 100,000-plus acres in that upper valley could suffer at least 50 percent water shortage ~~under present conditions~~. So ~~they~~ [the district] worked pretty hard, lobbied, to get Teton Dam authorized and built. And you know the history of Teton Dam. It failed. So that upper valley, you know, didn't get that supplemental water supply.

Effects of Sprinkler Irrigation

Now there is a *major* concern between the upper valley and the lower valley, for a couple of reasons. The upper valley is converted heavily to sprinkler irrigation, the area where I grew up. A lot of the water supply that once percolated into the aquifer has been diminished, [and,] combined with [greater groundwater pumping and] about eight or nine years of drought[, the outflow of the aquifer into] —the Thousand Springs area down here has suffered. ~~The outflow is greatly diminished because of depletions in the aquifer, which have occurred because of increased groundwater pumping. Much less flood irrigation and drought.~~ So the lower valley people are, you know, starting to really insist on their water rights being honored, and the upper valley [water users with later priority] could be impacted by that, both in terms of [restricted] surface supply[, diversions,] and groundwater pumping.

But when I was growing up, that controversy didn't exist. It was pretty much, in my view, a local, "That S.O.B. is taking my water. Here I am at the end of the ditch and I'm dry." You know, it was farmer to farmer.

“ . . . the big head-to-head between the agricultural community and the other river users, the fishermen, the floaters, didn't really start to occur until probably the late '70s . . . ”

Really, the big—what would you say—the big head-to-head between the agricultural community and the other river users, the fishermen, the floaters, didn't really start to occur until probably the late '70s, in the '70s. NEPA was what? '69?

Storey: Yes. 1969.

Riley: '69. So in the '70s, you know, there started to be a little more contention between ~~primarily~~ fishermen and boaters [and the irrigators]. ~~The reservoirs drawdown, Jackson Lake.~~ Jackson Lake was one of the early areas of controversy, the drawdown of the lake in the national park and ~~with the~~ flow problems below Jackson Lake Dam for the rafters. [Also, the] South Fork of the Snake River below Palisades is a blue-ribbon trout fishery. That became an area of concern. ~~Island Park. Henry's Fork is of environmental interest.~~

“Construction of Teton Dam did more than anything I know to raise an environmental awareness at Reclamation projects,, not only in southeastern Idaho but, throughout Reclamation. . . .”

Teton Dam. Construction of Teton Dam ~~and the failure of Teton Dam~~ did more [than anything I know] to raise an environmental awareness [at Reclamation projects,], not only in southeastern Idaho but, ~~I think,~~ all throughout Reclamation. It was a controversial dam to start with. The name of the dam, Teton Dam, was a red flag to start with. Then the environmental impact statement in those days ~~were~~ [was] minimal. The nationally based environmental groups taking interest. There was great concern about [the impacts of] building it, and then when ~~it was built~~ [the dam failed and] ~~, it~~ took out a large ~~section,~~ segment, of the Teton River, which was a blue-ribbon trout fishery and good big game habitat [there was a great outcry from] ~~. Took that out over~~

~~the outcry of the environmental community.~~

“ . . . when the cotton-picking thing failed, it was a catastrophe, not only in terms of loss of life and the economic impacts, but the ‘I told you so’ atmosphere that followed. . . .”

And then when the cotton-picking thing failed, it was a catastrophe, not only in terms of loss of life and the economic impact[s], but [the] “I told you so” [atmosphere that followed.] You know, the “I told you so” thing. ~~“You fouled up the canyon and you flooded out the valley and you shouldn’t. . . .”~~ Well, you know. That had repercussions all through Reclamation.

Storey: Yeah. Do you ever remember any fist fights or hearing about any fist fights or anything like that over water?

Riley: Yeah. I do recall stories about a few fist fights, pulling people’s dams out, taking the old rifle up to the head gate. You know, I can’t really be specific, but those stories were around town.

“My dad-in-law . . . owned shares in . . . the Farmer’s Own Canal. . . . He was right near the end of the ditch, and he was kind of the new kid on the block. . . . he had some really hard run-ins . . . dried up ditches, sleepless nights, trouble with neighbors that continues on to today. . . . he drilled a agricultural well and plowed his ditches in and said, ‘I’m done with that turmoil and contention.’ . . . for thirty years or so, has irrigated with the well. . . .”

My dad-in-law was an example of a fellow that owned shares in a canal, and I think it’s called the Farmer’s Own Canal. It came out of Fall River. He was right near the end of the ditch, and he was kind of the new kid on the block. Even though the farm had been there for decades, he had just bought it, and so he was kind of a Johnnie-come-lately to the area, to that ditch service area, and he had some really hard run-ins, verbal, verbally abusive arguments, dried up ditches, sleepless nights, troubled ~~resentment~~ with neighbors that continue[s] on to today. Even though he’s been retired for twenty years, the resentment is still there.

That led him to apply to the state to drill a well, and he drilled a agricultural well and plowed his ditches in and said, “I’m done with that turmoil and contention.” And so he, for thirty years or so, has irrigated with the well.

Storey: When did he do that? When did he drill a well?

Riley: In the late ‘60s. Well, no, about 1961 [or] 1960.

Storey: So this turmoil, as you put it, was going on while you were there working on the farm?

Riley: Well, this was my father-in-law now.

Storey: Oh, I’m sorry. Okay.

-
- Riley: My stepfather, on our farm, we never had a problem, contention.
- Storey: Do you remember the name of the ditch your stepdad's farm was on?
- Riley: I think it was called the Farmer's Own.
- Storey: Oh, so both your father-in-law and your stepfather . . .
- Riley: No, we were pretty much on what you would call the Marysville Ditch.
- Storey: Your stepfather?
- Riley: Yeah. My stepfather was pretty much on the Marysville Ditch side, and my father-in-law was on the Farmer's Own.
- Storey: You mentioned something that's fascinated me that I think I got a glimmer of—coffee breaks. (Riley: Yeah.) Tell me about coffee breaks.

Coffee Breaks in Ashton

- Riley: Well, ~~in a farming community~~, you know, a farming community *is* a community. It's an economic, social, cultural ~~thing~~ [whole]. It's a piece of the world that's kind of protected. It's "everybody knows everybody." It's a good life. You've got the farmsteads all out through the countryside, and then you've got the little community that's usually the focal point for churches, [schools,] small businesses, your retail community. And, of course, you've got the pool hall, the bars, and the cafes, and the coffee breaks were traditional for everybody. Whether you drank coffee or whether you didn't, you'd go to the café, and that was usually twice a day, mid-morning and mid-afternoon. The café was the gathering place for [businessmen and] farmers, either the café or the pool hall or the co-op. When I say co-op, I mean the place that sold diesel fuel, gasoline, oil, tires, that sort of thing.

So you had these gathering places. Depending on what your favorite was, you'd either go to the pool hall to have a beer or a pop, or play a hand of pinochle, or shoot pool or snooker; *or* you'd go to the café and you'd have a couple of cups of coffee and drive the waitresses crazy; or you'd go to the co-op and sit around in the co-op lobby talking about how good or how bad things were. So it was a social event every day [for many farmers]. People looked forward to coffee breaks. They go on year 'round. They get longer in the winter, shorter in the summer. It's a time to talk about politics, talk about the morality of the community, about intercounty problems between communities, about water problems. What do you call it? It's a "safety valve" to express [opinions], gripe, celebrate, that sort of thing.

- Storey: And Ashton had this?
- Riley: Yeah[, when we could take a break].
- Storey: So you would drive in from the farms and do this?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: How far out were the two farms that you were working?

Riley: Well, one of them was about ten miles, and when we were working that dry farm place, we pretty much stayed out there. The irrigated place was about three miles, and you'd come in [many days].

The other places were the drugstore. They had a fountain. Around the fountain, you know, you had people pull up with milk shakes or pop. And the barbershop, of course, was the [a] gathering place. ~~It had rows of chairs clear around all, well, three walls.~~ Two barber chairs. Chairs around all three walls, and they were usually at least half filled. And that was a place to complain, to talk, and whatever. So you either came in to get a haircut, a milk shake, a cup of coffee, a bottle of beer, or shoot a game of pool or something.

Storey: People who have never been in small communities, I don't think have ever seen this happen.

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: I've run across it a number of times. That's why I was interested in asking you about it.

You mentioned earlier that going to college was sort of special in those days. Why did you decide to go to college? How did that come about?

Why He Decided to Go to College

Riley: ~~Well, I guess in those days, farming in my case,~~ I hadn't been raised on a farm and Grandpa hadn't been a farmer and Dad wasn't a farmer. You know, I was kind of interjected into this thing when I was about fifteen, fourteen, something like that. So I really had no great sense of being a farm boy. Some of the guys I went to school with, two or three of them *were* ["traditional"] farm boys, and they stayed on the farm and ~~worked with dad, and they're still there.~~

Most of the guys ~~like me, like myself, though,~~ saw college as a chance to go off and be something. You know, if you stayed in Ashton, you could be a farmer with dad and grandpa, or you could work for the Forest Service, or work in the timber, or you could stick around and sort spuds in the winter and work as a farmhand in the summer for somebody else or irrigate for somebody[, teach school, or work for a small business]. Most of the businesses were family businesses with the husband and wife, mom-and-pop operation, ~~or [and] a few people that have worked there forever that were fixtures.~~ And, you know, there were [few or] no retail opportunities, so to speak. So, going to college was a chance to really make something of yourself, a big adventure to go to a different place, a different lifestyle.

I ~~went~~ [was able to go] to college because I got a football scholarship. I don't know what I'd have done if I hadn't gotten a football scholarship. I'd a probably gone

anyway. You know, I didn't want to stay around and really work on the farm. So I went off to college and played football and didn't know what I wanted to do. (laughter)

Storey: You went to Idaho State University, I think you said.

Went to Utah State University as a Freshman

Riley: Well, I went to [my first year at] Utah State.

Storey: *Utah State?*

Riley: Utah. Well, now, Utah State my first year on a football scholarship, and I flunked football. What happened—this is not really that interesting, but I went to Utah State, played freshman football. The coach said, “Great. We had a great freshman season. What I want you to do now is transfer up to Ricks College at Rexburg,” which had one building. [In contrast] Utah State University is beautiful, beautiful campus, beautiful trees on a hill.

Storey: Where is that?

Riley: Logan.

Storey: Logan, Utah.

Transferred to Idaho State University in Pocatello

Storey: Logan, Utah. Beautiful. He says, “I want you to go up to Ricks College in Rexburg.” Rexburg, bare hill, one three-story building, that's Ricks College, and that's thirty miles from Ashton. I didn't like Rexburg, [I didn't want that,] so I said to myself, “I think I'll get married instead.” So *then* I got married and I transferred to Idaho State in Pocatello. That's where I got my bachelor's degree at Idaho State. Then I went to the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho, to do graduate work.

Storey: Now, how did you get interested in history and biology? That's quite a combination.

Riley: Yeah. Well, see, like I said, I didn't go to school saying I want to be an engineer ~~or I wanted to~~—I wanted to be a football coach. But when I stopped playing football, that's what threw the monkey wrench in my plans. And so I said, “Well, I like biology and I do pretty well in biology. It's orderly. The frogs and everything are orderly. It's an orderly universe, and I like that.” History. I liked history. They had a couple of good history professors at Idaho State, believe it or not. One was Dr. Merrill Beal, who had written ~~the~~ [a] history of Idaho and worked up at Yellowstone Park in the summers and knew all about the Indians and all of that sort of thing. I liked that. [I liked the way he taught and the example he was.]

I just about had “equal number of history courses and biology, zoology, botany courses. So I had to make a decision in my senior year whether I wanted to follow the biological science or the social science side. . . .”

So I went ~~down the road and I just about had~~ [through my undergraduate years with about an] equal number of history courses and biology, zoology, botany [courses]. So I had to make a decision in my senior year whether I wanted to follow the biological science or the social science side. I thought about going into medicine[, a pre-med program], that sort of thing, ~~and~~ [but] I was broke, really. I was working two jobs at college. About that time, like I say, the University of Idaho started a graduate program [in history], and they offered me a ~~three-year fellowship, or a two-year fellowship~~, to go up there. So I had a wife and a little baby and that seemed like a way to—I enjoyed history and I needed the opportunity to pay my bills.

Wrote His Thesis on the History of Nez Perce Tribal Government

So I went up there, and I had some real good professors [at Idaho]. I got with my—what do you call them—advisor, ~~counselor~~, Siegfried Rolland, and we figured out a good thesis would be to do the Nez Perce Tribe, the [nature of the] government of the Nez Perce Tribe from time immemorial to the present. So I spent a lot of time on the Nez Perce Reservation at Lapwai, and I took a real interest in that. I wouldn't say [that] I drifted into history[. It turned out okay.] ~~, but it was kind of a planned thing. I didn't start out in high school, when I left high school, saying I want to be a historian, you know.~~

Storey: When you were first talking, it *sounded to me* like what you said was that you graduated from high school and then worked four or five years on the farm and then went to school. But I'm gathering that what I really should have heard was that you had worked four or five years on the farm before you went off to college and there wasn't a gap in there.

Riley: Yeah. Usually most kids that I grew up with started working when you were old enough to work, you know. So my farm years were [primarily] my high-school years. [I spent one summer on the farm while in college. I also did the potato harvest thing from grade school through high school.]

Storey: You mentioned earlier that you studied history and anthropology at Moscow. Were there any particular professors that influenced you?

Riley: Yeah. There were a couple. Dr. [William S.] Greever was the head of the history department. He was a good professor, very good. I enjoyed working with him. Dr. Rolland, Siegfried Rolland, was my advisor, and he probably had a greater influence. Greever was very professional, somewhat quiet. Rolland seemed to be hell-bent for election, quite outspoken, kind of reminded me of a football coach-type guy. And so I think he and I hit it off pretty well. He helped me a lot, helped me really get a good background in problem-solving. What I mean by that is, you know, the problem-solving process and gathering information and the research part. [Research and writing were a big part of the graduate program and the experience was invaluable.]

