

An Interview With  
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Retired Range and Wildlife Management Specialist  
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

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The Interviewer is Dick Nelson

**NELSON:** OK Dave, why don't you fill us in on your early life.

**BABB:** I was born in 1939 in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. When I was about ten years old we moved to San Diego, California, where I attended grade school and junior high. Then we moved to New Mexico where my dad worked for General Dynamics or Convair Aircraft. I attended high school in Alamogordo, New Mexico, where I graduated in 1957.

I attended New Mexico A&M which in 1959 became New Mexico State University. I attended a year and a half then dropped out to work at White Sands as a missile tracking camera operator. I was married in 1959 and our first son was born in 1960. After two more children came along I wanted to return to college. I had found that I could get a degree in wildlife management. I had always had an interest in wildlife and the outdoors.

Jobs were hard to come by then. I tried to find a job in Las Cruces for a couple of years that would allow me to return to college. One day I received a notice that I had been assigned family housing at the

university and had 10 days to let them know if I planned on going back to school. I decided that over that coming weekend I would make one more try for a nearby job. I went to work Friday morning and they asked for two volunteers to move to Las Cruces and work the four to midnight shift at White Sands in the drafting department which I was qualified for. So the company moved me, my wife, and three kids to Las Cruces. Everyone told me it couldn't be done, with a family and working full time, but I resumed college in 1964.

I brought my grades up enough so that I qualified for a graduate assistantship, so I remained for a Masters in Wildlife Biology which I received in 1970.

My first job in the field was with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Eastern New Mexico. In less than a year I found out there was a special tule elk study that was scheduled to be conducted in the Owens Valley. The BLM Bishop area office had not been opened at that time, and since the Owens Valley was still under the Bakersfield District, that seemed to scare everybody off. Only two of us applied. I knew where the Owens Valley was as I had been there in 1952 and had always wanted to come back. I applied and was selected for the job and we moved out here. I moved up as high as I could and in 1974, to advance any higher, I had to transfer to Bakersfield where I became the District Wildlife Specialist. Since I had drafting, display preparation, and audio-visual experience during my time at White Sands, I also served as the Planning Coordinator. Then I was told it was time to move on to Washington D.C. and promotion. To me, promotion and D.C. didn't go together in the same sentence. So, I was sitting there in November 1974 looking out my window at the tule fog in Bakersfield and something (someone) told me to call the Department. I remembered that a few years earlier Paul Lane had

talked about needing environmental people on staff for all the things that were happening in the Owens Valley. I called Duane Georgeson and he told me that just an hour earlier they had decided they needed to hire someone right away because Congressional Hearings were coming up on the legislation to have the valley turned into a tule elk refuge.

There was no civil service position in the Department at that time for Wildlife Specialist so I was offered a personal services contract. I accepted and in January 1975, I was back in the valley as a consultant. Jim Wickser always called me the Department's "insultant."

I started right in by writing a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) for the Buckley Ponds Warm Water Fisheries, and was just starting on the other portion of my contract, which was to write livestock grazing programs, when we got started on the Environmental Impact Report (EIR). This was the second EIR that was written on the increased groundwater pumping in the Owens Valley for the Department's Second Aqueduct project. I worked on the vegetation and wildlife chapters.

I was a consultant until October 1979 when a civil service class was created for a Range and Wildlife Management Specialist.

**NELSON:** How were retirement benefits, etc., handled?

**BABB:** As a consultant I paid self-employment taxes and all that. But, I ended getting all that back (the five years) on the "buyout" retirement option I took.

It has been a lot of interesting years and I think I got in on some of the most interesting years the Department has seen, particularly the Inyo v. Yorty times.

**NELSON:** Range and Wildlife Management. That major wasn't offered at many

schools was it?

**BABB:** All of the state universities in the four-corners area offered those programs. Humboldt University is probably the number one California school. Of course, one of the "fathers" of wildlife management as a profession taught at Berkeley. Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, offers a good program too.

The program at New Mexico State did not place wildlife management in its biology department, which I thought was a help to me. If it had, the emphasis would have been more towards producing laboratory biologists. Most of the people who complete those programs are lost when they get out into the field. Fortunately, New Mexico State, Arizona State, Utah State, and Colorado State place wildlife management in their agriculture departments.

I was required to complete 40 hours of ranch management, soil science, a lot of botany, and things like that because it all works together. They consider wildlife as a harvestable crop so it was placed in the agriculture department which I think was a benefit when I came to work for the Department.

**NELSON:** How did you get on with BLM?

**BABB:** It was through an on-campus "career days" recruiting of graduates. I was actually a range conservationist, although I had my degree in wildlife. My first job was a little embarrassing. It was summer at Roswell, New Mexico, right at the edge of the flat tabletop of West Texas, and they had some contractors building about a 10 mile long fence line. It was hot, about 105 degrees. In areas where there are antelope, the bottom strand must be 18 inches off the ground because antelope go

under fences instead of going over them. So, I would drive around in my air-conditioned pickup drinking iced tea. Every once in a while I would have to stop and get out and measure the clearance to make sure they got that bottom strand right. I can imagine what the workers were calling me while they were out there suffering in that heat.

**NELSON:** If you were out driving around Roswell, New Mexico in a pickup, did you meet any aliens in your travels?

**BABB:** No, for some reason I didn't, and I worked right on that ranch. The fellow who owned the ranch was Tom Corn. He thought it was the biggest joke he has ever heard of, but if people wanted to pay and go out to look at the alledged flying saucer crash site he'd take them.

**NELSON:** You said there had not been BLM personnel stationed in the Owens Valley.

**BABB:** Right, not in the Owens Valley. There was what was called a District Grazier back in the 1940s who came up for a couple of weeks at a time and talked with the ranchers. So, I was actually the first one in the Bishop area office. Our office was really out in Round Valley. There were four of us. One wildlife, one range management, one real estate specialist and the Area Manager.

**NELSON:** Why was the office opened?

**BABB:** There were a lot of things going on. That was just a year after Charles Manson had been caught over the hill near Saline Valley and held in the Independence jail. The Saline Valley area was a little wild and it was BLM land. It was felt that people were needed to get out there on a regular basis to keep track of what was going on. The environmental

movement was really starting to move in 1970-'71, and the Department's Second Aqueduct was operating and generating flack over the environmental issues involved with that. With all that brewing in and about the Owens Valley, I think the Feds thought they had better get their act together too.

BLM didn't have good surveys of the wildlife and vegetation communities on its vast properties. At that time the Bishop area covered from Ridgecrest to Topaz Lake and everything east of the Sierras. So, the four of us handled everything from the Northern San Bernardino County, plus Inyo and Mono counties.

My principal assignment then was the Tule elk. I lived with the elk eight hours a day, every other week, keeping track of what they ate and if there was competition with the cattle.

