

An Interview With  
Dennis C. Williams  
Retired Manager, General Services Division  
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power  
May 7, 1998  
at  
Cypress, California

The Interviewer is Dick Nelson

NELSON: Dennis, let's start with your early years, schooling, and how you came to join the Department of Water and Power.

WILLIAMS: I was born in Whittier, California, in 1940. In 1942, the family moved to Downey, and in fact my parents still live in the same home.

I attended Downey High School, then Cerritos College for a couple of years. I dropped out of college for about nine months while I worked as an Office Engineering Aide for Los Angeles County. During that time I realized that real engineers earned a lot more money than office aides, so, I returned to school with a civil engineering major, this time Long Beach State, which is now California State University at Long Beach. I graduated in February, 1965.

I was hired by the Department as a result of on-campus recruiting

which was going on at that time, and remember my first day of work in the Water Engineering Design Division, meeting a former classmate, Norman Buehring, who started with the Department that same day.

We were given a choice of work area's so Norm picked dam design, while I chose public works coordination. There I worked for Oscar Hensgen and Marvin Litz, coordinating with the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) on water system pipeline and facility adjustments that needed to be made in the course of freeway construction. We also worked with Los Angeles County coordinating with them on their flood control storm drain construction projects. At that time there were a number of those projects in planning or underway.

I held that job for about a year and a half, then moved over to the master planning of the Water System, where I worked for Don McBride. I worked there a few years before being promoted to a Civil Engineering Associate, then moved back to Design, where I was involved again in Public Works Coordination, this time as a squad leader-supervisor. Lynn Zamboni, I remember, worked for me. He was a nice guy. The Zamboni machine that cleans the ice at the hockey games was invented by one of his relatives. Betty Hendrickson a good draftswomen and Russell Ditz(sp?), the perenial Toast Master rep. and draftsman, were some other names that pop to mind in those days, when I became a supervisor.

**NELSON:** What were your assignments as an associate?

**WILLIAMS:** It was back to coordinating the relocation of water facilities. I would work with state highway engineering people as well as L.A. County Public Works Department for storm drains. I would coordinate between our Water Operating Division who actually did the

relocations and the state and county agencies who had to agree with the relocation because they had financed a great portion of the costs. In areas where we had water system enlargements to make, we shared the costs.

This was a busy time. There had been several bond issues that had passed authorizing large storm drain projects, and the state had a fairly large budget for freeway construction, of which several were being built within the City of Los Angeles, so there was a lot going on in that period.

Later, I transferred to another section of the design division, which was called Distribution Design. That job involved sizing distribution facilities and determining where enlargements needed to be made to improve fire flow. We also worked with a lot of developers because any time there was a new development, whether it was apartment construction or a subdivision, they needed water supply. So, our group would evaluate what type of facilities was needed as well as the financial responsibility of the Department and the developer. During that time, one of the younger engineers who worked for me was Bob Simons who went on to have a great career with the Department.

I thought that was a very interesting job because there was a lot of development work going on and a lot of distribution design work that had to take place as a key part of allowing the developers to move forward with their projects.

**NELSON:** Did you do that design work for the entire city or were you tied to one of the water districts?

**WILLIAMS:** At that time with so much work going on, distribution design was divided into four districts. I had West Los Angeles, which

included the U.C.L.A. area and the western part of Los Angeles. So, I worked closely with the Western Water District, Water Operating Division, and adjacent districts when we had overlaps. In later years, as development activity slowed, our various work units combined.

That job was very enjoyable, probably one of the best at that point in my career because the work had to take place to allow the developers to proceed. It was time-certain, unlike planning where you might do a study which might sit on a shelf for a lot of years before something was built. All of this was stuff had to be completed and you could see the results, which was very satisfying.

I stayed in that job a couple of years and then was promoted to Water Works Engineer in 1972. The new job was great and a real eye-opener for me in that it took me to the Aqueduct Division. Up until that point, I knew little about the division and how it functioned.

**NELSON:** So when you promoted to engineer, the position was in Aqueduct Division?

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, I worked for Wells "Bud" Abbott Jr. My work initially, was in the Southern District of the aqueduct. This included the operation and maintenance of the two aqueducts (Los Angeles-Owens River Aqueduct, 1913; and the Second Los Angeles Aqueduct, 1970) from Haiwee Reservoir southwest to the "Cascades" in the north end of the San Fernando Valley. This also included Bouquet and Fairmont reservoirs.

I worked closely with the district's field forces, which numbered about seventy employees, mostly working out of our yard in Mojave, or Dry Canyon. I did a lot of budgeting, a lot of maintenance planning type of work.

We were also responsible for water supply forecasting from the Eastern

Sierra snowpack, and planning aqueduct operations from the Mono Basin to Los Angeles.

Shortly after I began that work a few environmental issues started popping up. The really big one was Mono Lake. We began receiving inquiries about the lowering water level of Mono Lake and the adverse impact upon the environment. Initially, the inquiries were fairly few and far between. As I recall, Ray Corley was one of the associate engineers who fielded those inquiries. At that time he was involved in water rights issues for the Department.

**NELSON:** Ray had not yet gone to Sacramento?

**WILLIAMS:** No. He was a Civil Engineering Associate in Aqueduct Division. I believe that under Ray's supervision a study was done to evaluate the ultimate water level of the lake with the City continuing its diversions. The architect of that study was Bob Pagan who did the hydrology study and lake level projections.

During the early 1970s, the inquiries about Mono Lake were initially not great, but over time they became a bigger and bigger issue.

**NELSON:** How would you characterize those early letters?

**WILLIAMS:** Primarily letters of complaint, letters of concern. Letters trying to get our attention to the fact that the lowering water level was perceived as potentially causing some damage to the Mono Lake environment itself.

**NELSON:** Were these private citizens and residents of Los Angeles?

**WILLIAMS:** Initially, they were from private citizens. The movement that developed and caused increasing public concern about the Mono Lake

issue was the result of a summer field study done by a group of students, I believe from UC Davis, including David Gaines, a graduate student biologist, who founded the Mono Lake Committee.

Their study documented the great variety of birdlife that came to the lake, including the California gulls that nested there and the migratory birds who rested there on their south-bound and north-bound journey's.

The members of the study group were fairly active, highly interested in the environment and took a great interest in Lono Lake. It was towards the end of that summer we began receiving more inquiries.

As I recall, Gaines developed a color slide program and presented it to Sierra Club chapters and other environmental groups around the state promoting the cause of "Saving Mono Lake." This resulted in some newspaper and magazine articles appearing. But, it was really David Gaines' pioneering work as a one-man show educating environmentalists and eventually obtaining political support that gave a lot of visibility to the Mono Lake issue and heightened public interest. I would say that the interest of Los Angeles residents initially, was the environmental side of L. A., those people involved with the Sierra Club and other such organizations. The interest level grew at a fairly good pace as time went on and inquiries from local and statewide officials were added to the other inquiries. This all resulted in the formation of the Mono Lake Committee, with members, dues, and the like. With an organization and funding, they were able to hire an executive director who could spend fulltime on the Mono Lake issue.

**NELSON:** Back to those early letters, were they similar in form? Did it look like they had been orchestrated via form letters?

**WILLIAMS:** I would say no. They appeared to be independently written,

although I'm sure the Mono Lake Committee encouraged citizens to write the Department and elected officials. Mainly they were complaints or raised concerns. As a result of that increased interest and concern in those early days, the Department began to develop some good scientific data on Mono Lake and its environment.

