

An Interview With
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Retired Water Works Engineer "Water & Land Use Engineer"
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
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The Interviewer is Dick Nelson

NELSON: Why don't you tell us where you were born, schooling, and we'll go from there.

RAWSON: I was born on May 26, 1937 in Inglewood, California and lived in the Southern California area until I was around six. My Dad was a salesman for the Colgate Palmolive Peet Company and about when World War II began he changed jobs and went to work for a cosmetics company, Bonnie Bell Cosmetics, and we moved to Texas. We lived in El Paso for no more than a year.

Because we moved there he slipped into a new draft status and was drafted when he was about thirty-two years of age. When he left for the Navy my Mom and I returned to Southern California where all of our family lived. While he was away my Mom worked as a legal secretary and had worked off and on from about the time she was twenty-one or twenty-two in legal offices doing secretarial work.

During that time I attended a military academy. I boarded there and would get home to see my mom about every four weeks or so. It was out in Glendora and was called Harding Military Academy.

I was a youngster, starting I think, in the first grade there. The military academy was, of course, quite spic and span, snappy salutes, military all the way. I spent two and a half to three years there and got some self discipline, if you want to call it that, forced down my throat because that's the way it was.

After the war my dad got out of the Navy where he had served in the South Pacific and we moved back to El Paso, Texas, where we lived for three or four years. He transferred with the same company back to Southern California. We lived in El Monte when we came back because my grandparents had some property there. I attended El Monte High School for my freshman year. Then we moved to Monterey Park and I finished high school at Montebello High School.

I attended Pasadena City College one year and went on to USC. That's where I met Jim Wickser. We had a lot of classes together. He and I graduated at about the same time. I didn't know that he had interviewed with the Department. I did likewise, completely independent of each other. We never really talked about what we were going to do when we left school. So, we were both hired. I think Jim has a day or so's seniority over me. We ended up working together for Gerry Jones in the Distribution Design Section, Water Engineering Design Division.

While I was attending USC I was married in 1959 and we had a child that first year. While in school I worked for the Santa Fe Railroad as a brakeman. I worked nights as well as all summer long for maybe three to four years off and on. I made very good money, actually, I took a cut

in pay when I went to work for the Department. The pay was \$600 per month where I had been earning \$800 - \$1,000 a month with the railroad. But, it wasn't so much the wages but the long hours. I was on the "extra board", on call 24-hours a day, which meant I could work all I wanted. Under those conditions if you wanted to go out and scramble, you could make good money. It wasn't like a 40 hour per week job.

I worked nights out at the Ford Motor Company plant in Pico Rivera running a train crew that spotted all the cars into that plant. Maybe a couple hundred boxcars and various types of supplies were involved. It was one of those jobs where the quicker you finished, the sooner you could go home. So, it seemed like we ran a 100 miles per hour for four hours to get our work done, then go home. We usually worked from about eleven at night until three in the morning. I worked that schedule the last two years at USC. That's how I got through school because I was supporting a family.

NELSON: You didn't get a whole lot of sleep did you?

RAWSON: No. It was kind of interesting in my last year at SC. I set up my schedule so I was carrying 17-19 units. I remember one semester I had classes on Mondays-Wednesdays-Fridays; another semester it was Tuesdays and Thursdays which meant that I went to school at 8:00 a.m. and didn't get home until 10:00 p.m. or so and then run like heck to my railroad job. But, that gave me three days a week off so I would come home and crash on those days and not get up until 10:00 or 11:00 in the morning. I would then sit down at a desk, like I was going to an eight hour job, and study the rest of the day.

I got through school, not necessarily with flying colors, but I got pretty good grades and finished with a civil engineering major.

I began work at the Department in February 1961. Jim Wickser and I were in the same "squad" together working for Gerry Jones. Gerry moved on and Paul Lane became our Water Works Engineer. Our immediate supervisor, a Civil Engineering Associate, was a fellow by the name of Hal Ellefson. We were Civil Engineering Assistants.

We were in the Public Works Section. We checked plans on new facilities proposed by the Public Works Department. Storm drains, streets, grades, anything they were doing. We would check their plans to see if there were any conflicts with our Water System facilities, be it water mains, fire hydrants, or whatever. We were to identify potential problems. Later Jim went to the Second Aqueduct group. I stayed a while longer then went to the Planning Section and worked for Duane Georgeson. Duane was my Associate Engineer and we worked in master planning. Walter Hoyer and myself were the assistants. Duane was our immediate supervisor. Paul Lane may have been the Waterworks Engineer, I'm not sure. Paul was there for awhile then he moved up to the Owens Valley to take over the Northern District.

After about a year an Assistant level job opened up in the Owens Valley and I got it and moved to the Valley in August 1964. In a few years Paul went back to Los Angeles and sure enough Duane showed up and he was my boss for a few years. Duane went back to L.A., and sure enough, Jim Wickser came up and was my boss for several years. During all of this time I remained in the Owens Valley.

NELSON: What caused you to move to the Owens Valley? You had a family. It must have been quite a culture shock.

RAWSON: No, not really. My wife had grown up in a rural area, a farming community in Northern California. At that time we had two children and

we decided we just didn't want to stay in L.A. any longer. It was an opportunity to do something different and we both were agreeable to the change.

NELSON: Did having Paul Lane up there, someone you were familiar with, influence your decision?

RAWSON: Certainly he knew me and knew what I was capable of, having previously worked for him. I sensed later on that he had plans for me that I didn't know about when I first came to work for him in 1964.

Upon reaching the Owens Valley I worked in the Engineering Section under Water Works Engineer, Chuck McCauley. I took Neal Renfrow's place when he moved back to L.A. to take an CE Associate Engineer's position there. I came up to Independence as a CE Assistant and reported directly to my Associate, Vic Taylor. I worked there maybe a year and a half, maybe a bit longer.

NELSON: What was the nature of the work?

RAWSON: The Second Aqueduct had recently began construction, so we were of doing modifications to the First Los Angeles Aqueduct to increase its capacity. So, we were putting up sidewalls, improving facilities along the aqueduct, installing overheads that carry drainage and flood water over the top of the aqueduct. We were rebuilding the existing overheads, raising elevations, and doing that sort of thing. We did work at Haiwee building the Merritt Cut facilities and the by-pass ditch.

NELSON: Was that all force account work?

RAWSON: On the First Aqueduct work, yes. The physical Second Aqueduct

theoretically, began at Haiwee Reservoir and traveled south. I believe that some of the work we did at Haiwee was probably part of the Second Aqueduct job. But, the improvements and upgrading of the First Aqueduct in the Owens Valley, upstream of Haiwee was pretty much a force account thing, although we had some small contracts done. We did our own engineering and we did a good part of the work.

At that time Paul Lane approached me about working in what was called the Ranch Land Section. That work dealt with water uses land management, agricultural lands and watershed management. The fellow who had held the job had retired and the job carried an Associate rating.

NELSON: You're not talking about Mona Osborn are you?

RAWSON: No. Mona was in the real estate section. When she retired Cy Jeter replaced her. She took care of the commercial activities, rentals, housing, and so forth. I was in leasing activities, but I was in ranch properties which involved water, land management, watershed issues, and those sorts of things.