“... I was one of the first ones that they had that was specifically hired to be a *planning report writer* versus an engineer writing a report or an economist or a

hydrologist. . . .”

So when I went to work for the Bureau as— they called them, report writers in those days, in the Bureau in this region, I guess I was one of the first ones that they had that was specifically hired to be *a [planning] report writer* versus an engineer writing a report or an economist or a hydrologist. [The problem solving, research, and writing experience was critical.] ~~They had this dude that was suppose~~ [My job was] to consolidate and summarize and ~~glamorize~~ [simplify technical information. ,and So my background in history and writing and research helped.

Storey: Well, you know, I’d like to talk about your Reclamation career, but we’ve already been talking two hours and fifteen minutes. (laughter)

Riley: Isn’t that terrible?

Storey: No, it’s great. I’d like to ask you whether or not researchers from inside and outside Reclamation can use the tapes and resulting transcripts from this interview.

Riley: Yes.

Storey: Good. Thank you.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 8, 1994.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 1. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: This is Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Robert J. Riley on March the 20th, 1995, at about one o’clock in the afternoon in the Pacific Northwest Regional Office of the Bureau of Reclamation in Boise, Idaho. This is tape one.

Last time when we talked, Mr. Riley, you mentioned that you had been working on a thesis on the Nez Perce, I believe. Could you tell me more about that? That was when you were at the University of Idaho at Moscow.

Wrote His Thesis on the Government of the Nez Perce Indians

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: And you were a history major, am I remembering correctly?

Riley: That’s right. University of Idaho had just initiated a doctoral program in history, and they had offered a National Defense Fellowship. In fact, this was the first year that they started that. It would have been in ‘59. I worked with my major professor up there, who was Siegfried Rolland, and went through a list of possible [thesis] topics and decided to work with [the] Nez Perce Indian Tribe. The subject was “The Nez Perce: A Struggle for Self-Government.”

The concept was to try to follow the way that the tribe governed itself from time

immemorial to that present time. That required that I go to the Northern Idaho Indian Agency [in Lapwai, Idaho] and meet with Bureau of Indian Affairs people and, more importantly, to meet with the Nez Perce Tribal Council to get their approval and permission to ~~get into~~ [use] their library and their files, and sit in on their tribal council meetings, and to interview members of the tribal council and the general council.

So I did that and did the research. The University of Idaho had a pretty good library that included quite a number of early Indian Affairs documents and with the library there and the work at the Indian agency and with the tribal council, I did the thesis on tribal government.

Storey: What did you conclude?

Riley: Well, I concluded that the Nez Perce originally, or at least as far back as I could go and they could help me, the Nez Perce ~~was~~ [were] never really an independent single tribe with a single head man or chief. The tribe was actually comprised of a number of bands. Each band had its own head man and occupied a different geographical area, either along the Snake River or the Wallowa River or the Salmon River, [or the] Clearwater River. Each one of those groups had a little bit different lifestyle [that] depended on a different seasonal food base.

When the Europeans came and the missionaries came to Lapwai, they were interested in getting these bands in closer proximity so that it would be more convenient, I think, for teaching purposes and that sort of thing. So they pretty much designated one or two head men for the tribe, without really much approval of the scattered-out bands of Nez Perce. That was a big contributor to the Nez Perce War in 1877. When the U.S. Army tried to bring the bands onto the reservation at Lapwai, a number of ~~them~~ [the band head men]—Joseph's band from the Wallowa Valley and Looking Glass, ~~and~~ Toohoolhoolzote, [and White Bird]—those were the primary ones—joined together and tried to move into Canada. [The main group] didn't make it, of course, and surrendered at the Battle of Bear Paw [in Montana. One small group under White Bird did make it].

After the Battle of [The] Bear Paw, the non-Christian Indians, those primarily led by Joseph [since most other head men had been killed], were sent to the Indian territory and resided there for a number of years until they were eventually brought back to the Colville Indian Reservation near Grand Coulee [Dam] in Washington. The band never did return to their home country. So then after that, the tribal government was pretty much, for a number of years, ~~directed and dictated~~ [influenced] by, I think, the Bureau of Indian Affairs. However, as the tribes, I would guess in the '50s, early '50s, began to be more independent and there were some outstanding young men that reached out to take more responsibility for self-government. They established an effective executive committee and began to speak out and ~~stand up for~~ [seek solutions to] their concerns and move farther away, I think, from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

It's pretty much been a progression, then, for the last thirty years, I would say, thirty to forty years, strengthening that leadership talent, trying to develop greater [educational and] economic opportunities on the reservation, become more assertive in

their natural resource management, their financial affairs, and there's been quite a move, I think, away from the old concept of [assimilation]—I can't remember the phrase exactly, but the integration of the Indian community into the non-Indian community, a move away from that to a stronger Indian community preserving more of their values and making the reservation more of a productive, cultural home for [the Nez Perce.] ~~those folks.~~

Storey: Now, as I recall, you went from graduate school to the Columbia Basin Project?

Riley: No, I actually went from graduate to unemployment, and [I] fed cattle and sorted potatoes for about six months until I got a phone call from the Columbia Basin Project in ~~Butte~~ [Ephrata], and I didn't get that job. The man, I think his name was Ed Arnold, the administrative officer at Ephrata, [interviewed me for a job, but I wasn't selected. He] referred my name to the regional office in Boise. Gib Shirk, who was in the planning division at that time, hired me as a technical writer, and that would have been in '61.

Storey: In late '61, then.

Riley: About June or July. ~~June. Somewhere around there.~~

Storey: And you referred to the planning office as being located in the sheep sheds, I believe.

Reclamation Offices in the "Sheep Sheds"

Riley: Uh-huh. At that time, the regional office was located on Orchard [Street in Boise], and the main part of the regional office ~~that~~ [which] housed the regional director and, ~~I believe, the O&M, a large part of the O&M and administrative services group[s], and personnel, some of the administrative services,~~ was in a two-or three-story concrete building on Orchard. And then behind that were a number of barrack-like structures that had been, I think, part of the old fairgrounds, Southwest Idaho Fairgrounds, that we called the sheep sheds, and that's where we worked.

Storey: Were these one-story? Two-story?

Riley: One-story. The low ceilings, squeaking floor [bad ventilation and ~~type of building with wood siding and kind of scary.~~] (laughter)

Storey: Scary in what way?

“. . . I had to actually kneel on another person's desk to get to my desk, because there was no walk room to get through there. . . .”

Riley: Scary ~~in the way to a young person of being~~ [to me because it was] crowded with people that all seemed to be middle-aged and really knowledgeable and knew everything about everything, kind of dark and crowded. I remember when I was taken to my office, I had to actually kneel on another person's desk to get to my desk, because there was no walk room to get through there.

Don Street, Harold Hafterson, Doyle Affleck, Elwyn White, Gib Shirk, Clifford Okeson

But I'll tell you, looking back on it, those were good days, because that would have been probably at the tail end of the Bureau's real productive period, I believe, here in the Northwest, and there were a lot of fellows highly recognized for their expertise that worked there in economics. Don Street in economics; Harold Hafterson in hydrology; Doyle Affleck in engineering; Elwyn White, planning officer. Gib Shirk was a very knowledgeable person on Reclamation law, and Cliff[ord J.] Okeson was a knowledgeable geologist.

Regional Director Harold T. Nelson

It was just really a good group of people that knew their business, had come up through the '40s and '50s, worked on a lot of the projects in this region. The regional director was quite famous, or infamous, Harold T. Nelson, a very forceful-type person, politician. So it was a good group of people, but to a young fellow, it was kind of intimidating. To get around the lunch table and you didn't dare say a word. (laughter) So that was the beginning.

Storey: Tell me about some of these folks. You mentioned a guy named Don Street. What was he like?

Don Street Review of Planning Documents

Riley: Well, Don Street was head of the economics group, and he was a prima donna in demanding accuracy and clear explanation. He was a critic in the sense of going through planning documents with a fine-toothed comb. I think he had a reputation as a pretty good forward-thinker. He was willing to challenge anybody in Reclamation. I think his group that included Ken Johnson and Wayne Peterson and Ed Lee it was a highly recognized group of economists.

“ . . . in those days you'd do a planning report, and you'd have a clearing conference . . . you'd distribute a draft of the planning report . . . to the staff for review. And then you'd all meet . . . like having an oral exam for a master's thesis or a doctoral oral exam . . . ”

It seemed like in those days you'd do a planning report, and you'd have a clearing conference, and what you'd do about a month before you had the clearing conference is that you'd distribute a draft of the planning report, and each planning report had an engineering section and a water section and an economic section, and it would go around to the staff for review. And then you'd all meet in a room like this, like having an oral exam for a master's thesis or a doctoral oral exam, and you'd just start around [the table]. A guy like Don Street had his report full of paper clips and red marks, and you'd sit there and he would crucify the report writer usually, because in

those days, well, Terry Lynott,²⁹ Bob Riley, Fred Stillings, Chuck Laythe, I think we were the first of the report writers in this region. I don't remember, but it seems to me like Terry had a background in geography. I can't remember for sure. (Storey: He did.) Chuck Laythe was geography, Fred Stillings was English, and I was history. The Bureau of Reclamation was engineering and economics[.] ~~was trying to overtake engineering in terms of formulation, you know.~~ [Geography, English, history had a tough row to hoe.]

So I don't think we were held in very high regard in those days as report writers. So a guy like Don Street [would work us over pretty good.] ; However, he was fair and he was right, usually right. I'll tell you, if you [could] get a report through Don Street, and the P-N [Pacific Northwest] regional office division heads[, you] usually had clear sailing from there on. So they were very good and they weren't reluctant—I mean, you know, no wavering. They knew where they wanted to go. They were positive, they were creative, and that's the way that kind of worked. [It taught us much about planning.]

Storey: Was there a nickname for Don Street, either one that was used with him or behind his back?

Riley: You know, I don't remember one. I don't remember one for Don. I really don't. No, I don't recall one for Don.

Storey: You mentioned was it a Harold Hafterson?

Harold Hafterson, Regional Hydrologist

Riley: Hafty. He had a nickname, Hafty. Harold Hafterson was the hydrologist.

Storey: What was he like?

Riley: Harold Hafterson was a deep thinker. He knew the hydrology of the Northwest like the back of his hand. Kind of a slow talker, and he would philosophize a lot. A very friendly guy. He was very professional and a credit to the Bureau. He ran his shop with a close hand. The hydrology information that came out of Hafterson's group was accurate, and it was well presented, clearly presented. It was readable to a layman, and it was well done. He could go to a controversial meeting and explain to the public how water supply works and what water requirements are and operation studies and the interrelationships very well. He was kind of a soft-spoken fellow but very professional.

Storey: You mentioned a geologist, I believe.

Cliff Okeson Was Regional Geologist

Riley: Cliff Okeson was the geologist, and he had an outstanding geology crew. I remember one of the junior geologists was Dan Magleby, who was very competent. But Okeson

29. Terry Lynott participated in Reclamation's oral history program.

was much like Ted Hafterson. He was quiet. They were both tall fellows, impressive in appearance. Okeson was ~~much like Hafterson~~, [very] professional, could explain things clearly and knew geology very well and could explain the relationship of geology to major structures, dams, powerplants, canals.

As a report writer, you know, you had to look at everybody's work. Some of the GS-12-type people couldn't write very well, to be honest with you. I'm sure they were good scientists, but they couldn't write very well. But guys like Okeson and Hafterson and Street would make sure that the materials that came out of their respective offices was clear, supportable, not contradictory.

Storey: Do you remember how to spell Okeson's name?

Riley: O-K-E-S-O-N.

Storey: You mentioned several other people.

Gilbert (Gib) V. Shirk

Riley: Two characters that are worth reflecting on, for sure. One was Gib Shirk. Gib Shirk, his name was Gilbert V. Shirk and they called him Gib. He was the guy probably parallel today but maybe not quite as gruff would be [Donald] Glaser in the sense that Gib understood the history of Reclamation[.] ~~He understood~~ Reclamation law [and the politics of natural resources very well]. He was a great student of laws that related to Reclamation. He was the *thinker* in the sense of trying to get the political skids greased. He knew how to help the technical people in the area [of] formulation. He was an expert in formulation and justifying conceptually different ~~things to do~~ [ways to make things work]. He was very outspoken, usually went around in a dress shirt with sleeves rolled up to about his elbow, his tie loosened at the throat, a cigarette hanging from his mouth and his glasses down on his nose, and could speak freely to the regional director. The regional director depended heavily on Gib.

He was very fair. I remember more than once, after a clearing conference on a report when a report writer would be feeling down, you know, Gib would take you off to the side and console you and tell you you were doing a good job and to not let these other guys bother you too much. So I would say Gib really taught young people like myself. I guess you could say he would be a step beyond the graduate school in [teaching the] ~~information-gathering~~, problem-solving process that you learn in graduate school. He'd take you a step beyond that in terms of ~~the problem-solving process~~ [ability to think and reason]. ~~I think in everybody's case~~, Terry Lynott, Bob Riley, Fred Stillings, Chuck Laythe, he taught us all, because he critiqued us. He taught us the importance of credibility, consistency, thorough investigation, work supported by the law or policy, and he was an outstanding Reclamation person.

Don Price served as administrative officer

One other one is Don Price. Don Price was the administrative officer [for the planning group], and he was the guy that really kept the planning group going in terms

of administrative business, funding, equipment, supplies, travel, ~~promotions~~ [personnel actions]. He was the kind of guy that was so dominant, such a hard charger, that he could get things done. I mean, he was a doer. *All* of the ones that I've mentioned are gone now, except Don Price still lives here in Boise, and he's an expert on Reclamation, I'll tell you that.

Storey: I tried to contact him the last time I was here and couldn't get through. I wonder if he goes south for the winter or something.

Riley: Yes. Yeah, he does. He should be coming home now. When I left here, I gave him a whole folder full of photographs of these people that we're talking about and the old planning people, the old regional directors, that I gathered up through the years. And he's still sharp mentally. He's still clicking good. He's in his '80s, but he's still clicking.

Storey: Did Gib Shirk or Mr. Price have nicknames?