We hired experts to study and advise us on the situation at the lake. These people concluded that the Mono Lake environmental was very adaptable and that while a continued lowering of the lake level would increase salinity, it would not likely cause adverse impact to the brine shrimp, the primary food source for the migratory birds, for quite a long time.

As the lake level continued to lower, a landbridge connecting the shore to one of the larger Mono Lake islands, Negit, known as the Black Island, began to develop.

The environmental concern was that coyotes might walk, wade or swim across the landbridge and raid the California gull nests and eat the eggs. That, in fact, happened. The coyotes not only ate the eggs but they caused a great deal of disruption among the nesting gulls.

Interestingly, while coyotes were posing a problem for the Negit Island gulls, it turned out that Negit was not the only nesting place used by the gulls. There were a lot of small islets that were being exposed by the lake's lowering that were increasingly used by the gulls for nesting. As the lake level continued to drop some of the islets increased in size to where they became, if you will, safe relocation centers, for the former Negit Island nesters. So the loss of Negit Island nesting was more than offset by the newly exposed islets.

**NELSON:** Going back to Southern District, Aqueduct Division. You worked for Wells O. Abbott Jr.?

**WILLIAMS:** Yes. He was "Bud" to everyone who worked with him, and a great outdoorsman. He was also an outstanding engineer.

**NELSON:** You spent a lot of time in the field?

**WILLIAMS:** A fair amount. Primarily to the Mojave area working with the superintendent there and in the Owens Valley in connection with operational planning..

**NELSON:** The "Second Barrel," or Second Aqueduct had been recently completed when you moved to Aqueduct Division. Were there still "touch up" items, or mostly routine maintenance to perform?

**WILLIAMS:** It was mostly maintenance, but there were some major problems that popped up after its completion. One of the problems was an area of subsidence where the aqueduct was actually settling and subsiding in a canyon near Mojave. This resulted in some damage to the bottom of the aqueduct. In that area, it was a concrete box conduit, rather than a steel pipe. Bud Abbott came up with an innovative idea to raise, or lift the bottom of the sunken, or subsided conduit. The solution was to put holes through the conduit floor and force a pressurized concrete slurry mix under the aqueduct forcing it to raise the conduit floor. It worked and we went on to use the technique a couple of times. It was a real money-saver as compared to excavating and in-place reconstruction.

Another interesting aqueduct maintenance problem was in the Saugas area where the first aqueduct was in tunnels whereas the second aqueduct had a lot of pipeline. The first aqueduct began experiencing severe tunnel damage with the tunnel floor lifting several feet while the sides caved. We believed it was related to increased pressures in the nearby oil fields. We actually saw indications of oil leaking into the tunnel

at several locations.

That reconstruction was very difficult and involved replacing a long section of tunnel floor and some tunnel sidewalls. We knew there was some kind of problem when the flow began to be reduced, but we didn't know why until we shut down the aqueduct and made an inspection. Bud Abbott walked through with the first group. When he returned to the office, he was visibly shaken and said he had been shocked to have seen the tunnel section all heaved with the bottom all broken up. Instead of a nine foot+- clearance from floor to ceiling, he could stand on the pile of rubble and touch the ceiling. Doing reconstruction in the tunnel section was a challenging undertaking.

**NELSON:** Who else worked in the Aqueduct Division at that time?

**WILLIAMS:** Duane Georgeson was the division head for a good amount of time that I was a waterworks engineer. I think he headed the Division when I joined it. He had been in the Owens Valley earlier.

**NELSON:** How long did you work in the southern district?

**WILLIAMS:** About eight years. From 1972 until 1980. During the last two to three years of that tour of duty, I really started getting involved in the environmental issues surrounding Mono Lake, and to a lesser extent, the Owens Valley issues.

I remember working on some of the issues with Duane, the division head, who took a very great interest and provided direct involvement in the most important issues that had such potential impact on our water supply, plus those issues that had more public visibility and were jumped on by our legislators and the media.

One of the highlights in that timeframe was with a lawsuit the

Department actually won. That was a case that occurred during a very wet 1969 when we had to spill excess runoff water onto portions of the otherwise dry Owens Lake bed. Duane had been Northern District Engineer at the time. That excess water disrupted a soda ash mining operation on the floor of the lake. The lawsuit alleged that since we had been diverting the water we had an obligation to keep the water off the lake.

We were challenged on how we operated our aqueduct system. We knew it would be a high runoff year, so we had pulled down storage in some reservoirs keeping space in order to capture the later peak runoff.

The lawsuit went to a jury trial. Steve Powers, from our Legal Division, was our lead attorney. I remember that a tremendous amount of preparation was necessary for the case. Mike Selheim, who worked for me, did a lot of the prep work. Duane and I were directly involved as we formulated our defenses. We prepared simple graphics that, hopefully, could be easily understood by a lay person on how rapidly the runoff built up and how much water there was.

The trial was held in San Bernardino. We rented an apartment there for use as an office and for sleeping purposes by the attorneys and some of our staff.

**NELSON:** Why was the case heard in San Bernardino?

**WILLIAMS:** I believe the case was filed in Inyo County and the Department requested a change of venue to try to get a less biased jury. We won, and it was one of the few we did win. That was rewarding because a lot of work had been done putting our story together. That was my first exposure to the kinds of things that were needed to be done when you became involved in litigation.

**NELSON:** How did the water get into Owens Lake?

**WILLIAMS:** Much the Eastern Sierra runoff would flow into the Owens River and flow down to where our aqueduct intercepted the river. South of the Aqueduct Intake, runoff normally would flow directly into the Aqueduct. We had the ability to pass water over the aqueduct, or release water from the aqueduct, or to allow water to flow down the original Owens River channel keeping it from the aqueduct. So, a combination was used.

The runoff was so great that it just overwhelmed the ability of our aqueduct facilities to handle it. A lot of water eventually reached Owens Lake disrupting mining activities there like the water had disrupted everyone else's activities.

Our view was that we had an obligation to operate our aqueduct facilities to the best of our ability to capture the water, but when the water exceeded that ability, there was no other alternative, because of nature, except to allow it to flow onto Owens Lake.

**NELSON:** Can you give us an insight into the setting during the San Bernardino case?

**WILLIAMS:** Duane was the Water System's primary witness because he was the Northern District Engineer at the time and was responsible for Department operations in the Owens Valley. Duane was a tremendous witness having a keen sense to make things simple for non-technical people. We presented some very effective photos and graphs that helped tell the story in a way that the lay person could understand what was happening. Duane was very articulate and credible as a witness.

**NELSON:** How many Department people were over there on the case?

**WILLIAMS:** We did a lot of preparation at the General Office Building because the legal process required interrogatories where the other side was asking questions of us and we had to respond. There were depositions where the other side was deposing our key witnesses. A lot of the more technical support supplied to our attorney's was provided by Mike Selheim and his group. They had all our records and made numerous exhibits and stayed out at San Bernardino during the trial.

With the apartment in San Bernardino, the attorney's staff didn't have to commute home in the evening. It was, in essence, a working office that was available for strategizing in the evening after court. We would have dinner, then get together to review the day, anticipate the next day, and gather our materials, witnesses, etc., for it.

In one area, we presented an expert witness on the subject of accounting and finances, because we had to attack the claims of loss by the mining company.