NELSON: The term "ranch" covered those leases outside the towns?

RAWSON: Yes, basically, all the commercial and rental properties were under Mona, than Cy, then Carrol Ritchey. That was the way it was for many years. Later, my group grew and got involved in other activities. After I retired, and Ritchey, who then headed the real estate section retired, the operation was combined into one group. Lloyd Anderson, A fellow who worked for me and who eventually replaced me ended up over both groups. It's changed again as I've indicated.

My work dealt with irrigation which included all the various water uses on the land. At that time I had a CE Assistant, Denis Tillemans, a

Draftsman, Jack Fair, and we were into the work of preparing for the Second Aqueduct which meant the actual land and water use in the valley needed to change from the previous history to accommodate the needs of the Second Aqueduct.

What this all meant, and I don't remember all the numbers, so I won't attempt them, is that the Second Aqueduct supply was supposed to come from three sources. One would have been increased groundwater pumping. The second source would be more efficient and reduce irrigation water uses on the land. Historically, under average runoff conditions, we always had more water than the First Aqueduct could carry. So, in a sense some of our spreading of water was wasting water to some degree under average conditions.

The final third would come from the Mono Basin. We never really had used the Mono Basin to the extent possible because we didn't have the Aqueduct carrying capacity downstream of Haiwee Reservoir before the Second Aqueduct.

So, our water sources for the new aqueduct were: one-third from groundwater pumping, one-third from the Mono Basin and one-third from reduced water uses on the land.

In order to prepare for this the engineering group was working diligently on improving the facilities to pump groundwater, drilling wells and doing things necessary to accomplish that.

My job was to reduce water uses on the Department lands. I'll get into that in much more detail a little later. There was a need to be more efficient with that use too. The third element, that of bringing more water from the Mono Basin didn't require too much work to speak of. The facilities were there and the capacities were there. But we needed to reduce water use on some of our lands in the Mono Basin because we

did spread a lot of water in the Mono Basin quite frequently because we didn't have the capacity to use it.

My first job in that group was to visit each rancher and try to work out an arrangement on how we were going to reduce his water uses and irrigated lands down to create the one-third of the resource that we would be needing for the Second Aqueduct.

There was a little bit of conflict here because the local ranchers of course, didn't think too much of that idea because they wanted all the water they could get. They didn't want to reduce their irrigated lands.

NELSON: How did you accomplish those meetings with the ranchers?

RAWSON: Bob Phillips, a very sharp man, had earlier made a quick review of all the irrigation activities in the Owens Valley. On the lease maps he documented what he had observed as Northern District Engineer and came up with some initial thoughts about where we might be able to conserve water on land use activities. So, I had a sort of blueprint, an idea of what might be achievable.

Our basic philosophy on how to do it, how to "sell" it to the ranchers, how to make it work, was kind of stuck on me and Paul, who was my supervisor at that time. What we came up with was we had irrigated 30,000 acres intermittently up to that time. Our records and information suggested that if we reduced that to 15,000 acres, but firmed up that water supply with five acre/feet per acre and made some kind of water commitment, not a guarantee, because nothing can be guaranteed in the water business, as far as droughts, wet cycles, etc., but make a strong commitment to our ranchers, that they would receive five acre/feet per acre for irrigation, that they would go along with it. Because in the

past they received as much as 30,000 acres irrigated, but it was intermittent. They might go for one, two, three dry years when they wouldn't receive any water because we needed the water in Los Angeles and didn't have the capability to pump the groundwater basin and supplement the runoff. So, we were unable to provide water during those dry cycles. The aqueduct was our prime business and it had to be filled first, then we took care of the secondary uses in the Owens Valley.

I imagine the people of the Owens Valley probably wished it was the other way around, but collecting and moving our permitted/righted water south was our main function, the only reason Los Angeles was up there.

I started visiting the ranchers and talking with them individually. We looked over their operations. I established a set of rules in my own thinking process that were based on three elements: What was being irrigated? and if we were going to cut from 30,000 to 15,000 irrigated acres, then half of the acreage had to be cut out of the program. That was the basic principle with each rancher. Next, I would take into consideration the circumstance, keeping in mind Bob Phillips' earlier guide on general areas where he thought irrigation practices could be improved and water use conserved.

We would back away from irrigation practices that included running canals across the Valley, and convoluted delivery systems, with attendant conveyance losses and other problems. On the other hand, we would provide water where it was more convenient and efficient for us to do so.

We would maybe depend on wells a little more in certain areas where we could operate them during wet or dry periods and meet the irrigation demands more efficiently on-site, instead of moving water ten miles through a canal and losing a lot of water because of the inefficient

earthen, unlined nature of the canals.

So, those practices were reviewed as to where the irrigation was sited on the land and the amount of acreage. The other issue was "what was the impact?" on the rancher himself. There were some ranchers who didn't have a lot of irrigated land. Their cattle operations were based on a native forage concept as well as public lands permits. The cattle would be taken out of the valley and up into the national forests during the summer months for grazing on Forest Service or BLM permit lands. The cattle would be brought back down and wintered on the valley floor. As such they didn't have a lot of irrigated land on their ranches - minimal acreage, but good forage conditions for winter grazing. But, that 100 or 200 acres, or that portion that was irrigated for maybe alfalfa, or quality pasture was very important to the success of the rancher to balance out his feed conditions for year-round operations. This was another factor we had to take into consideration.

We had ranchers who had hundreds to thousands of acres under very inefficient irrigation practices. What they were irrigating was native grass meadow, what we called "D grade" pasture. This was native grass in which water was just spread over the land in what was called wild flood irrigation, or without much control. Using this method you would be lucky to get 30 to 40 percent irrigation efficiency, when with good practices you should be expecting to achieve 70 to 80 percent efficiency.

This meant that if the plant needed four feet, we ought to be able to give it five and that ought to be enough. But, if it needed four feet water and we were providing eight feet of water that was very inefficient in the sense of what the plant needed as opposed to our

delivery costs.

So we proceeded to inventory each ranch. First, I looked at the quality of the land, was it alfalfa or was it the poor quality, "bottom of the barrel," so to speak, native grass meadows that were very inefficiently irrigated and very poor feed quality. At the other end we had growers who could get five-six tons of good alfalfa from each acre. Those were our top dollar producers in terms of rent.

Those top fields were efficiently irrigated with either flooded border systems or maybe sprinklers. I'll talk about sprinklers a little later. Anyway, many factors were looked at, then we negotiated with the rancher.

I only had two ranchers out of sixty who just blew up and had a heck of a problem. They just couldn't hack the idea. They didn't see it as correct. They thought I was mistreating them, I suppose.

We were able to negotiate with the rest of them. In some cases a rancher didn't lose 50 percent of his irrigated ground because it was too important to his physical operation because if he lost, say alfalfa production, that was critical to his cow-calf operation.

NELSON: Those ranchers who had minimal irrigated lands and operated efficiently in the first place could really be hurt if their irrigation was reduced.

RAWSON: Absolutely right, and so they weren't affected as much. But others who had large quantities of very poorly irrigated and poor quality land felt the sting of reduction. Maybe 50 to 60 percent of their irrigated lands were reduced. But, at the same time we worked with them to improve their irrigation practices, and to only use their most productive lands.