Riley: Just Gib.

Storey: Just Gib.

Riley: And Don. Donald Price. You know, some of their closer compatriots might have had names for them, but that's all I ever heard. It was pretty professional, I mean, in terms of calling them something behind their back. (laughter)

Storey: What about Nelson?

Harry Stivers and Norm Moore

Riley: H. T.? All I ever heard him called was H. T. Just looking from *my* perspective, he kept the region going. He had a couple of assistant regional directors that helped him quite a bit. I think one of his right-hand people was Harry Stivers, and the other one was Norm Moore. They both still live here in Boise. Stivers kind of started out as the public affairs officer and I think ended up as a special assistant to the regional director. Norm Moore was the other [assistant] regional director, handled, I think, ~~more in terms of administration, some~~ planning [and O&M].

Harold worked very well and closely with people he trusted, people whose technical capability he trusted. He had a number of people that he worked directly with like Don Street and Gib Shirk. He and Gib Shirk worked very closely together. Ken Johnson, an economist, and Stivers.

Harold T. Nelson “. . . was very, very close to the water and power interests in the Pacific Northwest states. . . .”

Harold was political, politically inclined. You know, he had a loyalty to Reclamation, but then, too, he was very, very close to the water and power interests in the Pacific Northwest states. He was highly respected, as I recollect, by those groups. Stayed on as

regional director for at least twenty years.³⁰ He was kind of *distant* to a lot of us. Like he'd get in an elevator and you'd say, "Good morning," and then if you got, "Good morning," that was it, you know. (laughter)

"He worked with a pretty close group of people, but highly respected . . ."

He worked with a pretty close group of people, but highly respected and, I think, effective, because the Northwest—I guess I'm kind of biased here, but the Pacific Northwest had a pretty good program, pretty strong program, some really good technical people and some effective projects and good projects, and he was the main person behind most of those.

Storey: What kind of projects did you work on? Do you remember any specifically?

Various Planning Projects He Worked On, Including Teton Dam

Riley: Yeah. Probably the first one that I got very closely involved in—I was only with Reclamation for a year the first time I was here. Most of that first year was editing reports that somebody else had written and just double-checking the numbers, and, you know, kind of a clerk-type guy. Then when I came back to Reclamation from the National Park Service, I got more deeply involved. I worked a little bit on the Teton Project. In the early years on the Teton Project and on the Burnt River Project, on the East Greenacres Project, and on the Lower Snake Project, on the Okanogan Project, and the Oroville-Tonasket Project.³¹ Those were in the early years.

". . . after coming to the regional office, I worked mostly as a manager either in the reports division as head of the reports group, or as the planning officer. . . ."

Then after coming to the regional office, I worked mostly as a manager either in the reports division as head of the reports group, or as the planning officer. That was really more of a management position, and I didn't personally write reports after that point.

Storey: Tell me about Terry Lynott, whom you've mentioned a couple of times.

Riley: See, I came to the Bureau in 1961. Terry hadn't arrived yet.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. MARCH 20, 1995.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: You were just saying that Terry Lynott had not yet arrived when you came.

Riley: Terry hadn't arrived yet. At the time I came, the technical writers were really mostly engineers [or economists] who had been assigned a technical writing job. Burt Malmquist and Bill Maughn, I think, were the main engineer-type technical writers

30. Harold T. Nelson served as regional director in Boise from 1949 until 1972. Both Floyd Dominy and Terry Lynott mentioned him in their oral history interviews.

31. The Oroville-Tonasket Unit, Okanogan-Similkameen Division, Chief Joseph Dam Project.

[when I came]. ~~Then I was here a year.~~ Shortly after I left [to go to the National Park Service], Don Price and Gib, I think, recruited Fred Stillings, Chuck Laythe, and Terry Lynott. I can't remember when Terry came. I would say it must have been '63, '64. I can't remember for sure.

Storey: But he was here when you came back then?

Terry Lynott

Riley: When I came back from the National Park Service in—well, what was it? '66 or '67? '66. When I came back in 1966, I went to the Snake River office and worked with Fred Stillings. Chuck Lake, I believe, was either in Spokane [Washington,] or Salem[, Oregon]. I think Terry, he was either at the regional office[.] ~~or came to the regional office later.~~³² ~~It just seems like~~ That's so long ago I can't remember very well, but I know he worked in the regional office, and ~~I think he worked~~ [probably] with Bill Maughn for a while. ~~I don't think Bill had passed away then.~~ And [I know he worked] with Gib Shirk and Ed Lee.

“ . . . when Ed Lee took the head reports job in the regional office, [Don Street said] that that move strengthened both economics where Ed came from and the reports group where he was going. . . . I know Don was ribbing Ed. . . . ”

I think Terry worked most closely with Ed Lee for a number of years. Ed was an economist who came into the reports group. You remember Don Street. He said when Ed Lee took the head reports job in the regional office, ~~Don Street said~~ that that move strengthened both economics where Ed came from and the reports group where he was going. I always thought that was kind of humorous. I know Don was ribbing Ed.

But, anyway, Terry was a young whippersnapper and smart. He can present himself well. He had a gift of being able to talk with people. You know, he was a smooth person in the sense that he didn't hem and haw, and he could express himself. I think he kind of was the regional office focal point for reports, even though I think Ed Lee at that time was the head of reports. Terry would go around to the area offices and meet with area planning people and go over our programs and our reports, report concepts, with us, so that when reports came in, you'd have a better understanding of those.

I think he was a political animal, so to speak. He was interested in, you know, being more than a technical writer. He wanted to get, I think, more into decision-making and plan formulation and program development and policy guidance and things like that. So I think the career track that he's followed has been suited to the talents that I recall that he had when he was a young guy here in this region.

After he left the P-N region, you know, I really didn't have much to do with

32. Terry Lynott came to Reclamation in Boise in 1963 after graduating from the University of Oregon where he received his master's degree in geography.

Terry until the reorganization that brought him in [to Denver]. ~~Well, you know this. He was on a lot of special-type projects. Was it the Missouri River Basin Commission or something? I can't remember.~~

~~Storey: Yeah. He was involved with the group that dealt with the Missouri River. I've forgotten the exact title.~~

When Terry Lynott Became Assistant Commissioner—Resources Management the Planning Officers Met Quite Often with Him in Denver

Riley: But then, you know, when he got to be in the ACRM group,³³ the planning officers would go down to Denver quite often and Terry was involved in the meetings, the planning officers' meetings and the budget meetings. Terry has always been, to me, an easy person to talk to, a person that sees the big picture. He can present himself well. I think, you know, he always felt pretty close to the administration, and that's understandable. When you're in a Denver office position like those he held or in a river basin commission or group, you're very politically sensitive. He became pretty politically sensitized, and that's understandable because of the type of work he did.

“ . . . I hoped that he [Terry Lynott] could do more forceful battle on some issues that the planning officers felt strongly about, but he was dealing with some really dominant personalities . . . I think it was hard to pound on the table an awful lot. . . ”

So personally I always was able to work with Terry. There were times that I hoped that he could do more forceful battle on some issues that the [regional] planning officers felt strongly about, but he was dealing with some really dominant personalities in the nature of the commissioners that we had and the assistant commissioners. I think it was hard to pound on the table an awful lot.

“ . . . Reclamation was in a defensive posture, and I think this makes a lot of difference in the way people have to do their job. . . . when you're a program that's under attack . . . you don't operate from a base of power. . . . It's pretty much a reactive, reactionary, defensive way to do business. . . . ”

Well, to be honest with you, Reclamation, for all of the time that I think Terry was in a management-type position, Reclamation was in a defensive posture, and I think this makes a lot of difference in the way people have to do their job. You know, if you're in an agency that has a majority of the support of the Congress, of OMB [Office of Management and Budget], of the local politicians, the local people, you know, you can go into a room and pound your fist on the table and say, “This is what we think and this is what we want,” and there is enough wherewithal behind your program to make that heard. But when you're a program that's under attack, an agency that's under attack, you don't operate from a base of power. You don't operate from a base of power. It's pretty much a reactive, reactionary, defensive way to do business.

33. Assistant Commissioner—Resources Management. Terry Lynott served as the Assistant Commissioner for Resources Management in 1988.

I know that made Reclamation difficult for me the last ten years, and I'm sure that it [was true for] ~~has~~ Terry also. That's my guess.

Commissioner Dan Beard

And so now with a guy like [Commissioner] Dan [Daniel P.] Beard,³⁴ whether you agree with his philosophy or his management style, *when* I left here, he seemed to be trying to speak from a position of strength rather than ~~an~~ [always being] apologetic [and] defensive posture. I think he was trying to take the offense ~~instead of the defense.~~ ~~I don't know what's happened in the last year or so, but~~ Up until that time through the prior commissioners, it was difficult. I think Terry had to work and live through that.

“ . . . Terry was depended on heavily, I think, by the commissioner and others to do special projects. I think he was special projected to death. . . .”

Now, you know, I might be looking at it too negatively, but ~~he~~ [Terry] was depended on heavily, I think, by the commissioner and others to do special projects. I think he was special projected to death. It sounds like he still is a special projects man. Maybe that's been part of his salvation, being able to move away a little bit and to have some independence to be able to manage his own destiny, so to speak.

Storey: Any nicknames for him?

Riley: No, not that I ever heard. Really, I never did hear any.

Storey: I have a note here that says “permission slips.” Does that ring any bells with you?

Riley: Permission slips?

Storey: Yeah.

Riley: What's around permission slips? What comes before that?

Storey: Planning office, and after it is Grand Portages in Morristown. It isn't something that's slipping up to the surface real quick.

Riley: No.

Storey: Tell me about the kind of hours you worked when you were in the planning office here in the region.

“I was pretty fortunate . . . I would guess that on the average I probably worked fifty hours, maybe fifty to fifty-five hours a week, on the average. In times of crisis, of course, you work longer. . . .”

Riley: I was pretty fortunate, because I always had a good staff that did good work. So I

34. Commissioner Daniel (Dan) P. Beard participated in Reclamation's oral history program.

would guess that on the average I probably worked fifty hours, maybe fifty to fifty-five hours a week, on the average. In times of crisis, of course, you work longer. You know, I see people like [Boise office Regional Director] John [W.] Keys [III],³⁵ who burns the midnight oil and the weekend oil. I never really had to do that except on occasion when there was a crisis. I never came to work like at six o'clock in the morning and stayed until six at night on a regular basis. I probably could have made a bigger contribution and been better versed and maybe had a different career if I'd done that, different career track, but I didn't do that.

Storey: But you still worked maybe ten to fifteen hours a week above normal hours.

“ . . . I'd get here and I'd work until, you know, five o'clock. I didn't eat lunch or I didn't take any breaks or anything. I just worked. When I came to work, I just kept going until it seemed like about everybody was gone except for John Keys and a few guys . . . ”

Riley: Well, I'd usually, you know, either ride my bike or walk to work, and I'd get here and I'd work until, you know, five o'clock. I didn't eat lunch or I didn't take any breaks or anything. I just worked. When I came to work, I just kept going until it seemed like about everybody was gone except for John Keys and a few guys that had to work their rear off every day or wanted to.

Storey: How does Reclamation handle that? Did they pay overtime?

Never Put Overtime on His Time Sheet when Working over Forty Hours a Week

Riley: No. Well, you know, I don't want to incriminate myself, but I had the bulk of the responsibility for the time sheets, and you just put down that you worked eight hours. Except in the more recent years under flextime, they had a little place for you to put, you know, when you actually came to work and when you actually went home. Then they had—what do they call it—credit hours and that sort of thing. It probably was not the right thing to do, because I asked the staff to do that, but I didn't really keep track of that. The credit hour thing or the overtime, I never did that. I think it's probably because I had enough daydreaming and looking out the window during the day that I didn't feel comfortable doing that. (laughter)

Storey: Do you ever remember working weekends on a regular basis?

Riley: Oh, yeah. There were times when we would have a report that we would have to get out or a speech. Wrote quite a few presentations and papers for the regional director through the years, not on a regular basis. Not on a regular basis, but occasionally weekends.

Actually, my observation is that most people I worked with worked, you know, an hour or two maybe a day extra and usually took the weekends off except in, like I

35. Commissioner John W. Keys III participated in Reclamation's oral history program. He served as regional director in Boise from 1986 to 1998, retired, and then served as Commissioner from 2001 to 2006.

say, critical times, budget preparation times or that sort of thing. But it was a good working condition. We weren't burned out from that.

Storey: Tell me about socialization in the office here in the region, and did it change over the years?

Riley: You mean how people interrelated?

Storey: Well, both within the office and outside of office hours. Was there a lot of socialization? Were there a lot of activities?

“... the first ten years I worked with Reclamation, it was just like a family . . . we'd have picnics, Christmas parties, retirement dinners, and those were *all* well attended and it was a real family affair. But as time went on and as those older guys . . . retired and moved on, it became less of a close-knit group. New people started coming in. People started having more interests outside the Bureau. . . . the old close-knit Reclamation family thing, I think, has kind of faded. . . .”

Riley: I'd say the first ten years I worked with Reclamation, it was just like a family, you know. Well, you know, the people we talked about earlier, the old-timers, were mostly working fathers, and then I think lots of cases the mother and the children were at home. The wife might have worked part time or something. But we'd have picnics, Christmas parties, retirement dinners, and those were *all* well attended and it was a real family affair.

But as time went on and as those older guys that came up through the '40s and '50s retired and moved on, it became less of a close-knit group. New people started coming in. People started having more interests outside the Bureau. Of course, I was part of my own problem, because the last several years I don't think I went to any of the Christmas parties or any of the picnics. They had them.

The Reclamation Employees Association used to be a big thing. When I left a year ago, it was struggling to exist. I think John Keys has made an effort. Max Van Den Berg³⁶ had made an effort to try to draw, you know, some of the social activity back. But the old close-knit Reclamation family thing, I think, has kind of faded.