**NELSON:** Was that before Beulah Edminston came on the scene wanting to protect the Tule elk?

**BABB:** No, she was around. She always insisted that we counted the elk herds twice when we did our inventory's because she and her followers were convinced the Tule elk was close to extinction at that time. The truth was different however. Actually they were multiplying like rabbits.

**NELSON:** Did you get to know Beulah, and if so, what do you think her motivation was?

**BABB:** I knew her family well and I also knew her son, Joe. He was like second in command of the L.A. area Sierra Club. I think it was a cause they saw as a reason to become involved in "protecting" something. Beulah didn't come up to the Owens Valley much. Supporters I guess,

would come up to look around from time to time. They said they wanted to help us on the census counts. One time some guys showed up in a lowered Camero, about four inches off the ground. They were going to follow us out on the dirt roads to do the count. I think Beulah was probably looking for a cause and had read some of the background concerning the Tule elk that showed that by the 1870s the elk were almost extinct. Fish and Game hadn't put out much subsequent information to show how much they had recovered. On top of that the suggested impacts to the environment because of L.A. water exports from the Owens Valley probably made her afraid that since the valley was the only place where the Tule elk seemed to be holding on, there shouldn't be anything to cause them harm.

There was a little state reserve "zoo", over near Taft, in Kern County and there was one small herd of about 50 animals up near Ukiah, in Northern California. Although the Owens Valley herds totaled the largest numbers, this was not in the elks native range. They were not native to this side of the Sierras.

**NELSON:** Beulah's motivation was not against L.A. or its aqueducts was it?

**BABB:** No, it was just to obtain special protection for the elk. They were also an anti-gun, anti-hunting group. They got State Senator Behr to introduce legislation in 1969 to stop hunting of the Tule elk until the state population reached 2,500 animals. At that time the state population was maybe 700.

**NELSON:** What was a typical day out tracking the Tule elk?

**BABB:** It's amazing how much I could do when I was young that I can't do

today. There were five elk herds primarily. Fifty-four elk were brought into the Owens Valley in February 1934 and released. Over the years they had formed separate herd areas and ranged from Laws to Owens Lake. We noted over the years that the elk do not like each other in too large a herd so some had formed separate little herds here and there. It was easy for me with the five major herd areas so that one day a week I visited each herd area and followed them around for the day. I recorded how many and what location, and then I would lay down or get behind a tree with a spotting scope or binoculars and just watch them for a couple of hours. I would pick out two or three animals and count how many times they would take a bite of a certain species of plant so we could develop an idea of what their preferences were.

Beulah had gotten Congressman Dingle from Michigan to introduce a bill to turn the valley into a refuge just for the Tule elk. All the cattle would have to be removed because it was thought that cattle were a food competitor. So part of my job was compare the diet of the elk to the diet of the cattle. I found that there wasn't much overlap. They would be together in a meadow in the summer grazing together, but these elk are primarily what is called, browsers, and they eat about 80 percent brush, 20 percent grass. Cattle were just about the opposite. So, it wouldn't help much to get rid of all the cattle.

It's interesting that after following those elk around for about 25 years, you think you have them figured out, but one little change in the weather just throws everything off. The two-year drought of 1976-77 made a major change by bringing two elk herds together down at Fish Springs, south of Big Pine and across from Tinnemaha Reservoir. There was a small herd that had stayed near the reservoir all the time. Then there was a herd that stayed down at Aberdeen, which was called the



Goodale Herd. During the drought the two herds descended on the alfalfa field near Fish Springs and stayed there for two years. When the drought ended, some of them filtered back, but about 30 remained and started another herd which still stays around the fish hatchery area and the alfalfa fields.

**NELSON:** Did you stay on the Tule elk issue until it was more or less settled?

**BABB:** Yes, of course when I switched over to the Department I still worked on elk issues. My first Department assignment was preparing to testify when they held Congressional Hearings on the Tule elk.

**NELSON:** Who was handling that for the Department before you arrived?

**BABB:** Russ Rawson and Dennis Tillemans, the computer specialist. Dennis would go out of Independence one day a week and just keep track of where the elk were. Russ Rawson was out among the ranchers at that time and he would keep his eye out for elk too. The ranchers would help sometimes too, except they would clam up a bit when you told them you saw some elk with their anglers sawed off. Well, once in awhile some of the ranchers practiced roping. The elk were pests to a lot of ranchers. The elk were good at knocking down fences causing the cattle to stray.

**NELSON:** You moved back here from Bakersfield, and from BLM to the Department in January 1975?

**BABB:** Yes, the Department had prepared their first EIR on the increased groundwater pumping, then came the Inyo v. Yorty lawsuit, resulting in the Court dismissing the EIR as inadequate. The Department then proceeded with the preparation of a second EIR.

**NELSON:** What was your first project?

**BABB:** I was hired to write wildlife habitat management plans for City land and to develop a livestock grazing program for the lessees's. Those two items were what the Water System believed were the major things they needed to get a better handle on, i.e., how the land was being used and what was there. But, before I really got into that, We got the go-ahead to begin preparation of the second EIR, so, I got into that business real quick.

About that time I obtained some microfilm covering past local newspapers. To find out what's changed in the valley as far as what kind of wildlife was present in the past, or any changes in vegetation, or things like that, old newspapers are gold mines because the smallest, most non-newsworthy item was usually printed in those days. So, I became interested in the history of the valley and what the valley was like in the pre-Department days.

Then I became involved in working on the tours of the valley that the Department sponsored for L.A. area community leaders, regulators and politicians. On the tours I discussed some of the aqueduct operations and pointed some things out, but my main point was the "comic relief," or whatever they wanted to call it, regarding the historic events and incidents that occurred in the valley. I would get on the bus at Lone Pine and on the way up the valley I would talk about the local history and the humorous sidebars to it all.

**NELSON:** Who was your boss when you first came to work for the Department?

**BABB:** At the start I reported directly to Jim Wickser. When Jim

returned to L.A. and Duane Buchholz replaced him as Northern District Engineer, Duane thought there were too many people reporting directly to him. Since Russ Rawson was the ranch lands resource administrator, I started reporting to him. About that time they started hiring more people (Biologists).

After a few years of that, they brought in Lloyd Anderson, who reported to Russ, so then we reported to Lloyd, who reported to Russ, who reported to Duane. We didn't really care who we reported to. In any event we didn't report too much because we were too busy doing field work.