NELSON: How long did the initial inventory process take?

RAWSON: Oh, I would guess a year or maybe a little longer.

NELSON: You were "It?"

RAWSON: Yeah, although Paul Lane was looking over my shoulder. For that matter Bob Phillips was too because he was the Aqueduct Engineer. I usually took Jack Fair, my draftsman, along from the office so the meetings were generally he and I, plus the rancher and whoever he had with him. There were a couple of times where I had to go back to Paul to see how he felt about a compromise I thought would serve all the interests.

The goal of an-across-the-board 50 percent cut just didn't work in a lot of cases. So, some ranchers didn't get hit as hard when it came to the number of acres irrigated. However, some got reductions of more than 50 percent, but at the same time when we went back and completed some improvements on their ranch they ended up with better production from a lesser number of acres. As I said some ranchers were real efficient in their water use and as such reducing their acreage would have had a very serious impact on their livestock operation.

The livestock operators liked the big water years because that surplus water would be available so that they could make rough feed. That enabled them to buy extra cattle and make a little more money that year. Their's was a cow-calf operation which consisted of cows, bulls, and heifer replacement programs. They would winter the cows in the (Owens) Valley floor, calving in the early spring and marketing those calfs in the late fall.

Winter was the limiting factor. They would usually have pretty good

feed during the summer months on our ranch leases, plus Forest Service and BLM grazing permits. That seemed to be not too much a problem for them. But winter was the restrictive time on the numbers they could run. That's why they liked to spread a lot of water on rough native grasslands and create a bounty of feed that could be used for winter grazing. They would supplement that with some high-grade feed, like alfalfa they grew, or purchased, or with liquid proteins. That's how they operated.

As such our plan impacted them to some degree, but at the same time we indicated that while we planned to reduce the acreage it would be firm water, no more "feast or famine" situations. They would now be able to conduct a steady business by our use of the groundwater basin to supplement water supplies during drought periods resulting in a more solid long-run business enterprise

Those were the facts. It wasn't a pipe dream. That's the way it worked. But, we weren't able to reduce the 30,000 acres to 15,000 acres. I was only able to get down to about 18,500 acres. I missed my goal which had been given to me by Paul and Bob. But, the justification for the 18,500 acres was documented through this whole process. It would have been too serious an economic impact to some of the ranchers to reduce any further.

It was not our intent to put them out of business. If we would have wanted to do that we could have simply terminated the leases program and put all the water into the aqueduct. Maybe we should have done that, I don't know. But, it wasn't our intent. We wanted a viable economic base in the Owens Valley. We wanted our livestock operators to continue to be there. This was the way we thought we could do it and I think we had the right idea.

So, we got down to the 18,500 acres. Then we spent a lot of time and effort making sure the irrigated acreage was done so in more efficient ways. We did a lot of irrigation trials. We set up trials for both flood and sprinkler irrigation. I went to the University of California and obtained assistance from their Extension Service. We had experts come down from Davis, California. We set up irrigation trials with great detailed efforts to measure the water. We would conduct the trial on one of our leasee's ranches on either alfalfa or irrigated pasture.

By this, we proved the point that you could irrigate and get the job done very efficiently on five acre/feet/acre with a resultant good crop.

So, we worked with our ranchers to improve their irrigation practices so that the five acre/feet would be adequate, even more than adequate.

We developed a program where we helped them with sprinkler improvements. I worked up a program where the permanent underground improvements, the buried mainline pipes, risers and valves, the concrete vaults, sump pumps, whatever it took to pump irrigation water and service it out to the fields, would be purchased and owned by the Department of Water and Power. The pumps, sprinkler wheellines and physical irrigation equipment on the surface was the rancher's property. When and if he wanted to pick up and leave he could take his irrigation equipment with him and go. It was his.

I would work with the ranchers on the design and obtain some outside help if they wanted it and come up with a tailored irrigation design. The cost would be estimated and amortized against his rent for our share of the permanent improvements. The cost would run over a five-year term because the leases were written for that period.

NELSON: Was that five-year requirement a charter requirement?

RAWSON: Yes, to some degree. The Brown Act and L.A. City Charter had dealt with the terms of the lease. We felt it was better for us to stay within that time limit and not extend beyond it. The Department felt it was safer to live within the terms of the document. These projects were set up so we could amortize the improvements against their rent costs by giving them a rent reduction, in other words, we paid for the permanent improvements. We were fair and equitable with the ranchers. Every aspect of the project was considered.

NELSON: We played "banker" to them in other words.

RAWSON: Indirectly, through their rent. But, our goal was to reduce water useage and increase efficiency and it worked very well. As a matter of fact, it worked so well that some ranchers got so efficient that they were sprinkling alfalfa with four acre/feet of water with no problem at all.

After a few years years the next issue came up, and that was what to do with that extra acre/foot of conserved water. Of course they knew what they wanted to do with it.

We felt that it was fair that we had made the commitment for five acre/feet. That was our so-called contract. So, if they made improvements, including risking their own money for sprinklers, pipelines, and the like, to use that "extra" water we had promised, we would let them keep and use the water. We wouldn't take it and put it into the aqueduct.

This encouraged the ranchers to move in the direction we wanted them to. Many ranchers found ways to become more efficient, not only on sprinkler systems, but on surface irrigation practices and activities of that kind.

We called these irrigation programs "Second Barrel Irrigation Program"

and they could use their "saved water" to add to their acreage.

This brought us up into the mid '70s in time and the Inyo County lawsuit against increased groundwater pumping had been filed in 1972, I believe.

We had accomplished our water reduction activities and obtained the one-third supply that we needed for the Second Aqueduct. At the same time we were developing our groundwater production, I wasn't directly involved in that, the engineering group was. I was involved in developing groundwater spreading areas for groundwater recharge.

During surplus water years we needed to store the water by recharging the groundwater basin in various well fields. A lot of the area's were historic areas, where water had been placed in the past and where irrigation might have taken place in the past. I possessed knowledge in that so I was involved to a great degree.

The Department held about 310,000 acres in ownership, from Mono Basin to Haiwee Reservoir. Our ranch lease program totaled about 260-270,000 acres. Of that, 30,000 acres was being irrigated and we reduced that to about 18,500 acres with firm irrigation supplies.

We had accomplished those goals in a pretty good manner. But, then we got into the litigation issue. Along with that we had a number of dry years. A pretty heavy drought. The Department in their thought process probably said, "Great! This is an opportunity to test our theories on groundwater production and recharge and to learn more about the aquifers and the water table changes and drawdown." So, the Department installed more wells and pumped heavily during the drought years.

Of course Inyo County saw us out there "raping" the Owens Valley, or whatever their thought process was. What we were really doing was gathering good information, developing operating procedures, discovering

the capacities of groundwater aquifers, not that we were going to operate that way forever, but we were really hitting them hard, drawing down water tables, etc. We were doing what we could do to learn everything we could about of those groundwater aquifers.