**NELSON:** How long did the trial last?

**WILLIAMS:** Gosh, I can't remember now. I believe it was at least a couple of weeks or so, maybe longer. Duane was on the stand for a couple of days or longer.

The great thing about the aqueduct job was that I went from a situation where I had little involvement in public issues to a position that had a great diversity of issues. We planned the whole operation of the aqueduct system. We determined water levels in our northern district reservoirs because we operated the entire water-gathering plan, which included forecasting the runoff, determining where we would keep the water, and how much to bring to the City. We also worked with our hydrology people to determine how much well pumping was needed to

supplement the surface runoff. In addition to engineering and budgetary issues, there was the increased public, media and legislative interest in Mono Lake and Owens Valley environmental issues.

All of that gave me an exposure that many other engineers are not usually exposed to in a single position.

**NELSON:** Before Mono Lake, there was a minor matter called preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for increased groundwater pumping in the Owens Valley. Can you fill us in on your involvement there?

**WILLIAMS:** That activity was primarily under the direction of Bruce Kuebler, who had become a Waterworks Engineer about the same time that I had promoted. Bruce and his group handled the EIR, so my limited knowledge came from osmosis, absorbed during coffee breaks and the like.

I became directly involved in EIR issues a little later in my career when I became assistant head of the Aqueduct Division. I'll get to that a little later.

In 1980, I became Executive Engineer, working in the front office for Paul Lane, the head of the Water System and Walter Hoye.. It included a variety of coordinating activities as well as supervising the administrative services section. That assignment was brief, ending January 1981, when I went back to Water Engineering Design Division as a Senior Waterworks Engineer in charge of the Planning Section.

That job included master planning for water supply facilities in the City. One of the other major activities that took a lot of my time was our involvement with Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MET). My group was one of the primary groups that interacted with them, particularly on policy issues and legislative matters involving the State Water Project and the impact of MET policies on Los

Angeles. The real facility master planning was handled very capably by Wayne Krus, a Waterworks Engineer reporting to me. I worked with different engineers, including Mitch Kodama and John Jarf, on MET issues, as well as the preparation of EIRs for new Water System facilities.

One of the big EIR's we were involved in was for a facility adjacent to Marymount High School. We had a reservoir that had to be taken out of service because of dam safety concerns. It was proposed to replace the reservoir with a partially buried storage tank and pipeline through the Bel Aire County Club. That project gave me some experience in being involved in a high-profile public interest activity. Also, during that time, Duane Georgeson was the head of design division.

Duane as always took a high level interest in policy issues, especially policy issues involving MET. Duane was very active in trying to find strategies and approaches that would help on the issue of taxization and San Diego County.

There was a lot of talking and planning about how MET was going to fund its operations, whether through taxes, which L.A., because of its large population, was a large contributor, or whether MET was going to rely more on financing their capital improvements through water sales.

While I don't rercall the details, I know there were significant policy changes at MET, primarily as a result of Duane's efforts. My section provided numerous letters and position papers for Department management and the L.A. delegation MET board members.

**NELSON:** What was the issue about San Diego?

**WILLIAMS:** San Diego preferred a reliance on taxes, rather than increased water rates.

In January 1984, I was picked up as assistant division head in Water Operating Division under Ron McCoy. That was a great job and I enjoyed working for, and with, Ron. There were a number of coordination issues involved in working with the superintendents of the four water operating districts in the City.

Unfortunately, that job only lasted about seventeen months or so, until August 1985. At that time Duane was heading the Water System and decided to have Bruce Kuebler and me switch positions. Bruce was assistant division head of Aqueduct Division and I was assistant in Water Operating, so we changed hats and seats.

Bruce had many years of fighting the wars with Inyo County and the litigation issues, but hadn't really had a lot of operating experience. I had a chance for operating experience in Aqueduct Division and when I was in Water Operating Division as the assistant, and had the background of some prior involvement with earlier Inyo County issues.

I understood the Aqueduct Division, and the Mono Lake issue extremely well. I also had some knowledge of the groundwater pumping issues. Duane felt a job switch between Bruce and myself would be beneficial to both of us, plus giving Bruce a rest from the head-banging that had gone on for several years.

**NELSON:** You worked for Ron McCoy. How was he?

**WILLIAMS:** I loved working for Ron. He was a very bright guy. He was a very practical guy. He expected high performances from his people, but also gave them a lot of leeway in allowing them to do their jobs. He was always supportive in any way he could be. He may have seemed "laidback" to some, but, he was fairly aggressive, with a "laidback" sort of personality. He implemented several initiatives during his stay in

Water Operating Division.

**NELSON:** While we're here, let's catch up on some others. Did you have interaction with Bob Phillips"

**WILLIAMS:** Not really. However, I was researching some left-behind files one time and came across some reports that had been prepared by him, maybe when he was Northern District Engineer, on the philosophy of managing the Owens Valley lands. I was quite impressed with the perception he had on the land management issue.

I had the opportunity to observe him at a distance when he became General Manager. He was a straight shooter and didn't seem to like the politics, in my view.

I returned to Aqueduct Division in 1985 as assistant division head. Leval "Val" Lund, the division head, had the section managers in the L.A. office report to me. This included the sections that handled groundwater management, water rights, operations, and Southern District engineering. What it really came down to was that I would be primarily involved in the Inyo County issues.

Fortunately, when I returned to Aqueduct Division, we had some very good staff people. and two contract employees. Additionally, we had several consulting contracts with well respected biologists on birds and brine shrimp, etc. So we had good expertise. We needed someone to coordinate all that knowledge as well as someone to coordinate the litigation, because at that time we were involved with litigation on Mono Lake as well as legislation. Mitch Kodama played a key role in directing the Mono Lake litigation and research activities as well as public inquiries.

My primary Mono Lake activity was to accompany Duane, who at that

time headed the Water System, and be his backup and support, at meetings with the Mono Lake Committee, specifically with Leroy Graymer and the Public Policy program at U.C.L.A. I remember attending many meetings with Duane and many meetings without him. When Duane didn't attend, I was the primary Department representative.

**NELSON:** Did those meetings do any good for the Department?

**WILLIAMS:** I would say yes. The reason being at that point and with those issues, which weren't simply issues of fact, they were public policy issues on legislation, and litigation. Talking to the other side and the other interested parties was an essential part of what you did on political issues. To not engage in dialogue, to not engage in efforts to find solutions, would be very detrimental and would result in a poor public relations image for the Department.

So, we engaged in a lot of dialogue. We worked hard trying to find solutions. The problem in finding a solution to Mono Lake is that the Mono Lake Committee really didn't have to give up anything. In most other cases, both sides have something to gain and something to lose. So, you try to minimize the losses and emerge with something that all parties can live with and accept.

On Mono Lake, the Mono Lake Committee had nothing to give. It was all in what they could get, so, their motivation to settle and to agree on compromise positions, was very low, if at all. They were aiming towards complete victory, not compromise. By contrast, in the case of Inyo County and L.A., both sides had something to gain.

**NELSON:** Dennis, can you tell us a little more about the Public Policy meetings that the Department and the Mono Lake Committee attended?

**WILLIAMS:** I can speak to what I understand to be the background of the meetings.

U.C.L.A. had a public policy program or department headed by Leroy Graymer. They apparently identified issues of public interest with the goal of trying to reach a consensus, or to solve the problem. Before I returned to the Aqueduct Division, I believe there was a public policy program presented at U.C.L.A., on both sides of the Mono Lake issue. I don't know who the participants were.