**NELSON:** You say you got into the EIR process. What were your marching orders?

**BABB:** It was to prepare the wildlife and vegetation data.

**NELSON:** Where did this data come from for the first EIR?

**BABB:** The California Department of Fish and Game (Fish and Game) was contracted for the first EIR to do the chapter or chapters on vegetation and wildlife. I think it amounted to three pages. That resulted in some of the complaints the Department received from the environmental groups. They maintained those sections were inadequate. So, when I started working on the second EIR, I put together large plant lists and described all the various plant communities and then went through all of the wildlife species and developed a list of them and separated them into birds of prey, songbirds, owls, hawks, eagles, waterfowl, and so forth. We identified species as to whether they were migrants, summer or winter residents, or year around residents.

We also prepared lists of the environmental projects that the

Department completed in the valley that many people were unaware of. Buckley Ponds, the warm water fishery area, is a good example. The Department had, on its own, supplied water there for many years.

The Tule elk wildlife view point was another project that the Department undertook working with the Inter-Agency Committee.

**NELSON:** What was your data base for vegetation and wildlife details in the EIR. You couldn't go out in a short time and collected all of that first hand, could you?

**BABB:** No, it was mainly from observations that had been made over the years by other agencies. BLM, Forest Service, and Fish and Game has lists of species that they classified as "occurring" in Owens Valley. Those lists were verified and are being updated continuously.

At the turn of the century a very detailed bird count was made in the valley. This was the A. K. Fisher Expedition. One of the members was C. Hart Merriam, who has had his name applied to a number of wildlife species, like the kangaroo rat, who's scientific name is *Dipodomys merriami*. A number of species are named after this gentleman, like James Audubon before him.

Anyway, that was a detailed list which proved very helpful. It actually started with Fort Independence back in the 1860s. They would mount expeditions and they would always include a naturalist with the group.

The Fisher Expedition spent four summer months making their way from Owens Lake to the headwaters of the Owens River. They recorded 137 species of birds. There are presently 380 recorded here which shows me that the place is not drying up and blowing away as many people try to maintain.

That was my biggest job over the years, trying to confuse the issues

with facts. There were and are so many misconceptions and people tend to believe what they read in the media about what this valley was like.

I put together a slide show that I tried out on the local Rotary Club. I used slides and materials from the Wildlife Society since I was the regional director for the state affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation. I was a charter member of the California Natural Resources Federation. Some of the slides I used were those used by us on presentations made during National Wildlife Week, which is the first week of spring. I would make presentations in the local schools during that week. I remember one year, our theme was, "Water, you can't live without it."

Well, I put some of those slides together with ones I had shot up here to illustrate what the media's interpretation of the history of Owens Valley as opposed to the facts. I began with volcanoes and that stuff, "and the valley was formed..." then it turned into this lush garden. I had a slide of rolling hills covered with buffalo, then marshes filled with alligators and moose. I'd just throw that in. Then came the cattle and everything was wonderful. Then some evil person from Southern California looked at this valley (I used a picture of William Mulholland with his cigar in his mouth.) Then came the aqueduct which I showed some construction pictures of, and overnight the valley was changed. Here, I inserted some slides of the Oklahoma "dust bowl." I'd say that's how a lot of the media think Owens Valley developed. Their simplistic view was of a Garden of Eden turned into a wasteland. But, let's go back and look at the facts." I would then bring up reports I had from the journals of the early explorers. Agricultural reports I had been able to obtain and which I guess I'm the only person in the valley who now has copies. The farm advisor had a copy, but he's since

left the area.

The Department of Commerce conducted a census of agriculture which was published for the state of California every five years, beginning in 1870. It listed the acreage in various crops, how many cattle, horses, all the animals that were resident. For Inyo County, up until the 1950s, Owens Valley was it. There were a few resources over by Pahrump, Tecopa-Shoshone, but, Inyo County resources were mostly in the Owens Valley.

I was able to show how the valley changed, and that in 1874 the Board of Supervisors passed an Ordinance that since there was such a lack of trees in Owens Valley and that since shade and windbreaks were needed, anyone who planted trees, and the trees survived for three years, would be paid one dollar per tree. That was a lot of money in those days. That helped show that the valley was not this lush garden. It had been turned into something nicer than it is today, however, by about 1925 during the peak of agriculture, it was probably greener than it is today. But, it's still a great deal better environment than the pristine Owens Valley of one hundred and fifty years ago. Some of this material was included in the second EIR.

**NELSON:** You wrote the vegetation and wildlife sections of the EIR?

**BABB:** Yes, and provided answers to the comments received in those areas. It was kind of strange, the first EIR published, other than the vegetation and wildlife material provided by Fish and Game, was really heavy on engineering statistics, down to how everything was done; all the groundwater hydrology and the flows, all the technical stuff. There was even a technical supplement. One of the major complaints to the Court was that the Department was trying to "snow" everyone with all the technical information that not everyone could understand.

The Court came back and gave the Department directions on how to write the second one so that it was understandable.

**NELSON:** Who worked on the second EIR with you?

**BABB:** Russ, Bob Wilson, Fred Finkbeiner, were in on the engineering part. I think Ron Taylor provided a lot of the hydrology and flow data. But, a lot of it was still done by Mel Blevins and Bruce Kuebler. Bruce was the overall coordinator and compiler of the document. Rudy Garcia probably did a lot of work putting it all together.

**NELSON:** Did you have a pretty good feel for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) at that time?

**BABB:** Not really. I didn't even look at CEQA. I just wrote it up. It's kind of funny, I wrote the first National Environmental Quality Act (NEPA) EIR done here in the Owens Valley while I was with the BLM in 1972. It totaled three and a half pages and was on the tule elk situation in the Owens Valley, and everybody thought it was wonderful. So, that's how it changed over the years. Now, they measure how good it is by weight and the number of pages.

**NELSON:** Who were the people in the Owens Valley who jumped on the CEQA issue?

**BABB:** A lot of it stemmed from a couple of active members of the local League of Women Voters and a couple of Supervisors. There really wasn't much of a Sierra Club/Audubon presence at that time. And of course Bennett Kessler from the local media.

**NELSON:** Was Ms. Kessler around at that time?

**BABB:** Yes, when I was brought on as a consultant, John Heston and Bennett Kessler had their radio program on the Lone Pine radio station.

**NELSON:** What were their credentials?

**BABB:** Heston was supposed to have worked for the Hearst empire, or something like that. Bennett's father was a journalist for the New York Times.

Heston and Kessler started in Lone Pine. I have heard one of their tapes where they had taken some things Duane Georgeson had said in answer to questions, and poorly spliced it to manufacture a tape on which Duane gave different answers from what he had really said. The Department lawyers contacted the station operator, the station was on a Department lease, and said something like, "This is really close to libel, and you had better control your people." Apparently the owner told Heston and Kessler to knock it off. He was not going to lose his lease because of their doings. They were said to have told the owner that they wouldn't stop, because it was their job, and they were going to run the Department out of the valley. They wouldn't back down so the station owner fired them.