There were many impervious layers close to the surface of the Owens Valley floor that trapped "perched" water in a number of near-surface aquifers. Our wells tapped the deep water aquifers. We felt that our groundwater production would be acceptable within the safe-yield of the basins. In other words, we wouldn't be "mining" groundwater, or a continuous drawdown of the water table. Besides that, there was a buffer effect because of the impervious layers that separated the surface water table that were being recharged by surface activities. There was not a direct relationship between the two. It would be of a more subtle more time-delayed type of change that would occur because of our deep pumping. Most of the deep water aquifers were supplied right from the Sierras - deep percolation right off the creeks. We developed spreading facilities where we could take surplus water right off onto the aluvial fans and recharge down into the deep aquifers.

As time went on, I think most of our ideas and plans proved to be mostly correct. There were some areas where the impacts were more severe than we had anticipated. But, there were many areas where there was virually no impact. When we got into the litigation with Inyo County my premise with their consultants and the people who were there was that the impacts they were witnessing on the surface of the land had more to do with surface water operations, spreading water during surplus years, then not having water for a few years. It was feast or famine. The things they saw and equated with pumping were not that at all. They were the results of surface water activities as well as the fact that

some of the lands were old historical agricultural lands that had been taken out of production years and years ago. Long before the Second Aqueduct concept came along. Inyo County seemed to want to back up 40 to 50 years and talk about impacts that had occurred with the first aqueduct, or even before that. We didn't feel that was a proper issue. The Second Aqueduct included pumping and that was the issue in the court. That was the groundwater problem. That was why we had to write an EIR. My view at the time was that what the people were observing, including the Inyo County officials, was more related to those past historical things as well as surface water activities, rather than the effects of increased ground water pumping.

I'll tell you something, after 22 years of litigation before it was resolved, and I had retired before the last documents were signed, but I had their number one consultant, David Groenfeld who was a thorn in my side over the years, came to me two years ago, and stated, "You know Russ, you were right. Most of the problems were not directly related to your groundwater pumping." I looked at him and said, "You know it and I knew it and you knew it then. But I understand, we were on opposite sides of the table. You had to do your job for the purpose of the County. I did mine for the Department." But, it's kind of interesting that one of their own consultants would ever admit that.

NELSON: Where did he come from?

RAWSON: Colorado. He was the vegetation impact consultant for Inyo County.

NELSON: When the Department spread water did it ask the ranchers how much they wanted?

RAWSON: We didn't even measure water prior to that time. We spread water on the basins and ranches and the ranchers were happy to receive the surplus. In some few cases water spreading by the Department might have damaged some livestock operator in some fashion, but I'll tell you, it was rare, because the "grease" was water and that's what the ranchers wanted. So, there were very few ranchers who ever came to me to say we were flooding them out, "I've got too much water. Don't give me any more." They were always pleased to receive any surplus water they could get their hand on.

NELSON: When did the ranch leasing program formally begin?

RAWSON: It goes way back. We purchased property in the Valley from ranchers and on many occasions we turned around and leased the land back to them. The job was originally called the Ranch Land Agent and that person worked with the ranch and livestock operators. My predecessor was Frank Milner.

NELSON: Was Inyo County involved in the irrigation inventory?

RAWSON: No, this was between the landlord, the Department, and its leasee's, its tenants. The County knew what was going on and that's how the litigation got started. Two or three of the ranchers approached the County complaining they were being ruined by our program and eventually testified in court in the original litigation. Jerry Chance and Jack Tatum were two. I think the third was John K. Smith, but I'm not sure about that.

NELSON: Do you believe they were the catalyst for the suit against the Department?

RAWSON: Well, a part, in the sense that they tried to indicate they were being damaged by something we were doing and as such that was an environmental impact, and maybe the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) should have been involved.

NELSON: Your irrigation inventory and improvement program was pretty well finished by 1970 wasn't it?

RAWSON: I believe it was about 1967 when we finished with the reduction program. We experienced a super run-off that same year so we couldn't practice what we had preached so to speak. We had extra water so the ranchers were able to use it. We didn't have the Second Aqueduct in operation yet. The next year, 1968, was a so-so year. In 1969, we saw one of the biggest years on record (269 percent of normal snowpak). The next three years (1970-72) were on the dry side and the impacts began to show in the minds of some people.

NELSON: You said there were only three ranchers out of approximately 50 who complained?

RAWSON: I don't know. There could have been other ranchers who were unhappy, but there were three who ended up testifying. Frankly, I thought that was a little far-fetched because I didn't think the three gentlemen had been, or were being, hurt that badly at all.

To my mind the environment wasn't the issue. Money was the issue. Honest to goodness, I believed it then and I still believe it. Think of what it cost the Department and the City of Los Angeles to grease the skids for those people; all the special interest groups, Inyo County Water Department, supplemental money into the Inyo County economic base. There were a lot more issues involving money than there were involving

the environment. As I just told you, some of their own consultants have told me that the impacts weren't nearly as great as they estimated, and frankly the impacts that we envisioned were closer to reality than many of theirs.

NELSON: The Department had the experience of some 40 to 50 years.

RAWSON: Exactly right. Over a long period of time we had observed those conditions. The one thing we really didn't totally understand was just how good or bad the groundwater basins were. We accelerated our efforts to develop the basins and we pumped them fairly heavily during the drought years because we wanted to gain more knowledge about their capacities, where we were lacking, where did we need to increase pumping in certain areas in the Valley, and so forth. It was a learning process for us.

We had pumped during dry periods in the '20s and '30s, when we started drilling wells. We had learned some during that time, but not enough to where we felt comfortable in using some of those aquifers.

NELSON: You say the litigation was all for money. Who, in your opinion, was, or were, the "Mastermind(s)" behind it?

RAWSON: I won't get into personalities. I don't know for sure, but obviously, there was a certain group of people who were making money from the Inyo-L.A. "fight." They created jobs, they created "empires", litigation, attorneys. There was motivation by various people for various reasons.

Inyo County always wanted more money from the Department. Their big gripe was that we owned so much land, and because of tax policies and procedures limitations, they couldn't tax us the way they would have

liked to.

They had a lot of freedom and whenever they needed money they could figure a way to tax us and not impact the local tax rolls. They were like every other governmental entity, more money, more money, more people, more people. They didn't think we were paying our fair share in taxes and we needed to provide more funds to the County. They thought we were exporting a tremendous local resource from the County.

In fact, we never took the lands off the tax rolls. We paid taxes. Ground that isn't developed and continues in the same condition over 40 of 50 years doesn't create an inflated tax base, does it? As such, the towns were growing slowly. Sure, there was limited land, but there was growth. Local government was growing too, maybe faster, and taking a bigger slice of County revenues.

NELSON: Inyo County Board of Supervisors. There were five? What was their composition?

RAWSON: Yes, there were five. One or two generally came from the ranching industry.

NELSON: Did the rancher Supervisors generally support the firm irrigation program?

RAWSON: Yes and no. It depended on the individual. I remember Supervisor Alan Jacobs, one of our leasee's, seemed to be critical of it, although I personally didn't think we impacted him that much as far as any activities he had on our ranch leases. I'm blank on names right now, but there were a few others who were ranchers off and on during the years who ended up as county supervisors.