In the office, on a day-to-day work basis, for most all of my career you had pretty much compartmentalized groups. The O&M people, they talked to each other, they worked together, they associated with each other. The planning people did the same, the environmental people, the engineering people. And to try to break in or to work with those groups to form teams, interdisciplinary teams, and try to really get close to those people was pretty tough. It took a *lot* of effort to kind of break down those barriers or to move them aside to where instead of a planning and an O&M person working together under kind of an uncomfortable situation, you could do it comfortably.

36. Max Van Den Berg participated in Reclamation's oral history program.

“ . . . when I left, I think that was one of the biggest challenges still ahead was to get different people working together, and that’s one reason why I supported restructuring at the regional level to identify some new associations and groups of people to kind of force them into a common environment. . . .”

So that when I left, I think that was one of the biggest challenges still ahead was to get different people working together, and that’s one reason why I supported restructuring at the regional level to identify some new associations and groups of people to kind of force them into a common environment. My suspicion is that may not have happened yet, but that was my *main hope* when I left here was to get, for example, [the water] conservation group ~~and~~ [in] O&M and [the water] conservation group ~~and~~ [in] planning to say, “We have one [water] conservation group [in this region] and it’s called [the] water conservation group. It isn’t planning; [it isn’t O&M.]” ~~It’s water conservation group. It isn’t O&M’s.”~~ So that’s what I was trying to do when I left, ~~and it depended heavily on the assistant regional directors.~~

You’re asking about the socialization and, to me, that was the biggest thing that was needed and that would be helpful both in terms of Reclamation accomplishing its mission and also in trying to ~~revitalize some~~ [restore] Reclamation togetherness ~~feeling~~. So if I was still here, that’s what I’d be working on. I’d be pounding the table to try to have that happen.

Storey: It’s always tough to keep it going. Well when you came back to the Snake River office in ‘66, you became a writer again. Now, the Snake River office is the project office here in Boise, isn’t it?

Riley: No. Let me just quickly tell you about our structure in those days.

Storey: Okay.

The Region I Structure in the 1960s

Riley: You had the regional office.

Under the Region Were Project Offices and Separate Development (Planning) Offices

You had the regional office, and then you had project offices, and then you had planning offices.

Most or All the Other Regions Had Planning Staff Integrated into Their Project Offices

A lot of the regions—I think ~~all of the~~ [most] other regions at that time—had their planning staff, ~~field planning staff~~ integrated with their project staff. So that if you went to a project office and you wanted to talk to planning people, they had a planning contingent in that project manager’s office. In this region, you had the project managers that were responsible for [project] operation and maintenance[. They had their separate

offices. In addition, we], ~~and then you~~ had three *separate* planning offices that were *independent* from those project offices[.] ~~and~~ Each of those planning offices had their own manager [and staff.] ~~and they were located in~~ There was one in Spokane that handled what we called the Upper Columbia area, one in Boise that handled the Snake River area, and one in Salem that handled the Lower Columbia area. And they were responsible for formulating, directing, managing, programming the planning program for this region—new project planning. [A planning review staff was located in the regional office in Boise.

Storey: So how did they relate to the area offices or the project offices then?

Riley: That was not a very close relationship. The project manager had day-to-day management responsibility for [a project]—opening the gate, dealing with the clientele. But the planning manager was out drumming up new business and planning new projects, some which would interrelate ~~to~~ [with] or impact on an existing project. The manager of the project, operations manager, was informed but was really, as I recall, *not* a close part of that activity. Informed but not closely involved. That was a point of some friction. In the later years we tried to eliminate that by actually getting the [project] operations staff involved in the planning team [effort at the outset] so that they were there from the word go.

So when I came back [from the National park Service in 1966], I went to the [Boise] area planning office. Actually, they used to call them “development office.” There were three development offices, and they were managed by an area engineer. That engineer was in charge of new project development[/planning] for that area; ~~development offices and they were managed by area engineers.~~

Storey: So you went to work for one of the development offices.

Riley: That’s right. The Snake River [Development] Office [in Boise].

Storey: And then you subsequently transferred to another development office, the one in Spokane?

Riley: No, I went from the Snake River Development Office here in Boise to ~~the regional—~~ ~~yeah, you’re right,~~ to the one in Spokane. That’s right. I’m sorry.

Storey: And then you came to the region.

Riley: Then I came back to the ~~region~~ [regional office planning staff]. Let me just in one minute reiterate that. When I first came to work for the Bureau in ‘61, I went to work as a junior technical writer at the regional office. After six months, [I went] ~~they sent me~~ on detail to the Snake River Development Office [in Boise] for a six-month period to learn more about how the area planning offices worked. Then I left from that office to the National Park Service for about a four-and-a-half-year period.

Then I came back to Boise and went to work for the Snake River Development Office, and I worked there about one year, and then I went to the Spokane Development

Office and worked there from '67 until '73. In '73, then I came back to the regional office as a technical writer, and after I'd been here probably six-, eight months, I was promoted to the head of the reports division in the regional office.

Storey: And stayed there until '88.

Riley: And then I became the regional planning officer.

Storey: Supervisor is what you told me last time.

Riley: Yeah. That's what it is. Regional planning supervisor.

Storey: From '88 to '94.

Riley: Yeah. '93.

Storey: '93, maybe?

Riley: Yeah. It's '93. And then from '93 to '94 I was . . .

Storey: The program coordinator for the region.

Riley: Yeah. Late '93.

Storey: What things were you planning to develop when you at the Snake River Development Office? Was this Teton and Burnt River and East Green Acres and Lower Snake?

The Snake River Development Office Mostly Worked on Supplemental Water Projects, Including the Teton Project

Riley: Well, the top projects that we did in the Snake River office were primarily supplemental irrigation projects, small projects to supplement late summer water supplies using conjunctive use—surface water and ground water. Some of the projects were pretty marginal in the sense that you were dealing with a lot of cattle, cattle operations, where you raised a lot of [small grains,] pasture, alfalfa, that sort of thing. Some of the areas were also marginal in the sense that because of either soil or climate conditions, [they] were limited in their cropping pattern to primarily forage and grain crops. ~~So that was primarily supplemental.~~ [The Burnt River Project was an example of this type of project.]

The largest one that I was involved in would have been the Teton Project in southeastern Idaho on the Teton River. That was a project to supplement the water supply of the Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, which is about a 110,000-acre irrigation project that extends over Fremont and Madison counties in eastern Idaho. That did involve a sizeable storage dam and reservoir, a hydropower plant, and water exchange wells. That one *was* eventually ~~constructed or~~ authorized, constructed, and failed. The dam failed. So those were the kind of projects I worked on in the area office. [The East Greenacres and Lower Snake projects were planned in the Upper

Columbia Development Office in Spokane, and I worked on those.]

Storey: And what were you doing exactly? You were writing the reports now?

Riley: Yes. But, you know, by that time the report write . . .

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 20, 1995.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: Tape two of an interview with Brit Storey with Robert J. Riley on March the 20th, 1995.

I was asking you what exactly you were doing in the Snake River office as a writer/editor.

By the Time He Returned to the Snake River Development Office, in 1966, Report Writers Were Responsible for Coordinating Development of Reports

Riley: Well, by that time, the role of the report writer changed somewhat from being strictly a technical writer to one of being kind of, I guess you'd say, more of a team ~~leader or a formulation~~ coordinator, where even though you didn't have formal teams identified, the report writer had the responsibility, really, to keep the study on track.

Sometimes the area managers would designate a study manager. Study managers often didn't have the broad background. They'd usually come from a rather narrow technical discipline, and some of them were ~~like GS-11 or~~ GS-12 journeymen, and while they were designated the study manager, they needed assistance in looking at all aspects of a project [and considering the broad interrelationships,] including the requirements for authorization, what goes into authorization, [and generally] how ~~things fit~~ [a planning document fits] together.

So the report writer really became kind of an assistant study manager and, in some cases, depending on the report writer's personality, became actually, if not in fact—what would you call it—a shadow study manager. Usually ~~he~~ [the report writer] had the responsibility for not only preparing the report, but for making sure that the technical appendixes [supporting the planning report] were consistent. The earlier tradition of letter-perfect excellence in appendixes started to fade [somewhat as the old timers retired], and you'd oftentimes find different [technical] disciplines using ~~different~~ [inconsistent] numbers, ~~concepts~~ [descriptions], and that sort of thing.

So the technical writer really became the shepherd of a lot of these studies, and that's what we did. [We were] called on to write a lot of the publications, a lot of the speeches, because of the understanding of the [broad aspects of a planning study including the] politics and the natural resource aspects, the public involvement aspects, that sort of thing.

Storey: Uh-huh. What grade were you when you came to the Snake River office?

Riley: An eleven.

Storey: Did you leave as an eleven?

Received a Promotion When He Moved to the Spokane Development Office

Riley: No. I applied on that reports chief job in Spokane, and I was selected for that job, and that's a GS-12. So I left with that promotion to go to Spokane to manage their reports program.

Storey: For about six years.

Riley: Yeah. Well, from '67 to '73, yeah.

Storey: How active was that program over there?

Riley: It was active. We had a number of good projects, primarily in the state of [Oregon, Idaho, and] Washington, along the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers. They were pretty good projects. As it turned out, one or two of them were authorized and they [The Oroville-Tonasket Project in Washington and the East Greenacres Project in Idaho were authorized and constructed. The Bureau eventually] had a heck of a time in the construction phase [of the Oroville-Tonasket Project, probably partly because of some of the formulation decisions that were made. There were a couple of good projects.

Working to Authorize New Developments Around the Columbia Basin Project

Then, to be honest with you, there was some real reaching out to try to develop projects, marginal projects. I recall a couple adjacent to the Columbia Basin Project. One was called the East [Banks] High and one was called East Bank. One was called West Bank[s]. One was called East-to-East. They were [These projects envisioned] all new irrigation developments surrounding [adjacent to] the existing Columbia Basin Project. They were supported by development leagues in the farm community out there, primarily dry farmers who wanted to increase their crop selection capability, or irrigated farmers whose groundwater supplies were declining, deteriorating. Those projects, none of them were authorized[, and] . So there are lots of [the] plans [went] on the shelf there.

Comprehensive River Basin Planning Studies While He Was in the Spokane Development Office

Then that [Spokane] office also got involved in, about that time, during the late '60s and early '70s, there was a big move towards comprehensive river basin planning. [There was a big push for basin planning in the later '60s and the early '70s.] There were two or three, well, I guess I should say four that I'm aware of, these big comprehensive panacea-type [planning projects] solution things going on [at that time]. One was the Willamette River Basin in Oregon. One was the Puget Sound River Basin or the Puget Sound area, Puget Sound and adjacent areas in Washington. One was the upper Snake River Basin in Idaho, Wyoming, and Oregon. Then the biggest of them all was the Pacific Northwest River Basin's Commission['s] Columbia North Pacific Comprehensive Planning Study.

So we[, the Spokane office,] contributed both staff and information to those ~~big~~ comprehensive studies. They took years and years and gathered a lot of information. Each of those ended up ~~being~~ [with] a volume of recommended future actions. [Many of the recommendations were valid and would have been effective.] My guess is that less than 10 percent of those actions were ever taken, primarily because there was no real support [at the time] for water project development. It was really a dead period for water projects.

“ . . . most of my career, about 25 years, was dead in the sense of not accomplishing anything of significant importance. We did a lot of planning studies. . . . most all of those studies, ended up on the shelf. . . . ”

I hate to say it, but most of my career[, about 25 years,] was dead in the sense of ~~really trying to~~ [not] accomplish[ing] anything of [significant] importance. We did a lot of planning studies. A lot of those studies, most all of those studies, ended up on the shelf.

I came into Reclamation at the tail end of the good times in terms of [new] project development, and then worked for twenty-~~five~~ years through a period of status quo. Nobody likes you. The administration doesn't like you; the environmentalists don't like you; the farmers don't like you; the people you work with don't necessarily like you; Denver doesn't like you. You don't like Denver. (laughter)

“ . . . the last five years . . . for the first time I felt a real *breath* of life in Reclamation, and I felt kind of weird because a lot of the people that I worked with felt even more of a depressed, dismal attitude in Reclamation because they could see the old structure, the old Reclamation emphasis fading fast. But for the first time, I saw an opportunity for Reclamation to *really* productively do something different than maintain the status quo . . . ”

But I'll tell you, the last five years, and particularly the last three years, for the first time I felt a real *breath* of life in Reclamation, and I felt kind of weird because a lot of the people that I worked with felt even more of a depressed, dismal attitude in Reclamation because they could see the old structure, the old Reclamation [emphasis fading fast.] ~~thing, starting to waiver.~~ But for the first time, I saw an opportunity for Reclamation to *really* productively do something different than maintain the status quo, and that was to go out at its existing projects and to look at today's demands and [public] preferences and try to do something different and better than it's done for decades. That's why I *strongly* favored ~~the~~ [a new, progressive] area office concept and speaking out to the old clients and trying to do something that was productive ~~in~~ [for] society. Boy, that's a long ways off the bat from what I did in Spokane, but . . .

Storey: That's okay.

Though the Planning Studies Seldom Went Anywhere, it Was Possible to Identify Small Operational Adjustments and Features That Didn't Require Authorization and Could Be Implemented

Riley: What I said about twenty-five years of status quo and producing planning reports, I'll tell you, the best thing to come out of planning reports in Spokane, Boise, ~~whatever~~ [wherever], is [that] you go through a planning process and you come up with ideas, concepts, measures, features, ~~and it was very unlikely that you'd ever get the whole thing authorized.~~ **But** by [learning that process,] ~~going through that process~~ and as years went by, by involving the public more closely and looking at the environmental needs more closely, ~~you could come~~ [we came] up with operational adjustments, small features that didn't require an authorization, some productive things ~~you~~ [we] could do, irregardless of where the report went, because it usually went to the dead-letter office, but there were these little things that you could see and do.

So where I think Reclamation is today, I hope, is a magnification of that. Instead of having those ~~little things~~ [good little actions] come out by accident[, Reclamation's program focus needs to be one of going out and working with diverse groups to shape adjustments that will benefit the public. To do things ~~and doing them by accident,~~ that that becomes the major focus of your program is to go out and shape things and see what you can do through operational adjustments, what you can do through willing buyer/willing seller, [and generally] cooperative programs, ~~and things that you have to do through a hammer over the head.~~

Storey: What was the difference in responsibility between the development offices and the regional planning office?