Of course the story that went around for years is that "the Department had them fired", because they were getting too close to the truth. That was one of the things that really stirred the public up. I disagreed with Duane Georgeson a couple of times after some public meetings we held in the valley. The public would show up and start ranting and raving using incorrect facts over certain subjects accusing the Department of doing this or that. The Department would come into the meetings with all the correct documentation, but would never use much of the material. I asked Duane outside the Bishop High School one evening,



"How come we didn't respond? We have the correct information and could clear up many of their misconceptions." He said that the meetings were just for the public to get things off their chests. I know that was probably the proper thing at the time, but if some charge was made and not responded to, people in the audience would tend to believe it was true.

It was explosive and dangerous at times. I remember this one guy who was really threatening and was pretty well liquored up to boot. He got Mel Blevins outside, pulled a knife, and said that if he ever saw Mel in town again he was going to cut Mel's throat.

It's very easy for the Department to cause consternation in the valley. Jim Wickser was probably right, but it sure caused an uproar here when he recently said in jest concerning the Owens Lake dust issue that it would be cheaper for the Department to give the people in Keeler a million dollars each and have them move. Oh man, that was on the news and in the local papers for a month. "Who does he think he is?" With the money the Department has spent that might have been a bargain.

**NELSON** What do you think, was Heston and Kessler hurt by the Department? What, in your opinion, was their motivation? Did they just pick on the big guy around with the hopes of furthering their careers?

**BABB:** They had heard of the controversy and they did their best to perpetuate it. In order to make the area look a bit better the Department had proposed to remove dead trees and clean up debris along the highways. The "Hestonites" went around hanging red flags on all the dead trees so that when people asked about the flags they could say that it was a result of the groundwater pumping. They didn't even want the Department to clean the area up because they believed we were

just trying to hide the evidence of all the destruction we had caused.

There were times when Bennett seemed reasonable, friendly enough, but there's that thing about the Department with her.

**NELSON:** Are Heston and Kessler still around?

**BABB:** Yes, Bennett owns a local radio station, KDAY.

John Heston is still around too. He is sort of a guru. He has a little compound on Independence Creek, across from the park as you travel north out of town. He often dresses in a robe and at times, with others, sits in the lotus position and chants in a room with a blue light to prepare for a news program, etc.,.

**NELSON:** How do you know that?

**BABB:** From people who have left the area who were members of his group. They called themselves the "Hestonites." There were a number of young women who all looked alike with long straight hair. Heston had been involved in gold mining. As a matter of fact, I saw him on a National Geographic Special on prospecting in the Southwest, and there was John Heston talking about his gold mine. I was told that he would take three or four of the girls with him for a week or so out to handle his gold mine stuff.

He made a point of having them obtain local jobs in key positions. One was a major attorney and is now a public defender. She is a real good attorney. John had a heart attack last year and was in pretty bad shape for awhile. She had to cancel several trials because she was so upset. There were several of his followers in the media, and one in the Tax Collector's Office. They look to John Heston as their leader. Greg James, the Inyo Water Department Director, is not too popular with

Heston and Kessler these days. In their eyes he sold out to the Department. Since the Department funds the entire Inyo Water Department the far-out thinking is that Department must control the Inyo Water Department. If they only knew how much misery the Inyo folks cause the Department. The Inyo Water Department has about nineteen environmental-type people on their staff. The Department has four, but, now there's only three with me just retiring.

The County has botanists, and what they call general ecologists, hydrographers, etc. There is one person over there who follows our hydrographers around. We brought the County the same equipment that we use to measure the depth of the water. So, the Inyo Water Department person follows our people by about an hour and takes the same readings to make sure we are not falsifying the data.

When the county brought up their need for that equipment during the final memorandum of understanding meetings, I never saw Bob Wilson get so mad. He said something like, "After all of these years of trying to work together, if that's all the trust there is, that's it," and he threw all of his stuff on the floor and walked out. Everyone looked a little shocked and they turned to Duane Buchholz who said, "I think that about covers it."

We went on discussing other things and about ten minutes to four, Bob came back into the room, picked up his stuff off the floor, placed it in his briefcase, and without a word, walked out, and went home.

It sort of shocked the County then they found out that Bob was going to be Duane's replacement as Northern District Engineer. Bob probably got the job at the right time because we were getting a lot of flak from the county. Bob slowed them down a little, but not for long.

When the Technical Committee was formed, Patti Novak, a botanist,

who was the second Range and Wildlife Specialist the Department hired, and I sat in on all the meetings. Inyo County, through their chief scientist, Dr. Groenereld kept coming up with unimportant little research projects they believed were important. The county was, and still is, in my opinion, tied too closely to the academic community. Research is number one with their scientists. They know nothing about management and they don't care. Many things they wanted to do seemed aimed towards publishing papers and giving talks at symposiums and things like that.

These projects, in the eyes of the county, would of course, be funded by the Department. Department management would look at me and my group and ask if we would evaluate the proposal to see if it might be worthwhile. I guess Patti and I responded too many times that the Inyo proposals were stupid, so we weren't invited back to any of the meetings. I guess, the two of us and Mel Blevins were "rocking the boat" too much.

Of course, we couldn't match Mel. He would get after their hydrologist something awful. He would argue about everything they would say. Every once in a while he would be taken aside and told something like, "Hey, we're trying to reach an agreement with these people. Now, don't make waves." Now, Paula Hubbard, a biologist, has to sit in on the meetings.

To me the biggest problem that I see is the collapse of the Department from what it used to be as far as the Aqueduct Division is concerned. I think we gave away the store in the Agreement.

**NELSON:** Do you mean the final Inyo-Department agreement?

**BABB:** Yes. The way it began it looked like it was good process of discussions, and compromises, but, I don't think there were many real

compromises, by Inyo County. We can see that by the way it has come around full circle now and it's depressing at times.

Sure there were discussions, the Department wanted some things and Inyo County wanted some things. So, OK, we would give that, and the County would give this, and we finally reached agreement. But, in come the amicus parties, or friends of the Court, Fish and Game, Sierra Club, and the Owens Valley Committee that several local environmental people had formed.

It seems to me that some of the Department people in Los Angeles haven't caught on to the fact that what was demanded in all the amicus briefs were things that the county had dropped or compromised on earlier in the County-Department discussions. So, now they have gotten what they originally wanted by the way of an MOU to satisfy the amicus parties.

I can't prove it but it seems like the amicus parties were prompted by Inyo County. I think it was something like, "We gave this up, but you guys push for it." At any time of the day, you can see those people going in and out of the County Water Department office.

An example, at least to me, was the project of having people go over aerial photographs to make sure our vegetation analysis was correct and that our estimates in the EIR of areas impacted due to the the increased groundwater pumping were right. Somewhere in the papework we said, ok, we would do the analysis and hire experts in the field and if it was found that a greater area was impacted than what the EIR stated, we would revise the EIR accordingly and increase our mitigation.