My understanding has been that Leroy suggested that perhaps the University, through him and his group, could play a role in facilitating meetings between the two opposing viewpoints, with the thought that a resolution could be brought about.

My perception is that the Mono Lake Committee players at that time were eager to do this because any forum in which they received higher exposure would be good for them.

Duane Georgeson was the Department's representative. When I returned to Aqueduct Division, I believe Val Lund and I attended various meetings along with Duane. At some point then it was just Duane and me. Typically, we would meet out at U.C.L.A. in a room provided by Leroy Graymer. These were frequently lengthy meetings. Sandwiches were normally provided. The room was arranged so that we were either sitting around a table, or if there were more participants, it might be a table set up in a "U" shape. In that arrangement we could talk to one another, instead of one person making a presentation to the group.

Leroy acted as the moderator. He tried to keep a focus on where the discussions were going, what the topics were and what, if any, conclusions were being reached.

Participation varied from meeting to meeting. Martha Davis, Executive

Director of the Mono Lake Committee was their spokesperson. She was backed up by others, including Ginny Smith, who had written a book on the region. The Assistant Executive Director of the Mono Lake Committee would sometimes be there. Perhaps a Mono Lake Committee board member. At many of the meetings Andrea Lawrence, a Mono County Supervisor would attend. She was environmentally oriented and had taken a particular interest in Mono Lake and the Mono Lake Committee.

The City of L.A., was generally represented by Duane Georgeson and Val Lund, or myself. I attended all the meetings after Val Lund retired and was the Department's primary representative at many of the meetings. A representative from Mayor Bradley's office also attended at times.

After Mike Gage came on the Board of Water and Power Commissioners, he attended many of the meetings. Mike had environmental credentials and was interested in the Mono Lake controversy.

The meetings helped open discussion between the parties. Frequently, the goal was to try to identify points of agreement or actions that could lessen tensions or conflict.

There were a number of stumbling blocks. A major point of controversy was at what point did the water level of Mono Lake adversely impact seagull nesting? At what point does a lowered water level result in a saltier water and a survival problem for the brine shrimp which were the primary food source for the birds?

The reason those two concerns were such obstacles was that the biological experts had differing views. Our experts felt that the birdlife, particularly the gulls, could continue to use the lake as a nesting habitat even with Negit Island connected to the shore.

As a result of the Mono Lake public policy program we agreed upon a jointly conducted monitoring program that both sides would accept the

data developed.

So, there was a program to monitor and count the nesting gulls and identify their nesting locations. There was also a program to monitor the brine shrimp. That joint monitoring was helpful because, the parties had to agree upon the data that was produced and presented to them, instead of producing separate, conflicting data. I believe that was very helpful to the process.

It turned out that the Mono Lake Committee had a desire to keep the two islands for aesthetic reasons and claims that Negit Island was needed for nesting. I am not convinced they had any scientific backing. Our data certainly didn't support the need for two islands. But, on the other hand the biological data changed from year to year and someone could have selectively twisted and used that data to support any number of questionable conclusions.

It seemed that one of the greatest stumbling blocks was on reaching agreement as to whether there could be a healthy gull population nesting at the lake when there was a land bridge to Negit Island.

The other issue was at what point would the brine shrimp quantity be adversely impacted as a food source for the birds. There are things that happen in nature where you get natural changes in the quantity from year to year. Some people wanted to link that to the lake level at that time. But, looking at the data over the course of a few years, it was clear that at the time of the lowest lake level, before we were required to raise the lake level, when there was a land bridge to Negit Island, neither the gulls or brine shrimp were in danger according to our highly qualified outside experts.

**NELSON:** Do you know anything about the fence that was built across

the land bridge to Negit Island?

**WILLIAMS:** I think you ought to trust the memory of others on this, but I'll try. The Department was continually looking for solutions that might allow the gulls and other birds to be protected, without requiring the diversion of water from Mono Lake to be discontinued. In other words, the birds would be protected even though the lake level was lowering and a land bridge was forming between the shore and Negit Island.

Let me digress from the land bridge for a moment because there was a somewhat esoteric solution proposed early in the controversy. I think we were all a little skeptical of its practicality, yet, the credentials of the proposer were good. If nothing else, it was something we could point to that we were evaluating. It received some favorable publicity at a time when we were faced with mostly negative publicity.

The proposal was from a scientist who had developed a chemical powder for use on swimming pools that would coat the water surface and retard evaporation. Of course, if there is less evaporation, there is less water loss and the lake level will not drop as fast as it would otherwise.

This all resulted in a study and mini-report that proposed using aircraft or boats to disperse the chemical over the lake surface which was a large body of water. On completion of the report, it was clear the large lake size along with wind conditions pushing the powder to one side of the lake made it impractical.

There were other proposals. One was for a fence to keep the coyotes off Negit Island when the land bridge was affected. Coyotes were considered a problem, although there still remained a couple of feet of water

between the island and the shore because it was known that they could and would swim or wade short distances to get to food, which in this case were gull eggs and chicks.

At that point a fence was built, but I am not aware of the details so I will have to pass to someone with more knowledge of that subject.

One of the most difficult tasks we faced during the Mono Lake controversy was the very great effectiveness of the Mono Lake Committee in dealing with the legislative people. They were experts in the political arena and had the connections with the politicians. We were sometimes amazed at the quickness in which the legislators sided with the environmentalists on the issues of that controversy.

I don't believe we had the political expertise that our opponents had. We didn't have the expertise and we didn't have the story. We didn't have the glamour and the appeal they did, that's for sure. It was difficult to obtain support from local politicians because of the perception of environmental damage.

But, because they were effective on the legislative front, they were also effective in rounding up state dollars to assist on Mono Lake issues.

Another endeavor was to try to create a channel by dredging or explosives where the land bridge was forming that would make it more difficult for the coyotes to cross to the island. I wasn't too involved in this either, so will have to pass on details.

**NELSON:** What were your impressions of David Gaines?

**WILLIAMS:** It's interesting, we were not fans of David Gaines because he was our nemesis. He was a pain in the neck. But, I think most of the people who knew David at the time would look back and say that he was

sincere in what he was doing. While we didn't agree with some of his conclusions, he clearly put forth a tremendous amount of personal time and energy in raising awareness about Mono Lake.

His was a sincere "Save The Lake" agenda, and if it took politics to accomplish it, so be it.

David was effective, but I think that at some point the Mono Lake Committee realized they needed a full time legislative advocate in Sacramento. I don't think that was David's strength, although at that time he was recognized by the legislators as an environmentalist with a following. Anyway, David had a nice personality. He was a low-key guy. He was not an "in-your-face" type, like some of the activists. He was not a difficult person, but he sure caused us plenty of headaches.

**NELSON:** Let's go back to the U.C.L.A. Public Policy meetings. You said Mike Gage, a Department Board member with strong environmental credentials, attended some of the discussions. Was he able to have any influence with Martha Davis?

**WILLIAMS:** There are a couple of interesting things that took place. You might want to check with others to confirm my impressions. When Mike Gage began attending the discussions, he thought Martha Davis was interested in negotiating a solution. This apparently increased his confidence that perhaps he was the guy who could close the deal with her and the Mono Lake Committee.