Preparation and Review of Planning Studies

Riley: Well, the development offices worked with the regional planning office. The regional planning office was the technical clearinghouse for the planning reports and the planning programs that came in from the Pacific Northwest. So each development office had its own staff of engineers, hydrologists, economists, geologists, report writers, and they had their own ~~little~~ [local] programs. They would [formulate a project and] prepare ~~what they called~~ a field draft of a planning report, and that field draft would ~~come~~ [go] into the regional planning office. The regional planning office [staff then would review the report from a technical and policy perspective. When the area development office and the regional office staff reached agreement a more formal report—the Regional Director's report—was prepared and sent to Denver and Washington, D.C., for review and processing.] ~~then had like technical disciplines.~~ They would go through the report, meet with the development office staff to review the formulation, to review the technical computations, and that sort of thing. And then when it ~~left~~ this region, it ~~left~~ as the regional director's proposed report or the regional director's report. ~~So that's how those were related.~~

The Region Consolidated its Planning Staff in Boise in 1973 and He Moved Back to Boise as Chief of the Reports Section

~~Then later,~~ as Denver became to play the role of policy technical review, ~~this region—well, prior to that time,~~ [In 1973 the Pacific Northwest] Region consolidated all of its planning [staff and program in Boise and closed its three] ~~this region consolidated all of its planning activity back in '73, closed~~ those development offices[.] and

~~centralized their planning staff here in Boise. So then there was just one group of planning people that did the planning, plan formulation, the review, and it was all contained here. [I should point out that] there were a few people left in Salem, but they were mostly liaison people, you know, for political-[public relations] type purposes. Some planning, but not much. So it was consolidated here.~~

Storey: In '73. And that's when you came back as the reports chief for the region. Was reports part of planning?

Riley: Yes.

Storey: So who was the supervisor then? Well, excuse me, let's back up. Who was the supervisor in Spokane?

Riley: I was. Oh, you mean for the whole office?

Storey: For the whole office. For the development office.

Mangers in Spokane and Salem

Riley: Well, at the time I was there, the first supervisor was Rupert B. Spearman, and then the second one, after Rupert retired, was Roy Sipinen. They were the supervisors of that office. The supervisor of the Snake River Office at the time of the consolidation was Allen McGregor, and the supervisor in the Salem office was Carl Huish. So when those offices were consolidated, Kuish left the region, shortly thereafter retired. McGregor became the head of the plan formulation branch in the regional planning group, and Roy Sipinen became the head of the land classification and water quality branch in the regional office.

Storey: What were they like?

Riley: Those managers?

Storey: Yeah, the ones in Spokane that you worked directly with.

Riley: Well, "Rupe" Spearman was an old-time professional career-type Reclamation person that was strong on engineering and kind of a quiet fellow, had a hard time with public presentations. He was smart, very smart. He was a good supervisor in that he gave people a lot of latitude to be creative. But he was strong on structural solutions, structural solutions.

Roy Sipinen came on board after [completing a foreign] ~~an~~ assignment in [Thailand] ~~=I don't know whether it was Vietnam or . . . one of those [Far] Eastern countries. He had been on foreign assignment. He came back to the States, and I guess one of these foreign assignment guys that needed to be, you know, placed[.] somewhere in Reclamation, or they *hoped* that he could be placed. So it worked out that [At about that time Spearman could retire[d,] and Huish had moved, who had been the assistant at Spokane, and went to Salem [to run that office].~~

So Sipinen [was assigned to Spokane as] ~~became~~ the planning officer[.] , and Roy had a lot different ideas from the old line. I told you about some of ~~these~~ [those planning] projects surrounding the Columbia Basin Project ~~out there, basically irrigation projects,~~ [that were basically aimed at] new irrigation developments. Well, Roy came in about midway on those, and he said, “Well, you know, we can’t do much in the way of irrigation, but let’s be creative and [see if] we can develop fish farms and that sort of thing out there, you know, use some of the area to raise fish commercially ~~and harvest fish.~~” He was more of a creative thinker, but I think he was viewed by a lot of people as kind of a far-out-type guy whose ideas didn’t mesh very well with the older line ~~engineering~~ [structural] solution-type ~~thing~~ [people].

I remember one time [we were at a banquet sponsored by the East Banks Development Association.] ~~that out there at one of those development group banquets, annual banquets,~~ They’d invited the regional director, H. T. Nelson, to come out and speak. They’d also invited the area manager, Roy Sipinen, to come and speak. ~~It was on one of these Columbia Basin Project deals. The regional director got up,~~ H. T. got up, and he told them like it was. He said, “There’s nothing we can do for you. We can’t economically justify ~~this project~~ [an irrigation project like this]. It’s been good working with you, but we’re going to have to start to pull back from this.”

And then the next speaker was Roy Sipinen, and he got up and he says, “Well, now, things might not look all this bad. We might be able to put fish farms in out ~~there~~ [here] and do ~~all these~~ [some] things to try to get some non-irrigation benefits.” And that caused an awful lot of problems, because H. T. was a kind of guy that didn’t like to make that kind of a pronouncement and then have one of his managers come along and say, “Well, maybe we can be more creative than that.” We closed up [at Spokane] shortly after that. (laughter)

Well, anyway, McGregor at the Boise area office was an engineer, had been in that office, worked, I think, most of his career in the Snake River area. He was a guy that was an outstanding writer and speaker. He had really a charisma about him[.] ~~that he could go out to~~ [He was exceptional with] public groups. He was a handsome sort of guy, you know. I mean, when he walks in, you know, he had a presence about him, and he was well liked, was an extremely hard worker and just a basically good guy. He liked to do the right thing. I think he was more attuned to nonstructural-type things than some. So he was a good asset, and I think that’s why he became the head of the plan formulation group in the regional office when they consolidated ~~it~~ [planning]. That’s one of the reasons. It fitted him well. There were ~~other political~~ [seniority] reasons, I think, but it fit him well.

Huish had a very short tenure over in Salem. He was much like Rupe Spearman, much like Rupert Spearman. Didn’t really have much of an opportunity, I don’t think, to exercise his abilities as an area manager. His predecessor—is that right? Does that come before or after? (laughter)

Storey: His predecessor was before, I think.

Riley: Yeah. See how stale I’m getting. John Mangan was the previous planning officer [in

Salem], area manager, over in Salem. He ~~came here at this time as the regional planning [officer in Boise.] manager.~~ John Mangan. So his background was really Oregon. So he was the *one* surviving area manager after the consolidation, and he assumed the role as the [Mangan was a very good planner and well respected as] regional planning officer.

Storey: And you became the reports chief. What kind of staff was there with this consolidation going on and everything?

Riley: ~~Well, the area offices or the development offices in the old days—well, I'll tell you to keep you from getting totally confused, they were called area offices and development offices, and in the latter years of their existence, they were the area offices, because development implied too much of build-new-projects stuff. So they became area offices.~~

“The three field planning offices and the regional planning office were similarly structured. So when they closed the field planning offices, they really just absorbed people of like disciplines into the regional office. . . .”

~~Each of those~~ [The three field planning] offices and the regional [planning] office ~~planning groups~~ were similarly structured. So when they closed the [field planning] offices, they really just absorbed people of like disciplines into the regional office. Quite a number [of people], I think, [at both field and regional levels] retired. I can't remember what percentage. I'd say maybe 20 percent retired. So there was some downsizing [through attrition.] ~~and then~~ Some [field] planning people ~~went~~ [transferred] into project [operations] offices and some ~~into other~~ [were assigned to] regional office functions like O&M ~~or something like that.~~

Storey: Was there a perception that they needed to downsize planning?

“. . . Ellis Armstrong was commissioner, Warren Fairchild was an assistant commissioner. Fairchild made a number of trips out to the regions, and he argued pretty strongly, forcefully, for office consolidation, for economies of staff to better support the large river basin-type studies . . .”

Riley: Yeah. I think, you know, the Reclamation program [as far as new project development was concerned] was going downhill. And about that time, I think, Ellis Armstrong was commissioner, Warren Fairchild was ~~the~~ [an] assistant commissioner. Fairchild made a number of trips out to the regions, and he argued pretty strongly, forcefully, for [office] consolidation, for economies of staff to better support these large river basin-type [studies that were popular and,] ~~study things,~~ I think to gain a little more control over what Reclamation [planners were emphasizing in their programs.] did. It's easier to control one or two offices than it is twenty.

During the Development Office Stage There Were about 200 People in Planning, Then about 150 after Consolidation into Boise in 1973, and by 1988 There Were Only about Twenty

So I think at that time, 1973, the regional planning staff was probably [numbered about] forty[.], I'd guess around forty to fifty, forty to fifty. Each of the area planning groups was around fifty. So you had about 200 people, and [with the consolidation] I think it came down to 150, something like that. Then it *gradually* went down to less than [about] twenty [or thirty] by '88 or so. I mean, it just died. *But* as [Even though] the planning staff deteriorated in numbers, we still had a [viable] planning program[.], and We would reach out more to other regional office staff people like the O&M people, the environmental people [and the project people to assist]. We'd reach out more to the project managers. And then, of course, we'd have the service agreements with Denver [to provide some technical services. In a way, we benefitted because the planning program became less isolated.]

Storey: So when you became the regional reports chief, was that another promotion for you?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: To a thirteen? To a fourteen? To a twenty-two?

Riley: The head of the reports group in the area offices or development offices was a twelve and the regional office branches were thirteens.

Storey: And how many people were in the reports function?

Originally the Region Put Environmental Staff into the Reports Branch

Riley: Oh, let's see, at that time there were probably, I'd guess, [eight-, ten reports people.] ten. Technical writers. A couple of editorial assistants. Well, clerk typists. Three or Four editorial assistants and four or five writers. I'm not adding this up. Plus The environmental staffing had just started, and They put the first environmental people under the reports group [were assigned to the reports branch. This brought out group to thirteen.]

Storey: And you were what, the chief of that? Was it a branch?

Riley: It was a branch, yeah.

Storey: For fifteen years then?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: Did the staff decrease while you were the chief? Did it increase?

Riley: No, It [increased slightly because after stayed about stable. The reports group, I'm trying to think if we added. We added a couple of plan formulation study manager people in our group. After McGregor retired [as formulation branch chief], a couple of the plan formulation [or study team leaders came into the branch.] people came. I guess I could say the branch increased a little, because we took on the technical writing, *much* of the program development for the planning staff, and the environmental

function. So where when I first came [became branch chief] we were pretty much strictly [a report writing function. Then we added the] report writers, editorial assistants, and clerk typists, in the later years we had technical writers, the editorial assistants, and four or five environmental specialists [and study team leaders]. So the report contingent declined a little, but the overall branch numbers went up with the addition of the environment . . .

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: While you were the chief of the reports branch, we had the failure of Teton. I guess my first question is, do you remember that, and do you remember how people in the office reacted to that?

Failure of Teton Dam

Riley: I remember it happened on a Saturday. I was driving down the street listening to the radio and heard that it failed. [I went] ~~We came back~~ to the regional office, and there were a few people around, but the primary [regional staff] ~~action~~ right at that time was Harry Stivers, the Special Assistant to the Regional Director, and the Public Affairs Officer, Steve Wade[. They boarded] ~~, got in the Bureau plane and flew up to the project site [immediately]. I understand when they got to Rexburg, they could see the massive flooding that was occurring, and came back.~~ And it was a real crisis in the office that involved primarily the Division of Design and Construction, and the Division of O&M[,] ~~and, of course,~~ the Field Solicitor, and the Project Manager for the Minidoka Project. [This catastrophe,] ~~it,~~ of course, occupied the managers' time for an enormous period, the tragedy that it was, and [all] the questions that had to be answered[.] ~~, and [There were numerous] investigative panels that were established, [from] both within Reclamation and independently [outside Reclamation].~~

As far as I'm concerned personally, it didn't involve me [to a great extent. We did have to collect all technical reports and planning documents related to Teton along with all correspondence, place them in a special library, and manage their use]. ~~It didn't involve the reports branch other than to collect the technical stuff on the Teton Division, to gather it together and to kind of house all of the records and correspondence and to manage that written history of the Teton Project.~~

Storey: Were any reports written?

Riley: The reports that were written on the Teton failure were not locally developed other than, you know, the records of events that occurred in the field by the project construction engineer, testimonies. What do you call those when the lawyers come around?

Storey: Oh, depositions.

“ . . . the Denver design group, the engineering group, construction group working with the regional office, design and construction and geology group, they were the ones on the hot seat. . . . ”

Riley: Depositions. But as far as reports on the failure, my recollection is that none were done at the regional level. I think the chief engineer—I don't know whether they were called chief engineer in those days still in Denver or not,³⁷ but the Denver design group, the engineering group, construction group working with the regional office, design and construction and geologist [geology] group, they were the ones on the hot seat. The reporting that was done, I think most of it was done through Denver and then by independent panels, at least one independent panel.

~~But that—let's see, what could you say? That [The Teton Dam] failure changed Reclamation's attitude in this region, and probably bureauwide, dramatically[. And, the change was] in the sense of [there being a] paranoia[.] [Seems that people were] afraid to do anything, double-checking, triple-checking in terms of engineering, economics, primarily engineering, geology, hydrology[, environmental impact]. It added an enormous paranoia, you know, about that time-lost element to our work]. Are you doing it right? Can we control it? Are you trying to justify projects without real [adequate] data?~~

“ . . . we were trying . . . to do some meaningful environmental work. . . . And, when the Teton Dam failed and all of the people who strongly opposed Teton Dam because of the environmental impacts gained enormous stature and the Bureau's credibility went to zero. So the little progress we were trying to make along the environmental front was wiped out, totally wiped out. . . . ”

~~Then, of course, [it was a public relations disaster.] the other catastrophe was from the environmental standpoint, because The Bureau had been viewed as the old dam builder [oblivious to environmental values. Following enactment of N-E-P-A.—our regional director had actually hired the ex-director of the Idaho Fish and Game Department to be our first environmental officer. Area offices had actually hired environmental people, and we were trying honestly, I think, to do some neophyte [meaningful] environmental work and to look at it pretty objectively. And, when the [Teton] Dam failed and all of the people who strongly opposed Teton Dam because of the environmental issues [impacts gained enormous stature and the Bureau's credibility went to zero.] , when that failed, it **totally** wiped out any credibility of the Bureau in those people's eyes. So the little progress we were trying to make along the environmental front was wiped out, totally wiped out. Our credibility was wiped out. So when you add that on top of an agency that was out struggling to find [define a modern mission, it was near] an existence, it was a disaster. It's amazing that the Bureau survived it, if it has.~~

Storey: Why do you say that we were struggling to find an existence? I'm not following your thinking.