To me the Department gave up a lot to get the agreement and we thought Inyo County gave up a lot, but, the County now seems to be getting back everything they "gave up".

**NELSON:** Were Forest Service and BLM involved?

**BABB:** No, but state Fish and Game was. Their complaint was mainly over the Lower Owens River Project. We used that as in-lieu mitigation. You can't go back and get springs flowing again when you have sunk wells to provide water for a fish hatchery. You would have to shut off all the wells to bring the spring area back, if it came back at all.

So, if you can't mitigate on-site you do something somewhere else. It came out that maybe a hundred acres in the Owens Valley had been impacted in terms of springs and seeps. Now, we are putting water back into 52 miles of river bed, which will improve thousands of acres of habitat.

Enter Fish and Game, who doesn't like that as in-lieu mitigation. They also didn't think we used enough detail in describing what the Lower Owens River Project would be. We told them that it would be a separate EIR (which is being done now). We have consultants out of Idaho who are specialists in stream restoration working on it now.

Fish and Game wanted to know all the details, how much flow, when, where, and all sorts of stuff. The areas of contention are now increasing from forest boundary to forest boundary on each side of the valley, or getting way out of the Lower Owens River flood plain to analyze the vegetation. We are told we now need an aquatic invertebrate expert to take a look at some of the little springs way up on the sides of the mountains. Actually, there's Department land around them, but it's all landlocked in the forest. The whole program, to me anyway, is just getting way out of hand.

**NELSON:** The Owens Valley Committee. What do you know of them?

**BABB:** They turned out to be the most reasonable group that we dealt with. They were formed after the second of the three EIR's the Department prepared. Probably the brains behind the Owens Valley Committee (OVC) was Mary DeDecker. She is a well-known botanist for the Owens Valley. She helped us with a plant list for the first EIR way back when. Her husband, Paul, is a retired Department employee, a dispatcher who worked in Independence for years and years. Mary has lived in the valley since the 1930s.

Associated with Mary in the OVC was a retired aeronautical engineer living in the Big Pine area, Bill Manning. Manning had concerns about the valley and the environment. He moved here from the Los Angeles area and after a few years of seeing and reading about what was going on and the controversy, he apparently thought the OVC was a way to become involved. Other members of the OVC included citizens who were members of the Native Plant Society and the Audubon Society, who went on field trips to observe wildflowers and stuff like that, or helped with the annual Audubon bird counts that were made for the area. The OVC was basically composed of people who wanted to become involved but didn't have official positions in any agency. They were just a concerned citizens group. They were fairly reasonable compared to the real "hardline" groups.

**NELSON:** What was their membership?

**BABB:** A dozen at the most. But, with Mary DeDecker, they had a person with very good credentials.

The way Mary tells it, she thought Bruce Kuebler, who was in charge of the Department's first EIR, snubbed her. She was a part of a citizens advisory committee the Department put together to assist in providing

data for the first EIR. She gave us a list of 700 plants that she had identified during her 30 to 40 years of research. The list covered the area between Highway 395 and the Owens River. She also wanted to participate in some of the analysis. She says that Bruce rejected her offer of further help, saying that the Department had just asked her for the plant list and that she wouldn't be needed for any other tasks. She seemed to change after that and be a little more adamant against the Department.

It seems to be a given by people in the Owens Valley that if wells are turned on, plants will die. It's as simple as that. But, most people don't realize that groundwater pumping is necessary during drought years and it's during drought years when the plants are stressed. Playing on people's emotions was one of the major tricks that I thought the County employed and it sure worked great for them. They really knew what they were doing.

I told our attorney's, Ken Downey and Ed Schlotman, that they should take acting lessons. When they got into court they just put everyone to sleep with the facts. The Inyo attorney's or Mono Lake Committee attorney's were like the old silent movie actors. They would use all the eye movements and gestures and exhibit great emotion. The only thing missing was the tinny piano music.

There were also film/TV crews from the BBC and West Germany, that I remember, recording the plight of the Owens Valley and the David/Goliath aspects of the controversy. But, I noticed after three or four years of seeing things in the paper and going to some meetings that the County would bring these reporters up from Los Angeles in February and March when it was nice and green in L.A. at that time of the year. When they arrived up here they would be taken out to a well pumping water into a



canal. The visitors weren't told anything negative about the Department, but they were told that the County's concern was that the pumping was killing the vegetation. Well, the people would look around and probably think, "Geez, everything's brown, the trees are bare." It never dawned on some of them that it was still very much winter up here. How do you fight that?

Concerning Owens Lake. There's probably no getting around the fact that the Department has to do something about that dust. It is a problem. But, we need to put it all in perspective as to how it got there.

In one of the hearings with the Great Basin Air Pollution Control District (Great Basin), I had gathered up all the historic dust storm records and showed that water diversions by early ranchers were extensive. By 1890 there were about 250 miles of canals dug in this valley that diverted many streams and portions of the Owens River from emptying into Owens Lake.

At that time local people were complaining that the canal system was not efficient enough because water was still entering Owens River and "delaying the drying" of Owens Lake. The drying of Owens Lake was the goal of many at the turn of the twentieth century. Fresh water was precious and once the water reached Owens Lake, it was unusable for crops or drinking. Also, we should remember that the environmental concerns voiced today, were not important when the Department first came to the Owens Valley.

So, the lake was shrinking all the time and by 1904 it was about half the size it had been when the steamboats were operating on the lake. In 1905, when Los Angeles began purchasing property in the Owens Valley and began construction of the Los Angeles-Owens River Aqueduct,

the water was taken off many of the ranches and allowed again to flow south in the Owens River. During the aqueduct's construction period, Owens Lake rose 15 feet. After 1913 it started going down again and by 1927 or so, it was typically dry.

First we were accused of making those things up, but, we had documentation. Willis T. Lee, from the Geological Survey, did a report on Owens Lake concerning water level fluctuations. I added all the references to dust storms that I had found in old newspapers. Great Basin finally agreed that early water diversions by settlers and early day ranchers did cause the lake to go down, but when the Department purchased the property the Department assumed their liability.

Great Basin people said that even if the Department wasn't here and there was still the dust problem, they would be forcing the ranchers to fix the problem. I said, "I don't think Great Basin would be in existence if you tried to pull that on the local ranchers."

One of my objectives was to try to put the changes that have occurred over the years in the proper perspective in people's minds. The perception is that it went from a lush garden to nothing overnight and that the sole culprit was the Department.

**NELSON:** Why didn't the Department employees working in the valley have much influence in changing attitudes?

**BABB:** Most of us were accepted up here. It was always, "We know you can't do anything about it. It's 'they' in Los Angeles who are to blame." Now, there are a few people from third or fourth generation Owens Valley families who have worked for the Department and the reason is that the Department pays better than anyone else and in their minds it keeps the money in the valley. Why have someone from Los Angeles

making money off of Owens Valley.