I didn't deal with those people very much, except as my dealings with

them as ranch lessees. I didn't really get into the negotiating part until until the Inyo-L.A. negotiating committee was formed. I became a member of the committee because of my involvement in the EIR process. As time went on I became more involved with individuals in the County. Mostly, it was with the County's consultants. I grew to know a few of the supervisors fairly well later on.

When we became involved in the litigation it caused my group to have to begin documenting a lot of things that existed and/or occurred on our lands, prepare an EIR, start inventorying our properties, livestock, feed, and the vegetation.

I hired Dave Babb as a Wildlife Specialist to work with us on those kinds of issues. Later, I hired Patty Novak, a botanist, who classified our lands as far as vegetation, and so forth. We also brought in Brian Tillemans, another Wildlife Specialist.

There were others, and in total several people who became a group who were natural resource oriented. They were inventorying our lands for vegetation and wildlife, documenting all to develop a baseline of data.

We didn't have that kind of data base prior to the Second Aqueduct. We were always a little speculative about what happened before the Second Aqueduct because we didn't have the solid documented data. But, once we began collecting and documenting for the EIR and other studies, I starting seeing that our impacts were not as severe as others had made them out to be.

NELSON: Before Dave Babb and the other staffing, were you involved in the tule elk controversy?

RAWSON: A little bit. But, that's when Dave Babb became involved. I think it was around 1967. One of our first little issues that cropped up

was the tule elk.

NELSON: The Department was the innocent bystander in that one wasn't it?

RAWSON: Sure. We had provided a refuge so that some of the imperiled tule elk in the San Joaquin Valley in the early 1930s were brought to the Owens Valley and placed on Department land - private land mind you. Of the three or so dozen elk that originally came, the herds grew to several hundred in the '60s. Over time the elk program developed into a very reliable effort. There were federal hearings. Actually, the issue had cropped up a little before I arrived on the scene. When I came to the Valley Paul Lane had already hired a wildlife biologist, Dale McCullough, from the University of Michigan. McCullough came out and spent a lot of time studying the elk, their habitat, and their vegetation. His work was very helpful to us later because that became some of the base information we had that was pre-project (Second Aqueduct) condition.

He didn't do a lot of vegetation mapping, but he had done enough to give us a good idea about certain things. He felt that our management of our Owens Valley lands was pretty favorable to the well being of the elk. He did feel that there was some conflict between the ranchers and the elk. During drier years when natural feed conditions were a little on the short side, where do you think the elk went for breakfast every morning? You found them right in the middle of the rancher's hayfield! As a result some ranchers experienced alfalfa damage from the elk.

Depredation permits were issued by California Department of Fish and Game, who were responsible for the management of the elk herds. Some

people didn't like that solution. So, that was a little war that went on before we got into the Second Aqueduct business.

NELSON: The tule elk thing didn't get the Department into trouble with the ranchers did it?

RAWSON: I don't think so. The elk had been there for 30-plus years before this all brewed up. We had just provided a place for them. Fish and Game were the folks who managed them.

NELSON: Let's get back to Second Aqueduct litigation.

RAWSON: I'll be frank. For some of that time period, I just rolled back my mind and just cleared it just like you delete a file on a computer. Now there's a blank disk up there because some of it riled me so bad that I had a hard time swallowing it.

Some of the negotiations, in my mind, were absolutely asinine.

I remember early-on sitting in Sacramento during our first presentations on the EIR and Ken Downey was before the Appeals Court, I'll never forget Ken saying something like, "But, your honor, you have to realize that the cold hand of winter is upon the land." I got a kick out of Ken. He worked hard, but the deck was stacked against us.

We didn't have a good sound pre-project data base. That was tough and the lever Inyo County could always use against us. We couldn't say, totally black or white on a lot of things. We couldn't prove to them on water that our impacts or relationships were not as they suggested. We went back and used aerial photography. Thank goodness, we had those and some other things that we were able to interpret and work with to demonstrate and develop a so-called pre-project base vegetation map.

All of our ranch maps were classified and denoted various types of vegetation, but they weren't done in the high-technology world of today. So our classification system for all the vegetation was simply done and was looked at primarily as a use-concept for a lot of stock and what its value would be. It was good detail about what was out there. But, it did not statistically document vegetation composition and percent of cover.

The vegetation classification maps that we had at that time were oriented towards land-use practices for livestock. They were good for their purpose. They did identify an awful lot of what was going on in the Valley, historically, from way back, up to the late '60s. Water use practices were shown. Using that material allowed us to demonstrate that historic water uses had a lot to do with what was happening on the Valley floor, instead of groundwater pumping.

Of course Inyo County wanted to fold water use and the diversion of water into the litigation, but the litigation was really about the EIR on an increased groundwater pumping project. But, they kept trying to bring in the First Aqueduct as an impact and all the impacts associated. You know, start from year one and go from there. From our side we were dealing with a separate project which had to do with increasing groundwater pumping from Number X to Number Y, and identifying the impacts associated with that project. We would then forecast into the future as to what might happen.

NELSON: On the first EIR, I think Bruce Kuebler was in charge of preparing it. He had help from the Aqueduct Division office and from you folks in the Northern District. I understand that some EIR data was supplied from Forest Service or Fish and Game.

RAWSON: Yes, they had some information that we used.

NELSON: The data you supplied was as you've described?

RAWSON: Yes, historic records, but maybe not to the degree of detail that people would have liked to see. Our maps were a lot more useful than people thought. The vegetation uses, the land uses, the water uses, over time were very important.

Of course Inyo County and it's consultants were forever criticising their quality. The maps, in their opinion, were not up to the current standards. When we used them in conjunction with the historic aerial photographs as well as current aerial photographs we had begun to have taken on a regular basis to monitor and develop a pattern of changes in vegetation that were occurring on the Valley floor, we found that the changes were associated with surface water activities a lot more than with groundwater pumping operations. People forget that livestock activities also impacted the Valley over a period of time.

Overall, I think we did a pretty good job. It would have been wonderful if we had a bunch of biologists and we had veg-typed all the vegetation out there down to the composition, the percentage cover factor, all of the relationships.

NELSON: If that work would have been done from the beginning, you would have probably been accused of wasting Department money.

RAWSON: You're probably right. We didn't need that detail in the early years.

NELSON: Did you have any consultants on the first EIR?

RAWSON: I had several people who worked on vegetation. mapping, inventory work. Some of them later came on as Department employees.

NELSON: Were any local groups, such as Audubon, etc., helpful in supplying data?

RAWSON: Plant and animal lists and things like that were provided by various individuals and groups. Mary DeDecker was involved with the plants. She was one of the individuals who was key in defining impacts, that in her opinion, effected rare and endangered vegetation.

From the wildlife point of view there were several local people who shared data and their concerns with us. We received a little input from Fish and Game. Phil Pister provided some wildlife and fishery data. Phil didn't have many axes to grind with the Department regarding wildlife. His credentials were with fish. He was pretty fair. He was an environmentalist and as the years went by, I thought he leaned more towards becoming a preservationist.