I think, in a sense, some of those early negotiations were undertaken within the forum of the Public Policy Program. In those discussions Martha would advocate certain positions that Mike felt could be a basis for moving the sides closer together.

The real issue on coming closer together was on what stabilized lake

level would be agreeable to the Mono Lake Committee to cause them to settle. This would recognize that the Department would have to reduce its diversions from the Mono Basin in order to stabilize the lake level.

Let me take a little side trip here and mention that there were many Department Board luncheon discussions on what the Department's position should be. A few Board members, and I think Rick Caruso was the primary advocate, felt that because of the L.A. City Charter, the Department could not give away water rights and agree to leave water up in the Mono Basin for which we had rights. If the Department was going to lose water rights, it had to have them taken away by either the courts, or the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB).

I think Mike Gage had a different view and that was if the parties could come to a negotiated agreement that indeed would cost some water, that might be a better deal for L.A. than taking the risk of litigation, or SWRCB action and lose more of our water rights.

So, we had strong views within our Board whether we should continue to fight the fight and make someone take our water through litigation, or work to reach an agreement and perhaps minimize the loss.

At about the time Mike Gage came onto our Board there was an interesting little policy twist, which was that the Board and Department should have a policy statement on Mono Lake. Another Board member, Walter Zelman, who was from Common Cause, held a strong belief that we should have a statement. Zelman was instrumental in having the Board sign off on a statement that we had prepared. The statement was something I felt the Department, as well as our Board, could live with, and that the politicians and City Council would be glad to see.

I don't now remember the exact wording of the policy statement, but it recognized that our diversions were causing a drawdown of the lake's

water level and that our objective was to not damage the wildlife. My recollection is that it didn't go quite as far as Zelman would have liked, but it may have gone a bit further than certain attorney's representing the Department would have liked.

All in all, I think the policy statement was a constructive thing to do because it recognized the importance and value of the Mono Lake environment. It was the first time the Board and the Department had publicly spoken of those things. That was important, from Zelman's viewpoint, that we be seen as recognizing that the lake had value.

Going back to the negotiations with the Mono Lake Committee, I think the discussions on lake water levels at the Public Policy meetings led Mike Gage to believe there was room for negotiations on a lake level that both parties could live with. I recall that there were some negotiations that were separate from public policy meetings.

Mike was an interesting guy. I believe he had many one-on-one conversations with Martha Davis to see if they could reach anything that he could support as a Board commissioner. As I recall Mike came to the other Board members at a luncheon-briefing with a view that he thought something could be reached with the Mono Lake Committee. There was a lot of debate on whether we should or shouldn't pursue the matter. There was input from our water rights attorneys as well as the Mayor's Office.

At one point, Mike thought he had an agreement with Martha Davis on a lake level. He was excited when he presented the details to the Board. As I recall, after much discussion, he received a positive reaction from the Board and was told to call Martha and if she agreed to the deal they might be able to reach agreement. Now those are my words and recollections, but they were generally in that vein.

Mike called Martha. I don't know if others were present when he made the call. He came back very encouraged that an agreement had been reached, but Martha had to talk to her Executive Board. After receiving input, Marsha and Mike talked again. Marsha had apparently been unable to obtain agreement from her board so she had to backpeddle on what she and Mike had tentatively agreed upon, and in fact, raised the standard for agreement, so to speak. All of a sudden the Mono Lake Committee people wanted more from us. More! More!

Mike was extremely upset. He thought he had reached an agreement with Martha and had worked hard to sell the other members of our Board on the concept, only to have Martha step back and no longer be willing to support the proposed agreement. Mike had a real hard time with that. I think that incident resulted in a falling out between he and Martha.

**NELSON:** How would you characterize Martha Davis?

**WILLIAMS:** She was very well-connected politically. Very intelligent. Very wise on what would work with the public and on press releases. She knew how to pick the right kind of points to focus on to place the Department in a bad light and her organization in a good light. But, I wouldn't trust her. I wouldn't trust anything she said. I remember during the Public Policy meetings, more than once I watched her backpeddle on positions she had earlier said she could support. Add the Mike Gage experience and I think they add up to the fact that we couldn't really trust her. It was clear she wanted to undermine the Department in any way she could. She wanted to undermine us politically, legislatively, and with the SWRCB.

**NELSON:** What do you think motivated her?

**WILLIAMS:** Winning! To win the most for her side. Most environmentalists were not pro-L.A. types. L.A. represented development, population and destruction of the environment to meet the needs of the people. I don't believe Martha was much different than most environmentalists. On the other hand, I would say that Martha was not an L.A. basher either. She was smart enough to know that our City Council had a lot of say in Department policy, including Mono Lake, water supply and conservation.

Martha I think, took care not to alienate the elected officials of L.A., because she was in their offices lobbying all the time. I think she was anti-Department because she was pro-environment and it was easy to say the Department was the bad guy, because they build things. I really think her motivation was in winning the victories, winning on the legislative front, winning on the public front, winning on the public affairs front. If she could pull it all off and lead the Mono Lake Committee to victory, it would be a tremendous feather in her cap, and certainly didn't hurt her future employment opportunities. Clearly she liked the politics part, and she did well in that arena.

**NELSON:** What kind of support did the Department receive from the water community?

**WILLIAMS:** In terms of the other water agencies, like Orange County, or San Diego, I just don't think they saw it as their battle, although they recognized that if we lost that water, we would have to purchase more water from MET, which would impact them because we would be taking additional State Water Project water. I think they wanted to see us prevail, but, they didn't support us in an active way.

MET was a little more active in their support, but, even that kind

of moderated as time went on. I think it was because they had their own battles with SWRCB on state water project issues and they were fighting their own legislative battles. Only certain staff and management people were willing to be supportive of L.A. publicly. Others just didn't want to get involved. The bottom line is that we received a little bit of help from MET. They did clarify that if we received less Mono Basin water, we would be receiving more from them. But, even at that, they didn't hit on the consequences as hard as we were hoping they would. MET was among our silent supporters, I guess I would have to say.

**NELSON:** The Department pretty much stood alone. The Council didn't provided much support did they?

**WILLIAMS:** The City Council provided very little legislative support to us, although they did accept the Department's annual legislative policy position on Mono Lake. We couldn't take a legislative position that was contrary to a City Council position. So, they had to either accept or change our legislative policies. They did support our legislative policies, although, I would have to say there were times when we would have to re-craft our policies in order to receive their support.

But, in terms of sending a strong delegation of elected officials to Sacramento to advocate our cause, that didn't happen. We did get some support from time to time from John Ferraro, when he headed the committee that oversaw the Department. Zev Yaroslasky was bright, but not nearly as supportive because, I think, he didn't want to offend the environmental voters.

On the Mono Lake issue we didn't get a lot of Council involvement until

the lake issue became more visible and with a more negative press. At that point those Council members who are more concerned with environmental issues become interested.

Another problem was that a few Council staff people, a couple of them from Yaroslasky's office, were buddies with some of the Mono Lake Committee members. They brought us some views and efforts to direct us in a way that, I don't believe was in the City's best interest, and certainly were not warranted based upon the facts.

So rather than someone wanting to resolve and compromise, the Council was really not that helpful to the Department.

As the Mono Lake controversy grew and it became more on a "cause" with the media and the legislators, it grabbed the attention of some Council members to try to find a solution. The most environmentally inclined Council members wanted us to make a greater effort to solve the problem or come to a solution. So, we more or less stood alone.