**NELSON:** But you can go out in your neighborhood and people accept you don't they?

**BABB:** Yes, but a couple of times I have had people get that shocked look and step back when they found out that I worked for the Department. In fact, I gave a talk on the tule elk at the senior citizens spring banquet a few years ago. I had the slide show, the whole history of the elk in the valley. Afterwards, we were standing around talking and someone asked who I worked for. I told them and in about 30 seconds my wife and I were standing there all alone. But, that's only happened a couple of times.

Bishop might be a little different because it seems that every seven years or so a quarter of the population changes. Kids grow up here and go away to school and most don't come back because there's not as many opportunities here as in the big cities. It's becoming more of a retirement community. More people are coming in all the time with their minds made up on things, especially the "rape" of the valley by the Department. In Big Pine and Independence everybody knows everybody and they realize that all their Little League ball fields and stuff like that were built after hours by Department personnel working on their time. A lot of work was also approved by the Department as part of community betterment. There were so many things done for each of the communities by the Department.

What I think has really set the Department back about fifty years in public relations here was the installation of water meters in the valley. That's the one thing you really hear a lot about. Customers went from a ten dollar a month flat rate on water to, in hot weather,

a two hundred dollar water bill! That really hurt and it wouldn't have taken thirty seconds time for the L.A. City Council to amend the City Charter and exclude Owens Valley as far as metering was involved. The Charter does say that wherever water is provided, it will be metered.

**NELSON:** Did water consumption come down with metering?

**BABB:** Yes, but there were abusers. People would take off for a week or two and keep their hoses running believing the water would filter back into the ground and stay in the area, rather than going to L.A. There is always some strange logic used by some people.

The metering issue was the biggest Department blunder that I witnessed in my 27 years here.

**NELSON:** Did you work on the third EIR?

**BABB:** Yes. I was the EIR coordinator; basically the liaison between the County and EIP Inc., consultants out of San Francisco, who were agreed upon by the County and Department as a "Third party" to put the EIR together. This was our joint EIR and resulted from our agreement. The County was listed as a responsible agency, but we sometimes thought they should be called irresponsible.

I didn't get to do as much writing that time. I had to answer vegetation and wildlife questions and coordinate the other staff answers. I was getting material from the County and we would sit down and agree upon how certain sections should be written. I would then get the "blessed" material to the consultants.

**NELSON:** Who were you sitting down with from the County?

**BABB:** Greg James and members of his staff, who at that time numbered about a dozen. Only a couple came to our meetings, the rest were out in the field. At every meeting someone from L.A. would come up. Val Lund attended several meetings at the beginning, then Dennis Williams took over and attended most of the rest of the time.

We would write our version of a section of the EIR and the County would write its version. Then we would get together and work it out, then I would get it over to San Francisco. I handled the consultants invoices and made sure they received pay and all that.

You have to hand it to the County Water people. They stuck with it while all the time receiving criticism from certain people in the Owens Valley. Greg James wanted to get the job completed as soon as possible. I think he wanted to go on to bigger things, maybe to become the number one water attorney in the state and make a big name and big bundle rather than being on the Inyo County payroll. He was sharp, kind of like a Duane Georgeson type on the other side. Once he's heard it it's there in his head.

**NELSON:** Do you think the third EIR was adequate?

**BABB:** Yes, but then the Court opened it up to those "amicus" parties. Fish and Game was the first to jump in because they didn't like the Lower Owens River part of it. Then the other parties joined in.

**NELSON:** What was your inkling about problems with Mono Lake?

**BABB:** I got into it in about 1978 when the Mono Lake Committee was formed by David Gaines and David Winkler. That got the Department's attention.

**NELSON:** David Winkler stepped out of it all early didn't he?

**BABB:** Yes, my understanding is that he went on to post-graduate work and now, I think he is at Cornell University.

As far as public relations goes, the Mono Lake Committee made us look pretty bad. They were able to get their message out loud and clear and gained lots of believers.

Lloyd Dennis, who headed the Department's Public Affairs Division for a while came up one time and Duane Buchholz and I showed him around. When we stopped at Lee Vinning he said he was going to visit the Mono Lake Committee information center there to view their presentation. Duane and I went over to Nicely's and got a cup of coffee while he was gone. Dennis met us a half hour or so later and said something like, "What a bunch of clowns, we can have them out of business in six months." Look what happened.

I never thought it would develop as badly as it did. It wouldn't be so bad if there was scientific data to support the Mono Lake Committee's contentions. The only real problems I could see were aesthetics. After ten years of taking a photo at 2:00 p.m. every afternoon and other monitoring, we found only one percent of the days in which there is noticable dust on the east side of Mono Lake. When you talked to the company who harvested brine shrimp their catch went up every year. The number of seagulls kept growing too.

What we had all agreed on initially was that there could be a problem 25 years in the future so that we needed to start thinking about changes the Department could make in the diversions to keep everything ok.

**NELSON:** The Mono Lake people agreed to that?

BABB: Apparantly my hearing was flawed. It seemed to me that the Mono Lake people talked like they would be willing to consider the long-term solution and were going to start examining the problem. But then before we knew what had happened, the Mono Lake Committee sued the Department to stop all diversions.

I think that's what struck Duane Georgeson wrong and he never forgave them. He would talk to anybody in the world about Mono Lake, but he would not sit down with the Mono Lake Committee. He would have someone else do it.

We once had a meeting at U.C. Santa Barbara and Duane had to sit at a table next to David Gaines. Duane moved to the other end of the table.

NELSON: What was the problem?

BABB: We had agreed to study the problem. We could all see that if the lake dropped a number of feet more, there could be possible impact in the breeding and reproduction of the brine shrimp and the other life. We said something like, "You guys have a good point. We commit to start looking into the situation."

Most had agreed that it would be 20-25 years in the future before we started noticing impacts upon the shrimp .

NELSON: Did you concur with that?

BABB: Yes. there was quite a bite of research than that had been completed by Dr. Joseph Jehl with his California gull studies, and the U.C. Santa Barbara team led by Gayle Dana, who was the brine shrimp expert, and David Herbst, who studied the brine flies.

There were some other case studies of saline lakes in the world. Owens Lake even had brine shrimp at one time. It seemed like within about

five years when the salinity reached a certain level the brine shrimp disappeared. But, when Owens Lake was high, the salinity was so bad that it makes Mono Lake look like fresh water.

So, it looked like the Mono Lake people had a point and that the Department was going to have to look at its water-gathering activities. All that was agreed was that we would start looking at the problem and options and we commit some of our staff, such as Malinda Thun from Water Quality. She joined in and cooperated on the brine shrimp and salinity studies. I led the inter-agency gull census to keep track of the bird production.