He became involved with preserving the Owens Valley pupfish. We worked with Phil on a number of projects. I remember designing dams and dikes and outlets for the rare Owens Valley pupfish at Fish Slough. We built a sanctuary over on the east side of the valley. Another project we did with Fish and Game were various wildlife viewpoints for the tule elk, as well as for birds around Tinemaha Reservoir. We even built facilities out along Tinemaha to accommodate the osprey's, so they would have a nesting platform.

NELSON: Were you directly involved in all this?

RAWSON: Yes, and the people who worked for me. We were constantly involved in projects of this type.

NELSON: But you were just a ranch guy.

RAWSON: Wrong!

NELSON: This other stuff was additional duties?

RAWSON: Most certainly. My job became more involved with all activities on the land. All kinds of activities popped up as time went on. Actually, some of them were up and running before we got into the litigation with Inyo County. Paul Lane felt committed to enhancing environmental and recreational values in the Owens Valley. This was before the environment became a popular issue or "buzzword." Duane Georgeson carried the program on. They gave me the money and budget to try to get people involved in those activities.

So, the first we did was bring aboard wildlife experts, then we added vegetation experts. Eventually, we had two vegetation people and two wildlife biologists and we were working on a number of Inter-Agency projects. This was in the late 1960s when Dave Babb came to work for the Department. This was after the influence of Dale McCullough and the tule elk matter. We started building projects that were of joint interest to various agencies in the county. Inyo County, as I think about it was not much involved at that time, it was the other agencies like Fish and Game, the California Department of Forestry, BLM, the Department. There may have been a couple of others who I can't recall at the moment. These were the resource management agencies that formed the Interagency Committee on Owens Valley Land and Wildlife. (Interagency Committee).

The Interagency Committee moved pretty much on their own without much Inyo County input. We were involved in a lot of projects long before we got into the litigation on groundwater pumping.

NELSON: Who was the Department's visionary in all this?

RAWSON: I would have to say Paul Lane. Paul worked with, and was friendly with the other agencies. The problem with most of the agencies is that they may have management expertise, but, they didn't have property that they could do things on. The Department did! We had most of the valley floor. We had the freedom as a private entity to make the commitment to do something in a timely manner. Often times they just couldn't get off first base. Paul sensed that so he began to work with them so the Interagency Committee was formed and I believe Paul was the first chairman.

I think Paul believed this was a way to develop a good relationship with the other agencies and put together some cooperative projects of benefit to the Owens Valley that otherwise could not be undertaken by an individual agency.

I remember that Paul was the guiding hand behind the Department's bus tour program. He thought it important to bring L.A. people up to the Valley to show them where their water originated and develop support for the Department. It seemed like I was on tours day and night for about four years. When I got some supporting help I said, "You guys take care of it."

Ron McCoy was Northern District Engineer for awhile and I remember Ron was involved in the tours an awful lot. He seemed to enjoy them. On the other hand I got tired of them after a while.

NELSON: So, you delivered all your pertinent data to Bruce Kuebler for possible use in the EIR.

RAWSON: As I mentioned earlier, we sent the historic maps, aerial

photos and vegetation maps. They were more than adequate, in my mind, for that first EIR. But, Inyo County had an agenda that encompassed a lot more than the environment. But, the first EIR didn't fly with the Court.

NELSON: Did relationships with Inyo County personnel change after the County filed suit against the Department?

RAWSON: To that time I hadn't had that close a relationship with them. I had worked with the road department off and on. After the litigation began the County hired a bunch of people who were to be involved in the legal goings-on. Greg James came on as the Water Department Director, or whatever his title was. The attorney Tony Rossmann came on as their main legal guy.

I became involved in negotiations to work out our differences in the EIR process. After we had gotten through the first EIR, we worked on the second EIR, then we got involved in the various agreements.

NELSON: What do you mean by working out differences?

RAWSON: We tried to compromise. Sometimes we butted heads. But, we tried to find the middle ground.

NELSON: Did you meet with Inyo County people?

RAWSON: Yes. they had a list which drove me up the wall. One third of their list contained some merit. Two-thirds was fictitious. David Groenfeld was my nemesis. He was the fellow on the other side of the table who was the County's consultant on vegetation. My people and myself were on the other side of the issue as far as he was concerned.

Later on there were more people who they hired for their water department. Quite frequently Duane Buchholtz, Bob Wilson, myself would meet with them. Dave Babb attended some meeting as did Lloyd Anderson.

NELSON: What were the mechanics of the meetings? a few people sitting around a table?

RAWSON: We had an agenda. We had things that cropped up that we needed to discuss. We had to interpret data that was presented by one side or another. We shared information. We monitored joint studies.

In the latter stages of the EIR process we were working with the County on mitigation enhancement projects. The County came up with some real wild ones. Anyhow, we dealt with those.

NELSON: You went through this for a number of years. Did you get the feeling that their regulars began to understand near the end?

RAWSON: Yes. I think they did. Initially, I sensed they thought we lied to them and withheld information from them. But, as time went on and they learned more about the Owens Valley, what was going on, and what wasn't going on, and they learned more about us and our operations, and were able to verify by their consultants our information, they came about a lot and communications improved a whole lot.

I think some of the key people in the County began to recognize the the truth in the issues. Granted, at that point in time, they certainly wouldn't be saying, "Gee, you're right. Some of these problems weren't as serious as we thought." Instead they sometimes came up with something else to have a problem with.

During my last years with the Department I spent a lot of my time arguing with them about the various mitigation projects. They would

claim the projects weren't being done properly, or the Department didn't do this or that.

Pickish little issues if you know what I mean. They were justifying their reason for being part of the Inyo County Water Department. As I said before, it was all money. The Department was basically paying their wages with all the money we were giving the County to finance their litigation against us. It was a joke in my mind, but, that's the way it was.

NELSON: How did the ranch program operate during this time?

RAWSON: It ran smoothly. Their operations became more stable. We did have to curtail water once because of a water shortage. We had to reduce allocation to the ranchers to from 5 acre/feet to either three and a half or four acre/feet. We had a dry year and couldn't pump enough water under the restrictive pumping Court order.

The ranchers who I talked to, and were, I think, honest, all told me that the program initiated by the Department eliminated the "feast or famine" situation. They were now able to plan ahead a few years on how they would operate. Their business became more stable with less left to chance in getting their beef to the market. The market posed an entirely different set of problems for them.

NELSON: I guess a pretty good barometer of their happiness with the Department was in the percentage of ranchers who didn't renew their leases. Was the turnover high?

RAWSON: No. If anything the larger ranchers started expanding and buying out the smaller "parttime," if you will, ranches. To me this was a vote of confidence for the Department policies. They must have believed

they had a solid business enterprise going for them. If there was a large risk involved I doubt that they would have been foolish to go that way. I never knew a rancher who got up and just walked away. They always sold their cattle enterprise to someone else. The few "sellouts" that I remember were caused by retirements, marriages, deaths, family changes, and the like. It wasn't because the opportunity to make money was absent.

As I think about it, there was one, no, maybe two ranchers, in the 28 years, I was involved who couldn't make it. But, that was because they were such poor operators that their own worst enemies were themselves. It wasn't us, their neighbors, or the business they were in, it was just them.

We had a lot of "Gentlemen Ranchers," plus up to about 20 to 30 serious livestock operators who leased large amounts of land and grazed a large number of stock. They earned their livings from their ranches.