37. The title Chief Engineer was used beginning with the creation of Reclamation in 1902, but in 1963 the title changed to Director, Office of Design and Construction. In spite of the official name change, that position and its successor, the Assistant Commissioner for Engineering and Research (ACER), were unofficially known in Reclamation as the “chief engineer” until abolition of the position in 1994 during the reorganization undertaken by Commissioner Daniel (Dan) P. Beard.

Up to the early 1960s there were some small projects being built, but “. . . then during the ‘60s and ‘70s . . . the projects were . . . operating on the status quo. . .

Riley: Well, okay. I’d say up through the ‘50s and maybe for a little while in the early ‘60s, the old projects had been built and there were still some— I’m talking about this region, I’m not talking about central Arizona or central Utah, but in this region—there were still a few small projects being built around, primarily for supplemental irrigation water.

So then during the ‘60s and ‘70s, it was really status quo. I mean, the projects were being operated for the purposes for which they were authorized. The Bureau and the project beneficiaries, which in this region were primarily agricultural ~~and power~~, hydropower, [and flood control, you know, were operating on the status quo.

“. . . the Bureau had done little in the way of modifying traditional project operations. It had been mostly looking for *new* project development, you know . . . *new* structural solutions to problems . . .”

And the environmental, if you want to call it that, the environmental movement, was just starting to question river and reservoir operations and that sort of thing. But the Bureau had done ~~really nothing *much* in the way of a lot of creative thinking on project operations~~ [little in the way of modifying traditional project operations]. It had been mostly looking for *new* project development, you know, *new* project development, *new* structural solutions to problems, and very few, if any, were being authorized.

So you had a condition where you operate as usual, hydropower and irrigation [and flood control]; operate as usual with some tweaks here and there; new project development; new studies being done but not going any place; trying to chip away a little bit in project planning and looking at other than [traditional] irrigation needs. So, you know, it was a status quo thing.

“. . . when Teton comes along and fails, that just confirms in the public’s eye the Bureau’s longstanding role as a dam-builder and, you know, an agency in bed with hydropower and agriculture and incompetent and that sort of thing. . . .”

And then when Teton comes along and fails, that just confirms [in the public’s eye] the Bureau’s longstanding role as a dam-builder and, you know, [an agency] in bed with hydropower and agriculture and incompetent and that sort of thing.

“. . . during that period, the Bureau was struggling . . . you couldn’t make major changes in operations, such changes were impossible or unlikely at best, for two reasons. One is is that the beneficiaries of the project were strongly entrenched and not receptive and under no pressure to change anything. The other factor is is that the West had not been ‘discovered.’ . . .”

So to me, during that period, the Bureau was struggling, at least the people in planning were struggling, for an identity or a role, because you couldn’t make major changes in operations[, such changes were impossible or unlikely at best,] for two

reasons. One is is that the beneficiaries of the project were strongly entrenched and not receptive and under no pressure to change anything. The other factor is is that the West had not been “discovered.” This region had not [really] been discovered by non-agricultural, non-hydropower people. So *now*, you know, as the population has increased and you’ve had people move in that float the river; fish the river; fly fishermen; tubers; [want water for domestic, municipal, and industrial uses; and want improved quality,] you know, all of that stuff, you’ve got a new clientele. But that didn’t exist for all of those years that I remember.

“That’s why I say the last five years . . . was the first time, . . . even though a lot of people saw these changes in public emphasis as a negative, I saw it as a positive to finally push the Bureau into looking at water efficiency improvements, conservation measures, re-operation, you know, to get the cobwebs out and start to think. And, boy, that was a struggle to try to do that, but to me it was invigorating. . . .”

That’s why I say the last five years, especially the last three years, to me was—and maybe it was a mistake to retire so soon—but [it was] the first time, really, in my career that even though a lot of people saw [these changes in public emphasis] ^{it} as a negative, I saw it as a positive, to finally push the Bureau into looking at water efficiency improvements, conservation measures, re-operation, you know, to get the cobwebs out and start to think. And, boy, that was a struggle to try to do that, but to me it was invigorating.

I think it was a compliment to John Keys and to some of the other folks that you go to public meetings in the Northwest Planning Council and other people and they’d say, “Well, you know, the Corps is doing what it’s always done. The Bureau appears to be doing something a little more creative, or at least trying to be responsive to the problem and the issue.” You know, that was good, because I hadn’t heard that for twenty-five years. So when you say struggling for—whatever I said—struggling for an existence, and Teton was a real swat against the cheeks.

Storey: And that happened about the time [Jimmy] Carter’s “hit list”³⁸ came out, wasn’t it?

Riley: ‘76, as I recall.

Storey: And the hit list would have come out probably in ‘77, maybe ‘78.

Riley: So, you know, really the ‘60s and the ‘70s and the [early] ‘80s were a nightmare for me. I mean, a nightmare in the sense of [not] feeling good about [our ability as an agency to

38. Jimmy Carter served as President of the United States from 1977 until 1981 after his election in 1976. Within a few weeks of the beginning of the Administration, an internal discussion document accidentally fell into the hands of a reporter. The document proposed cancellation of a number of water projects considered environmentally or economically unsound. This proposal came to be known as Jimmy Carter’s “hit list.” This happened while Commissioner Daniel P. Beard worked in the Carter Administration, and he discussed his perspective on the issue in his Reclamation oral history interviews and in “The Passage of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, 1991-1992: The Role of George Miller,” an Oral History interview by Malca Chall, 1996 for the Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California.

solve a problem. Compelling public interests had not emerged which would encourage the Bureau to] solving a problem, because finally there were compelling issues and compelling public interests that came together to force the Bureau to do something different. [The hit list got out attention and serious public issues moved us away from our] I mean, we could no longer say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" [attitude,] you know, because the public was telling us, and even some of our clients, our clientele was saying, "Hey, we're under attack. You know, you're supposed to be our defender, so to speak, here. You're operating these projects. What are you going to do about this [these problems with competing water uses]?" And the Bureau [finally] had to stand up and say "No." It's had to learn to say no, or, "We've got to do some things differently." [That was a big change. I think the Bureau was able to make that transition better than some agencies.] , and we never used to do that.

Storey: So your perspective, the perspective that I think I'm hearing you say, is that you thought that Reclamation was in bed with the water users?

How He Perceived Reclamation's Development of Decisions Regarding Projects

Riley: No. Well, that makes it sound like there was some kind of a slick deal going. What I'm saying is that [the Bureau and its primary] you had a bunch of project operators and a bunch of Bureau managers and a bunch of clientele who had grown up [together and] generation after generation [they did things a certain way to respond to a "project authorization" or a contract.] , you know, of, "Here's the way it is. Here's what this economy is. Here's why these projects were built." And so, you know, when you have to make a choice or a judgment, you make it based on experience and on close associations, and you say, [The Bureau would often respond to issues with "Well, the project was authorized for this purpose[, or, the contract is written this way,] and we're obligated to meet things for this purpose. [operate our project accordingly.]"

So when I say in bed, what I mean is that there was a commitment by the Bureau to meet what it perceived to be the requirements of the authorizations [and contracts] for [its] these projects. And in some cases, those authorizations were quite non-specific, and other cases they were specific. And in the cases where they were not specific, the Bureau *usually* made the choice to support the traditional use of the water supply. There are a couple of reasons for that. One is is that's what the Bureau had always done. Another is, to be truthful, environmental science and biological science was suspect. In the case of the salmon recovery, I mean, you hear it every day. It just isn't me talking. You read any paper. You listen to any governor. You listen to any water board. You listen to the National Marine Fishery Service, Corps of Engineers, you still can't believe wholeheartedly. [Another consideration is that environmental science can be suspect—leading to a reluctance to overturning longstanding operational regimes. Where] there is no consensus, [or] *little* consensus, [it is difficult to justify significant shifts in operational emphasis. The major point here is that finally the Bureau is willing to pursue an issue rather than duck it.] on what it takes to save the salmon or to do this or to do that or to do that.

And so, finally, you know, The Bureau, I think, has shifted away a little bit and started to say, "Well, let's give the benefit of the doubt to the environmental need here

[and make some modifications that all parties can live with even if we aren't popular]." So in the early years it was authorized for hydropower flood control and irrigation, and we're obligated to meet that. Until somebody tells us, until there is an overriding congressional action or administrative executive order that tells us otherwise, as a competent engineering organization, operations with contracts, we're going to meet our commitments.

Reclamation Is Changing in the Way it Looks at its Responsibilities

So that's why for a long time [in my career] , to me, it was the status quo. *Finally*, you get people saying, "Well, now, you know, there are other compelling issues and needs out there, and we have to do a little better job in looking at what our authorities are, what our commitments are, being more, much more, creative working with these groups to try to do something a little better."

So I would have felt better about my Bureau career if what has happened in the last three years [had] happened thirty years ago. I kept telling these—that's probably my problem, but I tried to encourage the young people that I worked with here [by telling them that, "Hey, look, because you're downsizing, because Dan Beard this, because Dan Beard that, because of this and that, you know, look at it from a little different perspective.— for *once* you've got a *real* opportunity with public interest and some congressional support [behind them] to do something productive with your time [for society]."

Storey: Good. But you do see that there have been real changes?

John Keys Has Been Fostering Flexibility but Some Middle Managers in the Region Are Harder to Change than the Regional Director Has Been

Riley: I'll tell you, it's been very difficult. It's very difficult. The key, I think [Regional Director] John Keys has been outstanding, outstanding in—now, recognizing this guy came up through the ranks and worked through this same period I'm talking about—he's been outstanding in trying to be flexible and [honestly responsive to public interests. So have some of our project managers. I've seen growth in John Keys. He can say "no" to tradition for tradition's sake.] to encourage flexibility. When he goes out, I've seen the growth in him in being able to say no, to wait and say stop, I mean to big irrigation groups that H. T. Nelson developed and nurtured through the years. John Keys, I've seen the growth in him in being able to be an objective viewer of what's going on and [and in making a commitment to] try to fix it.

But where he's struggling and where he was struggling when I was here [with some of] , is his middle managers[. In spite of a regional director's good intentions] ; because the only way, in my view, that the Bureau is going to survive and to make a difference is that if its managers at the GS-13, 14, 15 level are really [going to have to be] committed to just what we've been talking about here, about trying to do more with what you've got rather than sitting back and saying, "We've got an authorization, we've got a contract, we've got to meet it [come] hell or high water. All of this other stuff is crap. Things are going to come around. Wait and see. People are going to get fed up,

and it'll come back to where it was.”

Contrary to the views of some managers, “It’s not going to go back to where it was, because Idaho isn’t what it used to be, and Washington and Oregon and Montana *aren’t* what they used to be. . . .”

It’s not going to go back to where it was, because Idaho isn’t what it used to be, and Washington and Oregon and Montana *aren’t* what they used to be. None of the Western states are. I mean, all I’ve got to do is drive home now and I don’t recognize anybody, when I used to drive home [I’d at least] ~~and~~ recognize some of the people. [Many] ~~All~~ of those people that I *don’t* recognize want to use the reservoirs and the rivers for a lot of different purposes.

~~So unless~~ The [Bureau’s] middle managers [have to be] ~~are~~ committed—and the Bureau has been a nice place to work, for me, because people were always very professional. Nobody liked to *chew* anybody out. I mean, that was the last resort was to, you know, talk turkey. However, we went—when Lynott³⁹ was there, I think, we had something down in Tucson where we were supposed to be new thinkers, and we called it “Talking Turkey in Tucson.” (laughter)

When He Left He Was Trying to Foster Cross-office Teamwork among Younger Workers

[My last effort in the Bureau] ~~So when I left here, that was my struggle is that last thing I was, was trying to get the young people that had been —if you recognize codes 400, 200, 700, planning, O&M, design and construction, who had been compartmentalized [into traditional organizational units] all of their career, try to [reach out and work within a team, to be assertive, and forget “turf.” To be] break them out of that, get the young people and identify young people who wanted to *manage* a study, who wanted to *manage* an activity, not a study but an activity, a *problem*, the problem-solver[s, to want to lead a problem solving effort, to be innovative, to] , and get them working with other young people, and with some coaching, some shadow leadership, to help them get over the humps and catch fire. When I left, there were still middle managers that were dragging their feet and that [would] argue or withdraw, or [gripe behind-the-scenes.] arguments, withdrawal, and then behind-the-scenes griping that is destructive.~~

So now in this region you’ve got ~~four area managers~~, three area managers and a power service manager. Jerry Gregg⁴⁰ out here at the Snake River [Area Office], I think he’s trying to do the right thing, and I think he’s got a couple of pretty sharp people working with him now. I’m not saying that the old people weren’t sharp, but [some had an approach that couldn’t be budged come] they had a philosophy, and it was ingrained, and it was that or hell or high water. ~~Some of them were able to change. A couple made a *miraculous* recovery. So Jerry Gray, Snake River; Jim Cole [has the] Upper~~

39. This refers to a planning meeting held when Ellis Armstrong was Commissioner and Warren Fairchild was Assistant Commissioner— Resource Planning.

40. Jerrold (Jerry) D. Gregg has participated in Reclamation’s oral history program.

Columbia [Area Office]; Ron McKown [has the] ~~over in the~~ Lower Columbia [Area Office]; and Steve Clark [has the power service center. These are all sharp people and will do a job] at the Grand Coulee.