But, before that ever got going the Mono Lake Committee went to Court to immediatley stop water diversion. That's what got under Georgeson's skin. They didn't really give the Department time to follow through and get started. It was a matter of a couple of months after the agreement that the lawsuit was filed.

**NELSON:** Were you at the meeting where that agreement was struck?

**BABB:** No, that was all told to me by, I think, Mel Blevens.

**NELSON:** You met David Gaines in the field I imagine. What were your impressions of him?

**BABB:** He was pretty far out there to start with. Just before he died in the auto accident he had stated publicly that some of their early pronouncements were overstated.

**NELSON:** That sounds like a reasonable person who acknowledges more recent and accurate data.

**BABB:** That's true. I think that if he would have lived the Department



might have come out a little better than it did. But, it got political, and maybe there was no longer room for reasonable people in the organization. Martha Davis was more adamant than David Gaines and, of course, the attorneys had moved in by that time.

**NELSON:** Let me ask you about the famous "fence" that was installed to keep coyotes and other predators off the forming land bridge between the shore and Negit Island.

**BABB:** The state built it and it was a big waste of money. We also dredged and blasted a channel, or moat", as well. It was an inter-agency project with Fish and Game, the Department of Forestry, and I guess the California National Guard was involved with the explosives. Department boats hauled the materials to the sites.

They tried dredging and blasting a channel but the "soft" sides quickly "sluffed" in and filled the channel. I kept trying to tell them that there were reports from BLM in 1975 that there were coyote tracks out on the big island, Paoha, where there were still some goats from past livestock activities. I have pictures of the poorest looking coyote you have ever saw that we found on one of the small islands that formed off Paoha when the lake level went down. With the lake water working on his fur along with sunlight, he looked like a skinny wet dog sitting there with the saddest look on his face. Coyotes are excellent swimmers.

The land bridge certainly made it easier for them, but they could get out to the islands if they were hungry enough.

With the fence completed, the coyotes had to detour about 20 feet out into the water to get around it. With a bunch of chirping young seagulls on the other side of the fence I imagine they were easily

convinced to make the effort.

**NELSON** I suspect the fence would corrode pretty quickly in that saline water.

**BABB:** It did. The fence builders also used lake water to mix the post hole concrete. Swell idea except the concrete wouldn't set up, so the Department had to haul fresh water out for them to use.

**NELSON:** I've wondered about the rising level of Mono Lake and if that's going to cause problems with the exposed tufas?

**BABB:** Some of the walkways are under water now. State Parks Department runs the area and they said something like they," would be happy to move out of the area just to know that the lake level has come back up".

**NELSON:** I imagine a number of organizations have gotten into the act, so to speak.

**BABB:** We've gone round and round with the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory (SNARL) from U.C. Santa Barbara, who is doing research on Convict Creek. They are very anti-grazing. They make a big point about the fence by their property, how tall the grass is inside as compared to outside the fence where the Department allows grazing.

We had a discussion with them a few months ago and told them that if there were no cattle in the Mono Basin there would be no incentive for the Department to irrigate the property. The only reason it's a nice green meadow now is because there is ranching activity. The leader of SNARL said it was ok, that they would rather see tall brown grass and weeds rather than shorter, green grass if they knew the cattle were gone.

We're dealing with a lot of people who are members of Earth First, which Edward Abby began. I guess they have no central leadership. Each group can do their own thing within their area. They were anti-cattle. They had a slogan, "Cattle Free by '93", which was matched by the Nevada Cattlemen's Association tee shirt, "Cattle Galore by '94." Earth First, or one of its chapters, up at U.C. Davis, was against the use of the lawnmower because they said the grass could feel pain. There was an apparently counter-culture group, the Rainbow Children, or some such, who camped up here on Forest Service land in the Mono Basin for awhile. The Forest Service finally kicked them out.

Years ago I would have called myself an ecologist, but now the meaning has, in my opinion been corrupted and certainly doesn't mean what it used to mean.

To me the Department has caused enough impacts to water exports to keep us all busy for years on mitigation. I still think that just proper resource management, working with the ranchers, rotation grazing, changing some of the water around, and things like that will improve the way the valley looks without cutting back water exports. We have to make better use of what we have.

There had to be some management. If you let cattle roam free to do their own thing, they're going to hang around their favorite spots and wipe it out. I thought the pendulum would be swinging back in the last few years to some reality, but not yet.

**NELSON:** What about the Courts?

**BABB:** The Mono Basin issue was won in Court, in my opinion, on emotion alone. We spent a lot of our time putting out fires on the edges, but could never get around to working on the major issues that we should.

**NELSON:** What do you think about the stream restoration work?

**BABB:** Not too much. Especially the way it was "engineered" originally. We had a high runoff last year which took away about half of the work and carried it to Mono Lake. One good thing is that the Court did come down on the consultants who thought they could engineer an environment on the creeks which really didn't work. After that disaster they are falling more in step with our consultants, Mark Hill and Bill Platts, from Boise, who are working on the Lower Owens River for the Department. Platts is probably the stream restoration expert around these days. He formerly worked for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game as a fisheries biologist. He has the nack of doing that terrible thing that we often get charged with, he uses common sense. He looks at the stream and says there's water in it, now go away for five years and come back to see what it looks like. He believes the stream will heal itself in most places. The places that haven't healed, may then have to be played with and helped along.

The original consultants who came in were making big money. An example is that in some areas that already had gravel for fish spawning, they dug it all out and would make it a pool. Where there was a pool, they would haul in gravel. It was a big waste of money and guess who had to pay for it?

**NELSON:** Are there other birds who use Mono Lake that we should know of, or be concerned about?

**BABB:** The California gull haven't been on the agenda for years because, I think, we proved that they were not in danger and the Mono Lake people quickly changed their tune and charged off on another tack.

The Point Reyes Bird Observatory is sort of interested in what's going on at Owens Lake because the snowy plover is a bird on the Audubon "blue" list which means that it's not officially listed as rare or endangered, but it's something to watch because it's getting down in numbers. Owens Lake was its number one nesting site in California and the east shore of Mono Lake was the number two nesting site. The plovers don't like a lot of vegetation. They want open areas and depend on seeing any predators coming and leading them away from the nests.

The number one predator on plovers at Mono Lake is the California gull. So, that was always a bit of a problem for some of the environmental groups. To save the gulls meant more grief for a real "sensitive" bird.

I sometimes had to wonder how much those people really cared about the environment.

There are two other main bird species that frequent Mono Lake, eared grebes and Wilson's phalarope's. Three-quarter million grebes descend on Mono Lake to partake of the lake's brine shrimp as they migrate south.