When we couldn't reach agreement on Mono Lake with the Mono Lake Committee, and after the incident where Mike Gage and Martha Davis had their falling out, we reached a point with the Public Policy meetings where Leroy Graymer felt he really couldn't get us any closer together because of our fundamental differences. We then met less often and finally stopped altogether.

**NELSON:** The Mono Lake people smelled victory.

**WILLIAMS:** Somewhere along the line they sensed from statements that probably came from sympathetic SWRCB staff members that the SWRCB was going to come down in their favor. So their position hardened and with it the prospect of negotiating anything substantial disappeared.

**NELSON:** You mentioned earlier that a Mono County supervisor attended some of the Public Policy meetings. Mono County generally kept out of the lake controversy, didn't it?

**WILLIAMS:** For many years and even into when it was starting to heat up Mono County didn't take a highly visible public position. But, I believe a time came when the Mono Lake Committee was becoming ever more effective that the Supervisors realized they couldn't remain silent any longer and needed to take a more aggressive posture on the lake.

Their activities were nothing compared to the Inyo County Supervisor's position and activity against the Department's groundwater pumping plan.

On the Mono Lake issue, it became clear that the SWRCB was going to come back in and take a fresh look at the Department's water rights application, and its Mono Basin diversions, and was probably going to make a new ruling based upon a reappraisal of the environmental impacts and the facts. Many Department officials came to think that this approach might be the way to resolve the issue, hoping that an impartial body would be really looking at the facts. The Department didn't really have a choice, but to go along with the process and to be as well prepared as possible.

So, we began preparing the evidence and documents and the support for presentation to the SWRCB. A lot of this activity occurred after I left the Aqueduct Division. So, I don't have a lot of first-hand knowledge in that area.

**NELSON:** When did you leave Aqueduct Division?

**WILLIAMS:** I had become Aqueduct Division head and served there for several years. My main involvement at that time was the Inyo County

increased groundwater pumping issue. It was still unresolved in the courts. We were engaged in very active negotiations with the county seeking a solution. That took a large part of my time as division head.

I left Aqueduct Division about three years before I retired, so that would be about five years ago (1993). Jim Wickser gave me a wonderful break from my years of fighting the difficult battles relative to Inyo and Mono counties environmental issues. In addition to Mono Lake and groundwater pumping, we were involved in controversy relating to re-establishing flows in the Owens River, creek restoration in the Mono Basin, and dust problems relating to Owens Lake. Actually, we held our own every once in a while. But, a win was never a win, it was minimizing our losses. About every resolution that occurred resulted in losing money, land, or water to Inyo County or Mono Lake.

I became head of General Services Division when Joe Hegenbart promoted to assistant head of the Water System. So, the last three years of my career were in General Services Division where we had some true management issues to deal with. It was a large division with over a thousand employees when I took over. We were involved in heavy downsizing while providing consolidated services for the whole Department.

Fortunately, I was blessed with having some outstanding managers reporting to me: Jim Vigue, Fleet; Ken Kassner, Facilities Maintenance and Services; and Ron Whaley, in charge of the General Shops. I received great administrative support from Carlos Solorza and Marty Rennerd. It was a fun job. The problems were all manageable.

NELSON: Let's back up a bit and why don't you tell us about the

Inyo Agreement and related things.

WILLIAMS There were really three forums for purposes of working on the L.A.-Inyo Agreement. There was a Technical Committee comprised of certain technical staff and managers from the Department and certain technical staff and managers from Inyo County. Their staff included their plant expert, their hydrology expert, and also Greg James. Greg was the head of the Inyo County Water Department, but he was a much more important person than the technical experts. He was really the brains, the smarts, and the negotiating skills that guided the Inyo Supervisors through much of the negotiations. Greg was also politically astute.

While Greg was on the Technical Committee, he was also on the L.A.-Inyo Standing Committee where he and Inyo County Administrator, Brent Wallace, and Inyo Supervisors represented the county. The L.A. representation included two of our Board members, head of the Water System, head of Aqueduct Division, someone from the Chief Administrative Office, and at sometimes a Councilman's representative

The Standing Committee was a very influential and important committee that resolved policy issues and worked towards an agreement. But, it was the Technical Committee who really had to implement things and who had to develop agreement concepts and positions. The Standing Committee focused on issues that could not be resolved at the Technical Committee level.

In addition to negotiating for a long-term agreement there was an Interim Agreement reached just before I moved into the Aqueduct Division. The Interim Agreement was in place when the Department's EIR was being challenged in the courts and was an important step towards reaching the final agreement.

The Interim Agreement required an annual negotiation to set groundwater pumping limits. Some of those negotiations were intense and difficult because when the groundwater pumping quantities L.A. needed were converted into dollars that would have to be paid to MET for the same amount of water, if not obtained from the Owens Valley, it added up to a tremendous cost to Department customers. At the same time Inyo County residents viewed the taking of "too much" water as having the potential for severe environmental damage to the vegetation in their county.

Many areas of the Owens Valley has a relatively high groundwater table, even though it's high desert. It's that high groundwater level that supports vegetation. As the water table lowers it has the potential to impact the vegetation; to change the type of vegetation, and the density of the vegetation.

In other areas, groundwater pumping didn't have a great impact, but, was still the subject of great debate because of potential impact. So, every year the Technical Committee was the group that tried to establish pumping levels. Each side would then make their recommendations to their Standing Committee representatives. It was the Standing Committee who would then negotiate the annual pumping levels.

In some years it was pretty much pre-agreed what the amount would be. In other years it was hammered out among the DWP Commissioners and Inyo Supervisors who were members of the Standing Committee. In some years, it was very difficult to do.

**NELSON:** Do you know who or what started the process that culminated in the L.A.-Inyo Agreement?

**WILLIAMS:** At the same time we had the Interim Agreement that resulted

in an annual negotiation for pumping, one of the parameters of the Interim Agreement was that the parties would seek to negotiating permanent agreement. Those negotiations were really two-step. First was an attempt to reach common ground in small, joint meetings, for example, Duane Georgeson and myself, and sometimes Duane Buchholz, represented the Department. Inyo was represented by Greg James and Brent Wallace, who was Inyo County Administrator. We tried to come up with the elements and parameters for a future agreement.

There were many parameters. One was what was called enhancement/mitigation projects. These were tradeoffs for the view that pumping causing an adverse impact upon the environment. So we identified some environmental enhancement features that could be viewed as beneficial tradeoffs to benefit Inyo County. Some of the enhancement projects were taken to the Technical Committee to have them scoped out.

One of the costliest enhancement projects was re-establishing flow in the Owens River below the point where the original aqueduct diverted Owens River water. Year-around fishing was created as well as allowing riparian habitat to re-establish.

Besides the enhancement projects there was financial compensation to Inyo County for taxation and other things where Inyo thought they were getting short-changed on the dollars. The money was one of the last things negotiated because Inyo County, I think, rightfully, did not want any agreement to be perceived as a "buyoff" of dollars for environmental impact.

So, the big question in coming up with the agreement was what kind of agreement could we put together that, on the one hand allows a certain amount of pumping by L.A., but on the other hand protects the environment of Inyo County, particularly the vegetation.