Storey: What's at the Lower Columbia? I'm not aware that we have—well, we have these little things like Tualatin, maybe.

Riley: Do you remember the old planning concept of the three area offices that split the region up geographically?

Storey: And Salem was one of them.

Organization of the Region after the 1993-1994 Reorganization under Commissioner Dan Beard

Riley: Okay. So we've got the same thing now, only it's called—when I left here, it was called Lower Columbia Area Office, and it handles all of the water-related issues west of the Cascade Mountains in Oregon and Washington. It's located in Vancouver, a brand-new office. It's got two people. Last I heard, two people there, the manager and one of planning's old activity managers, an environmental specialist and an old planning activity manager, Ron McKown and Eric Glover. So they're our liaison. They're the Bureau's liaison [in the Lower Columbia area.] ~~for those.~~

What's happening over in that coastal area is transition from agriculture to M&I and in-stream flow. We have the Rogue River Project, Tualatin Project, the Umpqua River Project. So there are a number of projects over there.

Storey: What I'm wondering is, I notice that you became regional planning supervisor in 1988 and, of course, 1988 is when Reclamation went through reorganization. The assistant commissioner for resources management was created. Did your becoming regional planning supervisor have anything to do with any kind of a reorganization in the office here?

In 1988 the Region's Planning Officer Decided to Devote Full Time to the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project and to Let Someone Else Take over as Planning Officer

Riley: [In a way, Larry Vinsonhaler, the regional planning officer, chose to work full time on the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project in Washington State. It was a demanding and important project and required his full attention. Regional Director John Keys advertised the planning officer job. I applied and was selected.] ~~I think what it had to do with is that when ACRM⁴¹ [pronounced as "ack rum"] was created and the concept was to do a lot of the technical planning work down in Denver and to do some of the project management down there that the then planning officer said, "I don't want to do this." He had another strong demand on his time, and that was to~~

41. Assistant Commissioner—Resources Management, or, sometimes, Assistant Commissioner for Resources Management.

manage the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project. So he opted, in consultation with the regional director, to dedicate all of his time to the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project.

In retrospect, that was a good decision [by] ~~Larry Vinsonhaler[.]~~ ~~was the planning officer.~~ It was a good decision on his part and on the part of John Keys, because last year Congress authorized that project, and that's one of the very few that's been authorized in this region in the last twenty years. The reason it was authorized is because it was [a project full of new, positive concepts on] ~~one of the new things that looks at water efficiency [and] water management.~~ ~~So, anyway, yeah, it had to do with the reorganization, and so I applied for the job and got it.~~

Storey: That was a division chief?

Riley: Yeah. ~~Division of . . . with some great big name. I can't even remember the name of it now.~~ Division of Project Planning and Program Development or something. ~~To me, it was just the planning division, but organizationally it was some other horrendous, terrible thing.~~

Storey: So that was a promotion for you?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: From a what?

Riley: Thirteen to a fourteen.

Storey: Now, when you moved into that office, how many staff did you end up with?

Staff in the Planning Division

Riley: I'm trying to remember. I got into that job on an acting basis just at the time that there were some RIFs occurring and transfers to Denver under the consolidation. And I think we ended up with—gee, I should remember that, but just roughly I would say around thirty.

Storey: What was the regional vision of what the reorganization was all about in 19 . . .

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 3. MARCH 20, 1995.

Storey: This is Brit Storey interviewing Robert Riley on March the 20th, 1995. This is tape three.

I was trying to ask you, when the other tape ran out, what your perception of the reorganization was in 1988, the creation of ACRM and all of that?

The 1988 Reorganization Intended to Consolidate Planning Functions for

Reclamation in the Assistant Commissioner–Resources Management Office in Denver

Riley: Well, my perception of it was that it really tied to two things, I guess.

“ . . . the Bureau’s program, particularly in the area of planning, was declining to the point where . . . it was near impossible to maintain staffs . . . with the funding that was available. . . . there was a feeling on the part of managers that you could get a bigger bang for your buck by consolidating technical staff in a central point while leaving some of your management staff out in the field. . . .”

One thing is is that I had observed, since I was closely involved in program development, that the Bureau’s program, particularly in the area of planning, was declining to the point where independent [Denver, regional, and field] planning staffs capable of doing quality work under the stringent technical requirements that were being placed on Reclamation, where it was near impossible to maintain staffs of that level with the funding that was available. So my view was that the reorganization was partly driven by [this] budget constraint and that there was a feeling on the part of managers that you could get a bigger bang for your buck by consolidating technical staff in a central point [while] ~~and~~ leaving some of your management staff out in the field.

“ . . . there was concern by senior Bureau managers . . . that the regions and . . . some of the field offices . . . were continuing to push programs and projects . . . not responsive to the changing conditions in an area and that those programs were really a continuation of what the Bureau had been doing for a couple of decades . . . And I think there was a desire to have more control in a central location . . . over the conceptual formulation of programs and projects so that the commissioner and his staff would not be confronted with programs and projects that had cost hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars to formulate and that had gathered some degree of public support to be confronted with a decision of having to say, ‘Those won’t fly, folks.’ . . .”

Another thing that I felt, though, was that there was concern by senior Bureau managers outside of the regions that the regions and, in particular, some of the field offices within the regions were continuing to push programs and projects that were not responsive to the changing conditions in an area and that those programs were really a continuation of what the Bureau had been doing for a couple of decades with some window-dressing on the side to make them look a little more multipurpose. And I think there was a desire to have more control in a central location like Denver over the conceptual formulation of programs and projects so that the commissioner and his staff would not be confronted with programs and projects that had cost hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars to formulate and that had gathered some degree of public support to be confronted with a decision of having to say, “Those won’t fly, folks.”

If we’d known sooner, we would have done something different, because now here we are. You’ve got all these folks pumped up about something and you’ve got your own development groups out there going to Congress to get these things

authorized. We're political animals here, and we're between a rock and a hard place, between some segment of the public interest and then having to hold a straight face to our secretary and our assistant secretary and so on.

So I think [it] ~~there~~ was budget-driven and there was maybe distrust or discomfort with [the] capability of the regions and the area offices to be objective in some of the work they were doing. That's the way I saw it.

Storey: Do you think it was good or bad?

Riley: Well, I think . . .

Storey: Maybe you don't want to make that kind of judgment.

Liked the Concept Behind the Planning Reorganization but Felt it Somewhat Missed the Mark Because it Was Too Sophisticated and Aimed at the Wrong Needs

Riley: It's a mixed answer here, because I think that the idea, the basic concept behind it, had some validity. *However*, in the *actual* workings of it, it appeared to me that the way that the organization had been structured was to perpetuate the highly technical in-depth study-type evaluation thing that would be responsive to new project development, and be responsive to principles and guidelines, you know, the type of work that needed to be done to formulate a new Columbia Basin Project or a new Central Utah or Central Arizona Project and some of the more complex smaller projects. It was a highly compartmentalized, specialized structure that was developed in that reorganization. And, to me, that would have been *perfect* for what the Bureau was doing [decades] ~~years~~ ^{ffty} ago. But for the *demands* that I can see personally out in the field, the [demands] ~~requirements~~ for that kind of sophistication were few and far between in this region.

“ . . . it was negative in the sense that it was overkill for some of the challenges we had here. It was overkill in terms of review time, cost, and staff being separated geographically. It was positive in the sense . . . that it shook Reclamation out of its slumber and caused the blood to flow and the arguments to rage and the thoughts to be developed. . . . ”

So it was negative in the sense that it was overkill for some of the challenges we had here. It was overkill in terms of review time, cost, and [staff] ~~then~~ being separated geographically. It was positive in the sense, maybe more strategically, in the sense that it shook Reclamation out of its slumber and caused the blood to flow and the arguments to rage and the thoughts to be developed. So it was positive in that it did [that.] ~~something~~. It shook the Bureau up. It was kind of like a C-P-R⁴² exercise. But for our particular case, it was not that beneficial.

Storey: Did you see any changes in your planning office as a result of the reorganization when you came in? Had things changed?

42. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

The Regional Planning Office Changed from Doing Technical Work to Managing and Directing Studies and Plan Formulation

Riley: Yeah. The planning office became no longer a doer of technical work, but primarily one of study management and directing plan formulation and the movement of the environmental staff to the environmental office.

“ . . . it was a . . . significant downsizing of the planning staff. *But* at the same time, an addition of responsibility, a different kind of responsibility, more complex pain-in-the-neck type of responsibility . . . you had a manager in Boise, a public interest hundreds of miles somewhere else, and a technical staff hundreds of miles the other direction. . . .”

So it was a downsizing, a significant downsizing of the planning staff. *But* at the same time, an addition of responsibility, a different kind of responsibility, more complex pain-in-the-neck type of responsibility in learning to do project management where you had a manager in Boise, a public interest hundreds of miles somewhere else, and a technical staff hundreds of miles the other direction. [For example, a planning study manager would be located in Boise, the study area could be, say, in eastern Oregon, and the technical staff in Denver.] So [there] ~~it~~ was a downsizing and an increasing level of frustration.

Storey: So overall maybe not an improvement?

“You could learn to work with it. But the question is, would the time and the cost involved in it allow you to continue to exist? Could you continue to be responsive to the public need? . . .”

Riley: I would say if I had to continue to work under the ACRM thing that was created in '88, that you could learn to live to work with it. You could learn to work with it. But the question is, would the time and the cost involved in it allow you to continue to exist? Could you continue to be responsive to the public need? In [several] ~~some~~ cases, we found very good people in Denver that were savvy, not that we were always savvy, but people in Denver who could come out to the field, spend considerable amount of time [with the] ~~in~~ public meetings with other groups, working with technicians from other agencies and from non-federal groups, and do an [overall] excellent job. In other cases it was not good, and when that happened, it was a additional level of management baggage to try to deal with that, because you had no direct management responsibility.

A Good Benefit of the New System Was More Frequent Meetings and Sharing of Ideas among the Planning Officers

Good? Some of the good was that [the planning managers] ~~=I don't know. We had more frequent meetings[.] ; the planning officers.~~ Bob Lanky and, I think, Terry [Lynott] helped institute this, too. But we had more frequent meetings of planning officers, we could share ideas and concepts and [set] budget direction, and there were some good planning officers from other regions that. . . they were just good, good thinkers. That was [very] beneficial. And I think that a lot of [what came from those

sessions] ~~that~~ kind of got reflected in the Commissioner's--what do you call that paper he put out?

Storey: The CPORT?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: Commissioner's Program Organization and Review Team,⁴³ I think it was?

Riley: Yeah.

Storey: This is Commissioner Beard.

Riley: Um-hmm.

Storey: Right. Yeah.

“ . . . those years from '88 . . . it was a struggle. It was a struggle, and I heard a lot more complaining than I did support. Not just complaining in this region, but every place I went. . . .”

Riley: So I see those years from '88 until--well, for a couple of years there, it was a struggle. It was a struggle, and I heard a lot more complaining than I did support. Not just complaining in this region, but every place I went.

Storey: Do you remember a specific project that Pacific Northwest had to implement where you used the Denver technical staff?

Planning Undertaken Using Denver Planning Staff

Riley: Well, I don't know about implementation. That implies that you actually put something on the ground and did it. But in the planning area we did use Denver technical staff in, I think, every study we did. I think some where we had a pretty darn good response were our studies in Oregon where we used the Denver hydrology staff, since [most of our needs were directed at] ~~all of our needs practically were~~ stream flow restoration[.] ; ~~you know, restore stream flow . . . stream flow restoration.~~ We depended pretty heavily on the Denver hydrology group because that's where the hydrologists were, and we got some pretty good service out of those folks in the hydrology group.

“ . . . I think that the planning group here, even though we didn't give it 100 percent, we supported ACRM, tried to make the ACRM approach work . . .”

Really, to be honest with you, I think that the planning group here, even though we didn't give it 100 percent, we supported ACRM, tried to make the ACRM approach

43. The “Report of the Commissioner's Program and Organization Review Team” which Reclamation published in 1993 is commonly known as the CPORT (pronounced “see port”) report. It was one of two major 1993 documents produced during Commissioner Beard's reorganization of Reclamation. Another document was Commissioner Daniel P. Beard's *Blueprint for Reform: The Commissioner's Plan for Reinventing Reclamation*.

work, to much, much, much greater extent than some of the other divisions or offices here. Part of that, I think, is because I had respect for Bob Lanky and knew Terry and knew Bill McDonald. [I thought Terry Lynott and Bill in ACRM were trying hard to work it out.] Some of our technical people were down there in economics and hydrology, and I had respect for them and wanted to try to make it work.

“ . . . I’ve been a believer . . . that the best place to try to solve the problem is right out where the problem is, and I have hope that the new area manager concept, directed away from the new project development and more towards better project operation, is going to do some good. . . . ”

But I’ve been a believer, I guess, because of my background, in that the best place to try to solve the problem is right out where the problem is, and I have hope that the [new] area manager concept,⁴⁴ directed away from the new project development and more towards better project operation, is going to do some good.

Storey: Now, if I recall correctly, part of the reorganization was moving people from the regions to Denver.

Riley: Uh-huh.

Storey: Could you talk about that a little bit, the people who went and *why* they went instead of other people, that kind of thing?

“ . . . we had been downsizing . . . every year since 1973 to the point where we . . . had a relatively small staff. . . . good hydrology people are a premium in the Bureau. So our hydrology people . . . I think one or two went to our O&M division to work . . . on operations . . . Two of our environmental people . . . went to our regional environmental officer, because . . . under the reorganization, the regions were to do all but the large, more complex environmental impact statements. . . . ”

Riley: Well, if I can recollect. On the planning side, I think the number of people that went to Denver was limited. I can’t remember the exact number. I know there were two or three economists and one or two hydrologists. I don’t believe there were any engineers. We didn’t have any sociologists. There were no environmental specialists. One of the, I guess you could call it fortunate—one of the things about being on the planning side is that we had been downsizing and downsizing and downsizing every year [since 1973]

44. Note that a couple of different reorganizations are involved in this discussion.

In 1988 under Commissioner C. Dale Duvall and Deputy Commissioner Joe D. Hall the planning staff consolidation in Denver occurred.