We had a large number of small ranch leases where the fellow's principal occupation was operating a business in one of the towns. Their secondary business or, in most cases, hobby, was their "ranch." Some of those operations were, over time, consolidated into a bigger ranch, but it wasn't because of impacts caused by the Department. They just changed their ideas about what they wanted to do with their lives.

NELSON: Was the ranching group influential in Owens Valley affairs?

RAWSON: I think so. There were always one or two Board of Supervisors members who were in that category and had a strong interest. As time went on they became less of an influence. More and more people were moving into the Valley more things were happening. The shift was

continuing to identify with the tourism and the recreational opportunities presented within the County. As such, the ranching piece of the local economy lessened. During the last few years I worked for the Department I don't recall a rancher being on the Board of Supervisors, other than Keith Bright, who I would consider a "Gentleman Rancher".

The former Inyo County Administrative Officer, John K. Smith, was a small ranch lease livestock/alfalfa operator in Independence. He could talk from personal experience about our impacts upon the environment. He leased property from the Department and was, I would say, one of the "Gentleman Ranchers." He was aware of the changes in our irrigation program over the years, and ranch lease policies. According to him, we caused him problems and impacted him. He was their voice of actual experience. He testified several times over the years on several issues. John's number one objective was how to better John's ranch. That's what was really going on. The Department spent a lot of time improving John's ranch.

NELSON: And he never appreciated the Department.

RAWSON: No. Being the Inyo County Administrator for years and years, John waged war with Paul Lane, waged war with Bob Phillips. I think he and Bob exchanged some pretty harsh words a couple of times. Paul tried to get along with John and I think he did.

In my dealings with John, I just had to be careful. I never had a real problem with John. I thought he was reasonably honest and up forward with me as far as our dealings. Most of the ranchers were honest, upright people.

I didn't always agree with John in our dealings, but my dealings with

him as his landlord he was pretty aboveboard. Like some of the others, he would try to scam me once in a while, but I never got uptight about and I'd work right on down the line until we got to the point where what he said or thought was corrected. I never made an issue out of it. I just kept on truckin', so to speak. That's the way I dealt with the people who were that way. I never accused them of anything. Paul had taught me when I first went up to the Valley that we had all the cards. We own the land and the water. We don't have to get into a fight with anyone. But, at the same time don't be arrogant with them, just deal with them, document what's going on and it will all come out. Paul was right we held the cards and the truth did eventually come out. It was easy to work that way because I always tried to treat people the way I wanted to be treated. I was a big man in stature and I might have intimidated some because of my physical being, but I never sensed I had to intimidate people. I never dealt with people in that fashion.

NELSON: When you first went north. Did you find it took some time for you to be accepted?

RAWSON: Initially, it did. I was probably thought of by some as the "punk kid engineer from L.A." so didn't know anything about ranching and this and that. That was fine, I learned a couple of lessons from some of our ranchers too. Some taught me some good lessons, not in a personal way, one-on-one, but, I watched how they did business.

I decided that I would act like the dumb engineer from L.A. who didn't know X from Y and I didn't know what's going on so I would go to them and ask a bunch of questions. In the meantime I'm documenting everything they told me. As a result, I got the facts that I needed.

I never tried to tell them I knew what I was talking about. I went

to them and said, "You know this ranch better than me. Here's the circumstance, we've got to reduce the irrigated lands, the so-called rule is 50 percent, but we're not going to deal arbitrarily on that basis." I told the rancher our three philosophies which I spoke of earlier. So, I said, "You know your ranch the best, what do you think would be the best to dry up? Let's not argue about reductions, they're going to happen. Now, let's talk about the best way to make those reductions on your ranch. What can you give up? What do you absolutely need?"

With the above approach most of the ranchers were honest and dealt with me in a straightforward manner. I got to the point where I thought I was better off playing the dumb engineer from L.A. who didn't know anything because I got more information that way.

When it came to the water issues, they learned pretty quickly that I did know something about irrigation efficiencies. I did know something because I had spent a lot of time getting schooled on that subject once I took the job. I attended various seminars all over the western U. S. Paul was good in that respect. He let me go to Utah, Montana, Davis, Berkeley. I spent as much as ten or more weeks in various studies on the subject of irrigation practices.

I think I became pretty knowledgeable about the subject. Once we got to the point of setting up irrigation trials on one of our ranchers land, and he was helping us demonstrate - of course he knew it would take eight acre/feet of water. There was no way he could get it done with five! Or, so he thought. When we finished he recognized that if he did a few things differently, which meant a little extra effort and time, he couldn't just turn the water loose and come back in five days and turn it off, he could irrigate more efficiently with a lesser amount of

water.

NELSON: What about the people in the Valley. Who stands out as helpful?

RAWSON: Phil Pister, who we talked about before was helpful. There was a rancher by the name of Sandy Kemp, our largest rancher. He came from the Southern California desert area. He knew what desert was and he knew what ranching was without water. I was able to convince him that if he wanted to continue operating with his alfalfa, he should consider sprinklers. He was one of the first for which I put together the deal where the Department would finance the permanent improvements and he would add the improvements that were his to keep. We were able to get five to six hundred acres of alfalfa going with him.

Because he was a solid rancher, looking to the future, we had some very positive success' with him. His was the project that demonstrated some of the points we were trying to make that would work with other ranchers.

There were several ranchers who were strong supporters of the Department. They demonstrated in their operations and their relationships with others that the Department was honest and trustworthy in its dealings with their leasee's.

There were people in the various agencies who I felt were an asset to the Department. There were businessmen who I didn't deal with directly because they were leasing commercial properties so I didn't have a one-on-one relationship with them like a Cy Jeter would have, who had positive experiences with the Department and weren't afraid to let people know their feelings on the subject.

It's like anything else, there are always the 10 percent "aginners" who are out there. They tend to be the critics of the Department and blame

anything and everything that happens in the Valley on the Department.

Maybe because of the conditions, and the history of the Owens Valley the figure is closer to 20 percent, but regardless of 10 or 20 percent, not a whole lot of people in the Owens Valley were, or are, enemies of the Department.

I honestly believe that at least 80 percent of the people of the Owens Valley feel the Department is a positive force in the Valley. If the Department hadn't have owned the land and kept it open for public use for hunting, fishing, hiking, boating, and all the other recreational uses, they wouldn't want to live there. Many people have personally told me that they wouldn't live in the area without the open land around them. They think of it as their playground, to do things on, to use. They don't have to pay anything or get a bunch of permits like they do on Forest Service or BLM lands.

NELSON: Did you personally testify in any of the Court proceedings?

RAWSON: In the Owens Valley litigation we sort of hopped, skipped and jumped directly to the Appeals Court, so, I didn't testify there, although I gave deposition after deposition and things like that. Later on I did and then in the Mono Basin litigation I testified on things like Lee Vining and Rush creeks, and things like that.

NELSON: Let's go on to Mono Lake. When did you first hear about it as a possible problem for the Department?