A lot of the initial efforts to overcome that hurdle took place between Georgeson, Buchholz, myself, James and Wallace. What became clear early in the effort to make the long-term agreement was that we weren't going to be able to come up with a formula for pumping that said, for example, if there was a 90 percent runoff year we could pump 100,00 acre/feet. If it was a 110 percent runoff year we could pump some other amount. The reason for that was that, one, we each had our in-house experts, and two, there was too much uncertainty because the years L.A. really wanted to pump the most were the driest years. In the driest years there wasn't the snowpack that would result in snowmelt runoff and so the surface water runoff to the aqueduct was less. It was in those years we would typically need to pump more. In years with less rainfall and snowpack the native vegetation also would be receiving less water.

Inyo County was paranoid that pulling the water table down would really impact vegetation to an unacceptable degree. While our technical experts wanted to strive for a higher rate of long term pumping on the average, as well as a higher rate of pumping during the driest years. Inyo had the exact opposite view.

Both experts, ours and theirs, came up with formulas, computer programs, and other things, to try to convince the other, but to no avail. So, what we had were two technical groups who couldn't come together advising their policy makers. The policy makers had nowhere to go with the technical people being that far apart.

In our small group discussions, Inyo County brought up a concept that would lean towards a more subjective-type agreement that wouldn't set specific pumping amounts, but would identify certain criteria when pumping would be OK. This included certain vegetation conditions, and if

the water table was pulled down for more than two to three years then pumping would be reduced so the water table could recover. Soil moisture became a critical factor in discussions. There can be soil moisture, from rainfall for example, even when the water table is low.

A concept evolved where pumping would be affected by the increase or decrease of soil moisture. Again, soil moisture is a different issue from that of the where the water table is located. Anything under the water table is saturated, but you can have soil moisture even though there is not saturation. So, the concept of trying to come up with a plan that would focus on soil moisture, vegetation health, vegetation monitoring and groundwater pumping became our objective.

We recognized that this approach would not result in an automatic amount of pumping each year, or a formula, but in fact would require some kind of annual negotiation for pumping amounts.

That helped move us a long ways towards reaching an agreement. We had one major setback, I would say, to that whole approach, and that was that the vegetation was divided for different parts of the Owens Valley. Along the Owens River was a more dense vegetation and a riparian-type vegetation condition. In some areas that had a high water table, you had a certain vegetation condition. For example the City of Bishop has a very high water table and therefore a very dense natural vegetation even though it doesn't receive much rainfall. As you drive along Highway 395, you see the more typical, dry, high-desert vegetation patterns.

One of the critical conditions that was initially agreed upon, but later taken away, and I'll explain how it was taken away, was the concept that the Inyo County environmental experts, including the vegetation experts, recognized that when there is a prolonged water

table drawdown, there is the potential for certain vegetation to become less dense. But when the water table rises the vegetation will generally re-establish itself. But there were certain areas where it was perceived the likely result would be diminished vegetation. For example, instead of being ten percent covered, it might become eight percent covered.

We weren't talking about a lush area becoming a wasteland. We were talking about rather small changes in the density of vegetation.

We classified the vegetation on the floor of the Owens Valley as Type A, Type B, Type C, Type D. One of the real critical "giveups" by Inyo County that we thought could make it work and allow L.A. to accept the agreement was a concept that said that certain types of vegetation would be allowed to change, for example from Type B to Type A.

The tradeoff was that we were going to re-establish the Owens River and have a tremendous riparian habitat and fishery, and that was such a great environmental benefit that allowing certain areas to decrease slightly in density would be a reasonable tradeoff. We felt that agreement on that issue helped us move forward on the big agreement.

We went on to reach agreement with Inyo County. The county then had to inform its citizens of the terms, conditions and benefits to the county, as well as jointly preparing with us an EIR on the agreement.

One of the great complications of that EIR process is that we weren't starting from the status quo, saying if we do project A, what happens to the environment? The fact was that the project for the increased pumping to supply the Second Aqueduct was implemented when the Second Aqueduct was completed in 1970. So, there were many years of increased pumping

before litigation put a halt to it. There were a lot of changes to the environment that were brought about by the Second Aqueduct, both in terms of surface water diversions and groundwater pumping. So we had to do an EIR on the basis that we could never go back to the "no-project." No project would mean that there would be less pumping, but the reality was that environmental impacts had already been created. Also, a number of the enhancement/mitigation projects had been implemented. They were called enhancement<sup>o</sup> mitigation projects because, in fact, they did mitigate perceived impacts or create other native enhancements. We couldn't really stop those and there were just a lot of conditions that couldn't be changed after fifteen years of pumping.

So, we had a very awkward EIR to prepare. When Inyo County announced the details of the agreement to the public, some opposition arose.

My recollection is that the public was irate that the Inyo Supervisors would sign off on an agreement including what they thought was environmental degradation by allowing some of the Type B vegetation to become Type A vegetation. So what was a critical agreement element to L.A. became unacceptable to the people of Inyo County. This furor made the Inyo Supervisors back track. At that point the Department was not in a position to back track to square one. So, we basically had to re-negotiate the agreement, but craft different language that kept the environment as it was at that time, recognizing there would be changes from year to year depending on wetness, but with no agreement that we could knowingly cause Type B vegetation to become Type A vegetation.

So, the revised wording made a lot of references to "no significant impact." There would be no significant impact on Type A vegetaton. There would be no significant impact on Type B vegetation, and so on.

It was impossible to accurately define what constituted significant

impact. So, that was all left to the elected officials and the Department to determine on an annual basis in the future.

That was probably the only way we could have reached an agreement because the Department couldn't have accepted an agreement that said no impact. We knew there would natural impacts that would come about. So, unfortunately, while we had to give up on the concept of allowing certain changes in the vegetation to be part of the agreement, we did end up with wording that placed heavy reliance on "no significant impacts," which is a very subjective term.

So, we had a new agreement and an EIR to be prepared. We hired an outside consultant to do the EIR, thinking that both sides could live with what the consultant produced. We knew that Inyo County wouldn't want L.A. to produce the document, and we wouldn't want to have Inyo do it. We decided to let a third party produce it. We would both provide input and both have the opportunity to review the product.

It turned out that the product produced by the consultant was lacking in many regards. Part of it was probably budget. We didn't want to do a six million dollar EIR, number one. Number two, we felt we had so much environmental expertise on both sides that could provide input to the consultant, who also had their own experts. So, the consultant produced a report that they tried to modify to incorporate all the data that Inyo and the Department supplied. It was almost an impossible task.

We eventually completed the EIR and circulated it to the public for review. It received a lot of criticism from the anti-agreement and anti-change folks in Inyo County. It became clear that we had to return to the drawing board once again to work on a revised EIR.

At some point the Court got involved with the challenge to the EIR

and they held our EIR was inadequate and sent us back to prepare a new one. Inyo and the Department started on yet another version of the EIR. In this version, the critical sections dealing with impacts was crafted sentence by sentence by Greg James, myself, Duane Buchholz, and some of the technical people. We tried to craft language we could both live with. I give Greg James credit for throughout the process he was motivated to represent his county and his Supervisors. But, he was also motivated to try to reach an agreement with us. I think the L.A. staff had the same motivation. We wanted to represent the best interests of the Department and L.A., but we also knew our Board and the Council wanted it done. Greg was an attorney and an expert at "word-smithing." His work required careful review because a few "select" words could have significant impacts when reviewed by others in the future.