The phalarope's should have been the most important issue, in my opinion. The phalarope's come down from northern Canada and by the time they reach Mono Lake they are little skinny birds. In three or four weeks they more than double their body weight eating shrimp, then it's a non-stop flight to Argentina. So, Mono Lake is a very important refueling stop for them.

Since the Court has cut back the Department's diversions and set the levels that Mono Lake is supposed to rise to, the emphasis has shifted to the streams; and now that the streams are running OK, they'll probably be moving on to Owens Lake.

I don't know what they're going to get into, constructing a new lake at

Owens Lake. Of course, they think that all that water has to come from our aqueducts.

I hope the Owens Valley people catch on soon as to where this is going to lead. If so much water has to flow into Owens Lake, there's not going to be enough water for the aqueducts to make anything worthwhile for the Department and Los Angeles. So, why own all this property up here and pay all the taxes and deal with all the headaches? If the Department gets rid of its property in the Owens Valley, it will be developed in some way and it won't be open space any longer, which is the reason why the people came here to live. The Department's and government land ownership has provided nice open spaces that's why it's such a great place to live.

In my opinion the Northern District is a non-profit organization. We take in less than two million dollars a year in rent and pay six or seven million dollars in property taxes. Power generation is less than five percent of total Department generation.

If it should become not profitable and the Department begins to sell off property up here, it's liable to backfire on those who have been fighting us for so long.

**NELSON:** How about Martha Davis. How did she strike you?

**BABB:** She was a very organized career woman. She would come up and spend a month or so during the summer.

**NELSON:** What was the membership of the Mono Lake Committee?

**BABB:** The last figures that I saw was about 7,000 at \$20 per year. I had heard that their budget was about \$180,000 per year. I don't imagine they had that much in the early years. They rented a couple of

houses at Lee Vining. Sally Judy Gaines still lives up there as far as I know as well as their wildlife person Emily Strauss. Those are the only two names that I recognize any more.

The Mono Lake Committee crusade was mainly to get the Courts to force the Department to stop diverting water and cause the lake elevation to rise. That was their goal and they sure achieved it.

I remember in 1981, the hot summer when the temperature ran about 10 degrees warmer than normal for the whole month of June and a large number of gull chicks died as a result. The inter-agency group had planned to go out to verify the magnitude of the problem. We were told that when we returned the press would want to meet with all of us. As we got out on the lake and pulled up around the back of one of the little islands who do we meet but the Mono Lake Committee in a small rowboat they had borrowed from Fish and Game and put a small motor on. With them was an NBC News crew. Of course everyone moved to the back of our boat and left me out there as the leader of the group and the Department person.

They didn't get up to us, they just shut off their motor and coasted towards us a ways and stuck a microphone on a long boom my way and the reporter shouts something like, "Do you deny that the Department of Water and Power is responsible for all this death?" I replied, "Yes, I'll deny that," and we proceeded to go over the heat problem. It made John Chancellor's evening news the next day. One result of that video exposure was that I soon received a call from my aunt and uncle in Florida asking what I had gotten myself into.

That incident was illustrative in that David Winkler was the Mono Lake Committee spokesman. That was while he was a grad student in the middle of his studies. He was identified as a "University of California

biologist." I was identified as, "L.A. Water Department."

About two weeks later Duane Buchholz and I got into something similar. Channel 13 from Sacramento came over in their chopper. We even helped them turn the darned thing sideways so their chopper's logo, "Channel 13 Eye Witness News" could be seen. So, with Mt. Tom in the background we had just the right spot to stand. Duane was told he would be asked about the drought years and this and that. It all sounded very innocent. Then the video rolled and the first question to Duane was something like, "How can you sleep at night knowing that swimming pools are full in Los Angeles while wildlife is dying for lack of water up here?" Duane said, "This isn't what you said we were going to talk about, so I'm not talking to you," and we left.

**NELSON:** Who was the visionary in the Water System?

**BABB:** Paul Lane. He was able to relate to people and the issues. I think he saw that the Department needed to move ahead on many fronts. Jim Wickser had the same abilities and that's why he remained up here for ten years. The people up here liked him.

I remember somebody coming up to Jim one time and jokingly asking, "Who's water are you going to turn off today?" Jim replied, "Your name is right here on top."

Duane Georgeson was probably the sharpest guy around, but he always seemed to step on somebody's exposed nerve. He had an ability for getting people upset.

Lou Winnard probably hurt us more than anyone. I flew back from Sacramento with him one time during which he told me what I should be telling those people whenever they complained about the Department. His attitude seemed to be that if they thought the Department was nasty,



we would show them what nasty really was.

**NELSON:** How has the Owens Valley fared from the focused separations and the latest exodus of employees?

**BABB:** About like the other divisions in the Water System. Fifty-two people will be gone by September 1. A lot of it was in the Power System.

**NELSON:** Did you feel like there was some "fat" that could be trimmed?

**BABB:** Not here. A lot of people were getting close to retirement anyway. They're dropping from seven to three hydrographers.

**NELSON:** Can't three do the job?

**BABB:** Probably not, so they'll miss some spots; hopefully, not the real important one's. They used to do monthly readings on watertables and things like that. Now it's down to semi-annual, April and October or November, supposedly the high and low months.

**NELSON:** How were your relations with the leasees over the years?

**BABB:** Really good. They're the only real friends the Department has up here. They complain, but they know they've got the best deal going. Every once in a while they'll turn on you if there's a chance to get more water, or if someone wants to sue for more water, they'll join in. But, for the most part that has changed in recent years. I think our current leasees are better educated in water, animal husbandry, range management, etc. than their fathers or grandfathers had been.

I think they are beginning to get the idea that there is going to have to be some minor changes in the way they've been operating or they could be out of business for good.

We don't want to tell them what to do. I think the people I've left behind think the way I do. We're not going to do what the environmentalists want us to do and start running our ranch lease program like the BLM and Forest Service do. We won't be limiting our leasees as to the number of cows they can have from day to day and otherwise dictate their whole operation for them. We will let them run it like it's their place.

Our first approach to a leasee is, "What do you need from the Department to make the operation work better?" That approach seems to work best because the ranchers are an independent group. If they don't think they need any help, then we can say, "We've been looking at this and you may have a problem because of some rare plants here. They start growing in May, so by the end of April, could you move your cattle out of the area?"

**NELSON:** Have the leasees responded positively to the Department's position?

**BABB:** Within the last four or five years, I think they began jumping on our side. They are very upset with their supervisors listening to the environmental "wackos."

**NELSON:** Who are the "Save Crowley Lake" people?

**BABB:** I think this is a local group of fishermen who are concerned about decreased flows into Crowley Lake. They are also unhappy with Fish and Game with all the fishing regulations changes and stuff like that.

**NELSON:** It looks like we're about wound up here, Dave, thank you for your time.

**BABB:** You're welcome.