RAWSON: I guess seeing the "save Mono Lake" bumper stickers distributed by the Mono Lake Committee. The group who came out of the Bay Area. Again, the locals, most of the ranchers weren't unhappy with what was going on. The unhappy people hitched their wagons to the Mono Lake

people thinking they were going to get something out of the deal. However, you talk to them today and they acknowledge they made a bad decision.

One of the most dramatic things that has happened up there was the drying of the Cane Ranch area. When we had to dry up Cane Ranch for the benefit of Parker and Walker creeks so fishermen could have water running down the creeks clear to the lake, people who live in and around the Mono Basin couldn't believe that was the way it was going to be. That we were drying up the ranch under Court Order to put water down those creeks. A lot of people who might have had some desire to support the environmental view on Mono Lake because it was dropping in elevation over time, really didn't like what happened to the ranch area.

We had a series of dry years then we turned around and experienced some wet years and the lake came back up. To tell you the truth, it would have come back up with or without the Court Order.

Again, we're talking money. A bunch of consultants came onto the scene with all sorts of expensive schemes for enhancements to bring Rush, Lee Vinning, Parker and Walker creeks back to their former glories. This was where the Department of Fish and Game really began to cause trauma.

Darrell Wong and others in Fish and Game at that time were impossible to deal with.

Our Brian Tillemans worked on Mono Lake and Owens Gorge issues. He is a wildlife guy who I hired. He is the brother of Denis Tillemans, who I hired back in the late 1960s. Denis operates and maintains all of the computer data bases in the Northern District.

The reason I got him involved and groomed into this was that we were trying to digitize all of our data on our water uses and ranch

properties.

Some of the contractors who were working for the State Water Resource Control Board (SWRCB) - well, frankly, I have lost track of who was working for who most of those issues. It was the most gross mis-expenditure of money that I have ever seen. We'd sit there and say to them - Water Resources, Forest Services, etc. - "Look, all those improvements you want to put into the creeks will just wash out. They will be totally destroyed by the first large runoff."

Even I, not skilled in fisheries, know something about hydrology, hydraulics, runoff profiles, creeks and even when all else failed - gravity. The money the Department spent on some of those ill-conceived projects in the Mono Basin was just such a total waste.

All that was necessary was to just put the water back into the creek bed and leave it alone. This was the approach suggested by one of our consultants, one of the best we've ever had, Bill Platt, a fisheries expert out of Idaho. His approach was to put the water back into the creeks and give them a few years. The various forces of nature would do their thing in a perfectly acceptable environmental fashion.

But, on the other side money had to be made. "Big buck" contacts had to be let to do a lot of half-baked projects. The Department was taken advantage of in so many different ways, but we were held hostage by the Court. There was nothing we could do about it.

I'm not criticizing the Department or our leadership. I'm just saying that we were held hostage, both in the the Owens Valley and in the Mono Basin.

I can remember going down to L.A. to attend the Inyo-Department negotiating meetings. The two Inyo Supervisors as that time were Keigh Bright, who had a ranch down on South Parker Creek, just north of

Independence, and Bob Campbell, a retired Bishop school teacher. On our side we had Rick Caruso and Jack Leeney. They seemed to balance each other which was important from time to time. I liked Rick and thought he was always looking out for the Department's interests. He just didn't write blank checks to Inyo County. I think others did, but I didn't feel that way about Rick. Leeney was a problem sometimes with some of the outrageous things he would come up with.

On the other side of the table was Greg James, Rossmann, and David Grounfeld, their botanist and environmental consultant. Our staff included myself, Jim Wickser, Duane Bucholtz, and Dennis Williams. Mel Blevins was present off and on.

Those meetings were hectic sometimes and the politics sometimes got in the way of good science and common sense. But, you know, that's the way things work. I was sometimes frustrated and sometimes felt some positive things occurred in those meetings.

For 22 years we went at it, and I remember Duane Georgeson's comment, "We're still pumping the water and we're still operating the aqueducts."

The one that hurt us the most, I think, was the Mono Basin litigation. Losing that water resource was very devastating. I can't balance the use of that water for the people of Los Angeles versus a lake that can't even support fish. The Mono Lake solution was harder for me to accept than the Owens Valley solution.

I was probably more involved in the Owens Valley issue than Mono Basin. But, the Mono Lake case was too heavy-handed by the Court, way too heavy.

NELSON: Did you know David Gaines?

RAWSON: Yes, first hand. We used to meet with the Mono Lake Committee up at Lee Vinning. I am trying to remember what we called ourselves, the Inter-Agency Task Force, I think. We had the people from the agencies I've mentioned earlier, plus Gaines, Martha Davis, and one or two others. Then we had our own worst enemies, the Fish and Game people, some of whom were just outrageous, I thought. All of a sudden Fish and Game was feeling their oats and, by gosh, they were going to knock down the City of Los Angeles, no matter what. I sensed that in some of their people, a vindictiveness.

NELSON: What were they looking to get out of it all?

RAWSON: I really don't have a clue as to their agenda. In that group there were a lot more third party people involved, Cal Trout, Audubon, Sierra Club, etc. They were all special interest groups, each of whom had an axe or axes to grind and wanted something. It had very little to do, in my opinion, with the environment. I'm sure many of them cared about the environment. But the group's seemed to be calling the shots to the detriment of the local people and to Mono County. In some things that happened I don't think Mono County ended up being real happy with the results.

NELSON: Didn't Mono County generally stay out of the fight?

RAWSON: For a long time. They got involved, especially when the District Attorney got involved with the Owens Gorge issue that involved putting water into the Lower Owens River Gorge. Once he got into it, they had to declare us an enemy on those kinds of issues.

NELSON: I've seen a bumper sticker that says, "Save Crowley Lake,"

have you?

RAWSON: Yes, I think a group of fishermen who were concerned with the drawdown of Crowley Lake got that going. They knew we were not bringing water into the lake from the Mono Basin and that the flows through Crowley Lake were not what they had been historically. Crowley Lake had been one of the best fisheries around. Some of the changes that occurred around Mono Lake definitely affected Crowley Lake and Long Valley area.

Mono Lake was a little more complicated because of all the special interest groups. These were not public agencies responsible to anybody. They were lobby groups. Cal Trout, Sierra Club and the others. Now some of them might have a reason to exist and so developed over the years because of the special interest they furthured. Dealing with those people was very difficult. I was very flustrated with Cal Trout, not only in the Mono Basin issue, but also in Long Valley, on Hot Creek and Convict Creek. Grazing, according to them, was destroying the creeks and the stream banks. We put in fences and did all sorts of things to control livestock access to the riparian vegetation along the channels. I am not saying it was wrong, it was a good program, but some of their demands were, in my mind, too much.

NELSON: Now that there is water flowing in Rush and Lee Vinning creeks, are fishermen lining their banks?

RAWSON: Not in my opinion, but I've been retired since 1992, and those things have progressed in time. Someone else can probably give you a more accurate feeling about how successful the rewatering had been.

Returning the flows to Walker and Parker creeks has certainly had a negative impact on the Cane Ranch area. The nice meadows are

gone. The area is a disaster now.

NELSON: What about the Owens Gorge?

RAWSON: That came along at the end of my time in the Owens Valley so I didn't get myself involved in it.

NELSON: Okay, Russ, Thanks for your time.

RAWSON: My pleasure.