In 1993-1994 under Commissioner Dan Beard there was a move toward decentralization which involved consolidation within regions of project operations offices, construction offices, and planning offices into fewer “area offices” which were responsible for projects in specified geographic areas. Many functions also transferred from the regional offices to the area offices so it was a new approach to management of Reclamation projects.

Oral histories, gathered by the Reclamation history program, of Commissioner John W. Keys III, Commissioner Bob Johnson, Commissioner Daniel (Dan) P. Beard, Assistant Commissioner and Regional Director J. William (Bill) McDonald, Max Van Den Berg, and others contain particularly relevant information relative to aspects of these reorganizations since many oral history interviews occurred soon after the 1988 reorganization and during the 1993-1994 reorganization.

to the point where we didn't have a very large staff in the region. We didn't have any planning people in the project offices or field offices, so we had a relatively small staff [impacted by the reorganization].

A couple of our hydrology people—I'll tell you now that good hydrology people are a premium in the Bureau. So our hydrology people that didn't go to Denver, I think one or two went to our O&M division to work with our project managers on operations, because [experienced hydrologists] they are extremely, extremely scarce. [Two of our] The environmental people that we had went to our regional environmental officer, because, as I recall, under the reorganization, the regions were to do all but the large, more complex environmental impact statements. So since planning wasn't going to be doing the impact statements anymore, the regional environmental officer took that responsibility on and took the staff to do it.

Now, what was the rest of your question? Why . . .

Storey: I was just asking about who moved and why. How was it thought of in terms of the reorganization that this person would go and that one wouldn't?

Riley: I think there was general agreement, general agreement that economics could be done well in Denver, and so a couple of economists did, in fact, go. It was felt that hydrologists, like I have said, to be repetitive, were at a premium. We were short of hydrologists in the operating offices and also in the O&M group, and they were just not going to get lost to the region. So they were put either in O&M to work with the project managers[.] , and that wasn't bad, even though it sounds like it was trying to escape part of the idea there. [Our project] Those offices truly were *not* staffed *adequately* in the area of hydrology to meet the demands that were being placed on our projects for minimum flows and that sort of thing. It was a wise move to have those people stay.

I told you about the environmental specialists. We had no engineers, because previously we had consolidated our engineering expertise in this region into the Division of Design and Construction[.] , and planning contracted with our Division of Design and Construction to do our engineering. So we had no engineers in '88 to send away.

Storey: Well, tell me about your transition from planning supervisor to program coordinator for the region.

Riley: Well, the regional director said after—when did Dan Beard come into office, do you remember?

Storey: Must have been about March of '93.

Riley: Yeah. So the regional directors, I think, were challenged through the E-M-C⁴⁵ or

45. Executive Management Committee. This is a coordination and policy meeting, generally held three to six times a year, of the executive staff of Reclamation which varies slightly in make-up dependent upon the current Commissioner's thinking. It has also been known over the years by various titles such as the PMC, Permanent

(continued...)

whatever. What is that called now anyway? Or does it even exist any more.

Storey: To be honest, it exists, but I've lost track of what they're calling it now.

The Futures Team and Report

Riley: Okay. The regional directors were challenged [by Commissioner Beard and the EMC (Executive Management Committee)] to look at their organization, to look at their mission, to see what their business is about. So John Keys put together a review team. I think it was called the Futures Team or something like that, and I was a member of that. We put together a futures report that talked about what we believed the region's mission to be, what the challenges to the region were, what the needs, what the organization of the region was at the time and what the organizational challenges or problems appeared to be, and what we would recommend as some possible future actions to take in regard to the regional organization and staffing and program direction and program priority.

John Keys Proceeded with Reorganization of the Region

So we put that ~~together~~, report together, for the regional director, and [John Keys] ~~he~~ shared it with the other managers in the region and with all of the staff in the region. And then, through a series of meetings with all of the managers in the region, he adopted a[n action] plan to move ahead with, and that plan included some realignment of the old traditional divisions [within the regional office and also recommended creation of new area offices].

[The action plan proposed creation of] ~~[Inaudible portion] creating the area offices, eliminating the assistant regional directors as we had known them, and creating the position of regional program coordinator and then the area managers and two new program managers to run technical services and one to run environmental operations and that sort of thing. So the regional director asked if I would assume that position[, regional program coordinator,] as a directed reassignment. It was one of the directed reassignments that he made, and I said, "I have a headache and I want to go home, but I'll do it. I'll try it."~~ So that's how that happened.

Storey: What was the program coordinator position?

There Were Three Program Directors for Administrative Services, Technical Services, and Environment and Operations and the Regional Program Coordinator Was Responsible to Facilitate the Meetings and Work of the Program Directors and the Regional Director

Riley: Under the regional director's ~~new plan, or the~~ new organization ~~that he decided to adopt~~, he had the area managers, the three area managers, and the regional power service center [manager]. He had three directors. I'll call them directors. They were

45. (...continued)
Management Committee, and the RLT, Reclamation Leadership Team.

program directors. There's one for administrative services, one for technical services, and then one for environment and operations. All of these people that I've just mentioned [along with the regional finance manager, regional personnel manager, and public affairs officer,] formed a board of directors. We used to ~~have this report request to the board of directors where these managers sit down at least monthly to [set] talk about program direction, [discuss budget, and deal with critical issues, review staffing needs, and so on.] mission, business, accomplishments, personnel, and that sort of thing.~~

So the program manager was really the—at least I served that role as a facilitator for that group and also monitored the program development and [accomplishment.] ~~progress. I tried to consult—well,~~ I consulted with the regional director[, area managers,] and the program directors about where I saw their programs going, where there were still conflicts [and duplications], where there were accomplishments—what I thought needed to be tweaked, some things they might consider. I pretty much developed the agenda for the board of directors meetings in consultation with members of the board, facilitated those meetings, worked with the regional finance manager on budgeting.

It was kind of an interesting job. I had no direct supervisory responsibility. I didn't have any authority over any of the directors or office managers or any staff. But it was a good and worthwhile job. But, when we designed that position, it had kind of a “sunset” concept. We saw that it would be pretty traumatic to make the changes we were making; and to do away with the old division identities; and try to form some new associations with people; and to get the board of directors working; and to understand the big picture; and to try to work as a board to take this region somewhere. That had never been done before. We'd had regional staff meetings once a year, but this was a whole new—so the regional program coordinator was to try to, I guess, be the ramrod[, I think John Keys wanted me to be the ramrod]—~~you wouldn't want to call it enforcer—the~~ prompter, to try to get this thing in place and going and to try to deal with some of the negativism . . .

Storey: And the idea, then, was that the position would disappear?

Riley: Well, that was one option, was for it to then disappear [after a time.] ~~or to assume—well, I would say that the . . .~~

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Storey: You were saying the first option was for it to disappear.

Riley: Yeah. I would say for it to disappear after two or three years, because you didn't want another layer of some kind of “executive” level, ~~somebody in there.~~ The idea was for the area managers to, by that time, have developed their programs and their staffing levels and for those staffing changes to have been transferred from the region to the area offices, so that the area managers were, in fact, pretty much self-contained operating entities that understood the big picture. And when I say the big picture, unlike other

regions, in this region the old project managers were O&M people. They didn't do problem-solving in the sense of new projects. I mean, you know, they would tweak their operations, and they were good at that, but they didn't deal with some parts of the Reclamation issue. [Same for the regional office functions. Then the board of directors would serve as the arena for coordination.]

“ . . . the commissioner wanted the area offices . . . [to] deal with the full range of Reclamation issues and mission . . . So in this region, that was a new thing. It was taking . . . an O&M organization and trying to mold it into a . . . more comprehensive-type operation in the field. . . .”

So now the commissioner wanted the area offices, or suggested that they deal with the full range of Reclamation issues and mission and problems and problem-solving.

Area Managers Differed in Their Ideas about the Boundaries of Their Responsibilities

So in this region, that was a new thing. It was taking basically an O&M organization and trying to mold it into a bigger—or you could do more comprehensive-type operation in the field. So our first board meetings, it was interesting to see the different perspectives of the area [and [regional] managers, ~~the new area managers~~. Some, you know, this big in their thinking, and others, you know, [not that] ~~this~~ big.

Storey: Some very large and some small in the way they envisioned it.

Riley: Yeah. Yeah.

Storey: So you were there a year, a little more, a little less?

Riley: I'd say that, yeah. I'm just trying to think. Boy, the years go by so fast. I don't know if it was much over six or eight months. I'm trying to remember when I first started. It seems like it was in—we did the future report, I think, in August, and by maybe November I was kind of working in that job. So it wasn't very long.

Storey: Did Mr. Keys pretty much accept the futures report?

Regional Director Keys Was Concerned about Some of the Reorganization Suggestions

Riley: Pretty much. He struggled with abolishment of some of the old division identity. Not much, though. He could see that there was kind of little pockets of—well, I don't know what you'd call it. What do you call that? Turf?

Storey: Um-hmm.

Riley: He could see turf. ~~He was struggling with~~ When a job would come in or a problem would come in, you know, O&M could do it or planning could do it or environment could do it. [There was duplication in the offices.] He and the assistant regional

directors would struggle frequently and try and decide who should do that job, because planning worked on water conservation and environmental enhancement, O&M worked on the same things. So I guess he was pretty receptive to [dealing with] that. He was kind of interested in having a deputy [regional] director, and the futures report didn't recommend that. I think since that time, though, that's happened. So I think he was, at least outwardly, pretty receptive to it. Quite a number of people weren't.

Storey: Was there quite a bit of struggle on your committee, your work group, whatever it was called?

On the Futures Committee the Tensions Were More Between Field and Regional Staff than among the Regional staff

Riley: Not so much. I think if there was a struggle, it was probably between those members of the committee that were from the regional office and those that were from the field office, and the field office people seeing that they had a mandate to take over more and the regional office people, even though they were good-intentioned, being somewhat reluctant to give away too much. So that was one of the issues that consumed a lot of [time] ~~business~~ and probably still is, is [balancing] the transfer of capability from the regional office to the [area offices.] ~~field office.~~ But generally it was pretty smooth.

The Main Conflicts Were Between People Who Were Put on the Futures Committee and Those Who Were Not

Where the conflict was, was between the people that were on the committee and the people who were not. ~~The people who felt that they were part—those~~ [Some] parts of the organization ~~that~~ felt left out of the process, and some of those people were disappointed enough that . . . they were pretty negative from the beginning of when they first saw the product because of its impact on traditional branches and divisions and its request to transfer staff from the region to the [area offices.] ~~field.~~ [John Keys tried to prevent this by having all review the transition team report and discuss it openly, but tension existed still.]

“The board of directors worked pretty well together, but there was a lot of flak from managers who were not on the board of directors. . . .”

The board of directors worked pretty well together, but there was a lot of flak from managers who were not on the board of directors. So I think there was a feeling by some that you had this elite group of people who [unilaterally] were setting ~~the course in the direction and the~~ program [direction], and then you had these other folks that were being impacted but not contributors.

Storey: How many were on the committee?

The Futures Committee

Riley: Oh, boy. You know, I'm trying to remember. I apologize. I just haven't thought about these things for a long time.

Storey: It doesn't matter.

Riley: It seems to me like there were about [twelve.]~~eight.~~

Storey: How long did it take you and how often did you meet?

Riley: Oh, I think [we met once a month for two days usually.] ~~it took us probably sixty days, and we met more frequently in the beginning and then pretty much in a review capacity in the last few weeks.~~

Storey: Were there any specific areas or specific people who felt left out?

Riley: That weren't on the committee?

Storey: Yeah.

Groups Not Represented on the Futures Committee

Riley: Yeah. I think the ~~Engineering~~ Division [of] Design and Construction, which was the bread and butter of the Bureau from the beginning, didn't have a representative, *per se*, on there. The O&M people who were mainstay didn't have a regional office representative on there, and the regional environmental office didn't have a representative on there~~—so three of the . . . and that's understandable.~~ They carried a big part of the weight [of the regional program.

“ . . . John Keys had a distinct feeling what he wanted to do to try to encourage some new . . . different thought, and so he leaned heavily on the project managers, and some of them have become area managers, and he leaned heavily on the public relations staff and the program, finance, budget staff, and the human resources staff, the managers. . . .”

But John Keys had a distinct feeling what he wanted to do to try to encourage some new thought or some different thought, and so he leaned heavily on the project managers, and some of them have become area managers, and he leaned heavily on the public relations staff and the program, finance, budget staff, and the human resources staff, the managers. So I just hope it works for John, because I still honestly, basically, believe it's the best thing to do with what the Bureau's got to do. I hope it works.

Storey: What else should we talk about? Who was the regional director before John Keys?

Riley: I'm trying to remember if it was—we had H. T.,⁴⁶ Ed [Edwin F.] Sullivan, John Keys. Has somebody told you who it was?

Storey: No, I don't know. I don't have a list for this region.

46. After Harold T. Nelson came Edwin F. Sullivan (1972-1974), Rodney J. Vissia (1974-1980), Lester W. Lloyd (1980-1986), John W. Keys III (1986-1998), J. William (Bill) McDonald (1998-2010), and Karl Wirkus (2010-2011).

Riley: Oh, I know. There was one after Ed. Bill. He went to work for a consulting firm. I can't think of his last name. That's an embarrassment. But I can't think it. I'll think of it tomorrow.

Storey: Tell me about Ed Sullivan.

Regional Director Ed Sullivan

Riley: Ed Sullivan was a pretty much structural solution-type guy, very outspoken, tall, pretty loud voice, big bushy eyebrows, and pretty definite on what he wanted done. I didn't work very closely with him. And, that's about my recollection of Ed.

Storey: Well, let me ask you then if you're willing for these tapes and the resulting transcripts to be used by researchers?

Riley: Sure.

Storey: Good. Thank you. Appreciate it.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MARCH 20, 1995.
END OF INTERVIEWS.

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