We burned up the fax lines with wording changes as we moved through not only the EIR, but the agreement as well. We could resolve most points. When we couldn't, the dispute went to the Standing Committee for resolution.

We completed the next EIR and it went public causing a new avenue of controversy to develop. We had Inyo County support for the agreement. We had Inyo County support for the EIR. We had Department and Council support for the agreement and the EIR. Who should come out of the woodwork, but the California Department of Fish and Game.

One of their key issues was the release of water down the Owens River. My perception is that Fish and Game viewed themselves as the regulators of fish and game issues in the state and believed they should be involved in regulating the amount of flow, timing of flow, and the type of fisheries that were established. We were looking at more of a low flow, slow velocity, warm water fishery with bass, which the public had

wanted.

Fish and Game attacked the EIR and they attacked the agreement. They apparently felt they should have been involved and that they should have been administering the environment, so to speak. They claimed the EIR was inadequate in many respects. They had some locals who formed a committee that was supportive of Fish and Game and there was a warm water group of fisherman who wanted to be involved so they joined up with them.

In any event Fish and Game was a major obstacle because they had a certain amount of technical expertise on biological issues. They wore the hat of state officials on fish and game issues. They had legislative clout and they had some clout at the highest levels of their own agency, including a lot of legal support.

So, we began a round of meetings and negotiations with Fish and Game. Inyo County found themselves in a difficult spot. Often times they probably preferred the Fish and Game position because it was more environmentally friendly to them, but they knew they had to work towards our agreement. So frequently Inyo County was the moderator between the Department and Fish and Game.

At a staff and official level I don't think some County people were real sorry about the Fish and Game involvement. But, they also knew it had a great potential to kill the agreement.

So, they worked pretty diligently to stay on the middle ground while trying to bridge the gap between Fish and Game and the Department. Fortunately, for all of us, Greg James took a leading role and was very good at word-smithing, very good at meeting privately and resolving issues with Fish and Game, and meeting privately and resolving issues with us.

Fish and Game was very difficult to deal with because they represented a mentality of regulatory control. They viewed their department as needing to have a regulatory role on the Owens River matter. Their basic position was more water, more often, and they would decide when, rather than the Department and Inyo making those decisions.

Jim Wickser headed the Water System during those difficult negotiations. We would meet with Fish and Game officials and come away thinking we had agreed to something, often to find that when the joint resolution of the issue reached Sacramento, it would be overturned by their own attorneys. We went to Sacramento trying to reach agreement but, the usual stumbling block had to do with Fish and Game being unwilling or unable to relinquish their regulatory role in this case. I really can't add more first hand knowledge. I retired while the beat continued on, so to speak.

**NELSON:** Who would you credit, if anyone, in getting the two parties, L.A. and Inyo together?

**WILLIAMS:** I was not in Aqueduct Division when the Technical and Standing committee's were formed. I'm pretty sure it was a combination of Duane Georgeson, and Commissioners Rick Caruso and John Leeney for the Department and probably Greg James and Supervisor's Johnny Johnson and Bob Campbell for Inyo County.

**NELSON:** What about the Owens Lake dust issue?

**WILLIAMS:** The Owens Lake dust issue actually evolved similar to the Mono Lake issue. It started with a few negative letters being sent us, and a little negative press, and it grew and grew and grew. It was an interesting issue, because historically the lake shores were a source of

dust before the Department began diverting water. Pre-Department Owens River diversions for agricultural purposes was forcing Owens Lake levels to lower.

There were press accounts in the late 1800s and early 1900s about the dust at Owens Lake.

What really started the dust issue were a couple of things. There was federal legislation on what I believe was called PM 10, which centered around fine dust particles and their health implications. That was one of the triggers. The other was in the appointment of a more aggressive director for the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control Board. Great Basin, with this PM 10 regulation to hang its hat on, identified Owens Lake as a major contributor to PM 10 dust.

Before I returned to Aqueduct Division there were increasing pressures on the Department by Great Basin to correct the dust problem. This resulted in meetings in Sacramento and legislation. I don't know who sponsored the legislation.

We got involved and agreed to certain language that came back to hurt us more than we ever perceived. That involved us taking some responsibility for finding a solution, but that Great Basin couldn't require unreasonable measures.

The bar raised several notches on what constituted "reasonable measures" as time went on, and more became known about PM 10 dust. Great Basin also became more effective at advocating the damage that was done by the dust. The reality is that the number of days per year where dust problems exist are not large and the impact upon the Owens Valley is not very large either. However, there are times when rising dust from the dry lake resulted in major dust storms containing high concentrations of PM 10 particles.

We negotiated annually to determine what part of Great Basin's budget we would cover to allow them to examine the problems, staffing, and for experimental methods and mitigation to eliminate the dust problems.

Each year the costs to us went up and each year it became clearer that we had a big issue with no good solutions available.

**NELSON:** Who impressed you during your career at the Department?

**WILLIAMS:** A lot of people have impressed me over the years. Early on, I admired Gene Hensgen, my first supervisor, for his style. He left the Department to form his own company. It wasn't until I went to Aqueduct Division that I began to appreciate the talents of certain managers. Bud Abbott stood out in the technical sense. Duane Georgeson certainly stands out. Duane took an interest in specific issues like Mono Lake, aqueduct operations, the Owens Lake flooding lawsuit, and other things that I was involved in.

I had a real chance to interact with him and, boy, did he stand out as a leader and manager. He had great foresight. He was able to keep a lot of balls in the air at one time. In my view, he could have been successful in any company he chose.

I really liked working for Ron McCoy and really respect and enjoyed working for Jim Wickser. I didn't know Paul Lane that well. I thought Duane Buchholz was very talented and he was a great asset on the Inyo and Mono County issues.

**NELSON:** What about Board members who impressed you?

**WILLIAMS:** I didn't come in contact with a many Board members until the last seven or eight years of my careerlot, but during the Inyo problems Rick Caruso came onto the Board. The eyebrows went up. What was he

twenty-seven years old or so?, and on our Board? He impressed me from day one with his intelligence, maturity, astuteness and his ability to negotiate and lead. Jack Leeney didn't impress me as much. He had the business credentials and had made the money, but he was emotional, and I thought that was at times a negative. However, he and Rick made a fine team and worked together well. Both Jack and Rick were willing to give their time to the process.

Mike Gage was sometimes a loose cannon type and sometimes thought he knew more than he did. Walter Zelman impressed me. He may have been one of the first Board members who brought in the public and environmentalist perspective. He advocated his viewpoints, but he tried to work with the Board. He was a constructive counterbalance on the Board.

There is a final thing I should add to all this. During L.A. - Inyo negotiations, Inyo's chief negotiators were their county supervisors who were on the Standing Committee. They would get together with the county staff, sometimes preparing two days in advance for a Standing Committee meeting. They knew the issues and problems. They had a game plan. Before a Standing Committee meeting we were lucky if Rick or Jack could arrive thirty minutes before the meeting started. We were fortunate when we had forty-five minutes of briefing time. We came to expect thirty minutes to brief them. Many of the meetings included significant issues that they need to know about and they needed to know our perspective so they could represent us effectively, or tell us they didn't agree with our view. The only thing that saved us on that is that Rich Caruso is such a smart guy that he generally picked up our concerns and generally represented the Department well. But, we could have been even better.

NELSON: Thanks Dennis, for your time.

WILLIAMS: You're welcome.