

An Interview with
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Retired Assistant General Manager - Water
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
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at
Glassell Park, California

The Interviewer is Dick Nelson

NELSON: Jim, to get started, why don't you fill us in on where you were born, parents, that sort of thing.

WICKSER: I'm a Los Angeles native. At the age of two the family moved out to Inglewood and that's where I grew up. We lived along West Boulevard at 82nd St. If you drive by you'll see a brick house on the corner which my father, Frank, built. He was a brick, or masonry contractor. You can't miss the house because there's a big wrought iron "W" on the chimney.

A favorite playground of mine was Inglewood Park Cemetary. My friends and I could scale that six-foot high, chain-link fence with no sweat at all.

My high school was Morningside High. In 1961, I graduated from U.S.C with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. Two years later, I earned a Masters, and also a Certificate in Public Administration.

I met my wife, Mary, while attending S.C., and we were married after I graduated. We moved to Highland Park where we lived about a year, then moved to Glendale. In 1964, we moved into the house we are sitting in right now.

NELSON: When did you decide to become an engineer?

Wickser: As I said, my father was a brick contractor and I learned the trade from him. I worked with him during vacations and other free time starting I guess, when I was about twelve, first moving brick, then later learning to lay brick. I really thought that I would go to college, get an engineering degree - I was thinking more about construction-type engineering, and then working with my father.

As I neared graduation the brick trade was not doing well, and union issues were surfacing. My father decided he was not interested in growing the business at that time but rather just keep his client base and see how things developed. He suggested that I practice my engineering on the outside for a couple of years, then we'd re-evaluate the situation.

NELSON: I guess you remember the Higgins Brick Yard out on Artesia, I believe?

WICKSER: Indeed I do. The bricks used in the construction of our home on 82nd Street came from the Higgins yard. As a kid I used to go out to Wrigley Field on 42nd and Avalon to watch the LA Angels with the Higgins family. There were two brothers involved, Bob and Walt. They both had boys my age so sometimes three adults and four or five of us kids would go to the ballgame.

As a matter of fact, just last week, I was talking to my Dad who wanted to drive out to the Higgins Chino yard. He hadn't been out there in a while. It was a rainy day however, so we decided to wait until the weather cleared up. He is still close with the Higgins family.

NELSON: What type of engineering did you take at S.C.?

WICKSER: I originally applied at U.C.L.A. but they only offered general engineering. I decided I didn't want that so I enrolled at S. C. where they had a good civil engineering program.

NELSON: You graduated in January 1961. Were you married?

WICKSER: No, we were married in June 1961. I earned my Masters in June 1963, while I was working at the Department of Water and Power.

NELSON: What made you seek employment at the Department of Water and Power (DWP)?

WICKSER: I was thinking about that the other day. I think I was talking to someone at school who was working at the State Department of Water Resources (DWR) as a student engineer. So I applied there, was accepted, and went to work at, I think 11th and Grand, in September 1959. I worked there for about a year and a half as a student engineer. I happened to be there, I'm not sure, but it must have been November 1960, when the state-wide ballot measure that authorized the California Water Project was approved by the voters. So I was there when the state people were promoting, and moving along with the construction of the California Aqueduct. From that exposure I became interested in water and the corresponding issues.

With graduation approaching, I attended some campus job interviews,

one with a guy, Cliff Robinson I think was his name, who came from the City of L. A., Bureau of Engineering. My recollection is that I asked him if he was also recruiting for Water and Power. He said no, that I would have to go to them separately, he was just there for Public Works and the Bureau of Engineering. But, he told me not to go talk to Gerry Jones because Jones would sell me on Water and Power so fast I wouldn't believe it.

As it turned out I went down and interviewed at the Second Street Building, up on the eighth floor. My first interview was with a Water Works Engineer by the name of Paul Lane. My second interview was with a Water Works Engineer by the name of Leval Lund.

I remember with Paul Lane it was your traditional half-hour interview; talk a little bit about the Department, my education, what I wanted to do, my interests, and so forth. When I talked to Val I must have talked to him three hours. He was in charge of pump and tank design. I think that by the time I finished my interview I could have sat down at a table and designed a pump tank system. When I got home my Mother asked, "Where in the world have you been?" I think I got home about eight in the evening. I found out later that Val had no problem with time that night as he was going to an ASCE dinner meeting at Roger Young Auditorium, or wherever it was.

My classes ended in January. I was offered a job a couple of days after I interviewed. We agreed I would start February 1, 1961. So after getting out of classes, a few of us drove to Mammoth to ski for a few days. When I returned I was going through my mail and there was a notice from personnel department that I was to appear for an oral interview for a CE Assistant position with the City of L.A. The date to appear was the previous week! I thought, "Oh, my gosh, what did

I do?" I rummaged through more mail and come across another notice from personnel saying, "Congratulations, You Passed!" I subsequently found that it was for the Bureau of Engineering.

NELSON: At the time you went to work as a Student Engineer for DWR had you decided to forego the contracting field?

WICKSER: No. As a matter of fact, Dick, I didn't even plan to stick with the Department. One of the reasons I went to work for the Department rather than staying with DWR - I was also offered a job with them - was money. At that time DWR was paying \$525 per month while the Department paid \$599 per month. DWP had a tuition re-imbusement program so I could go get a Masters degree, and the state did not. At that time the Department could get you deferred from the draft because you held a critical occupation.

So, for those three reasons, I thought I would go to work for the Department for two to three years while getting my Masters and state registration and then go do something meaningful.

NELSON: Such as? What is meaningful to a twenty-something young man?

WICKSER: Maybe going back into construction, building things, see physical results. I don't know what meaningful was. It just seemed that working for the City was not going to be that meaningful.

I think generally my family has been conservative, not big risk takers financially. Later, working for the Department security was important to me, but at that time it wasn't so important.

NELSON: So you joined the Department as a what, doing what?

WICKSER: I was a Civil Engineering Assistant in the old Water

Engineering Design Division. I was assigned to Distribution Design Section, working in the general engineering squad for a nice gentleman, Jerry Cooper. We were doing system adjustments, design and estimates, so that Water System facilities could be relocated to accommodate 1952 and 1957 storm drain bond issue projects. In other words they were putting in big, new storm drains in that era that had been authorized back in the '50s. We had to move pipes before storm drains, which had to be layed at a straight gradient, could be constructed throughout the city.

I worked there for awhile then moved on to work with Hal Eleffson, in a public works squad which would take an improvement plan for a new subdivision and check it out for sub-structures and infringements upon our properties and facilities. It was in this squad that I first worked with Russ Rawson. Paul Lane was the Water Works Engineer. We were stationed in the Hill Street Building, on the eighth floor.

Paul would come over, once or twice a week, and talk to Russ and me about the expected return of Bob Phillips from the Owens Valley and how Paul thought he (Paul) had a good chance of getting the Northern District Engineer's job.

That group had more than it's share of characters and sometime later I'll detail some of them. One of the things I remember most about that whole section was the daily noon bridge game. One of the Assistant's, Howard McNabb, two of the Associates, Jim Cassidy and Bill Rice, and the division head, Emil Mamrelli known as "Sali," would play cards for an hour, hour and a half. They had a card table which they set up in the main corridor. After the game they would spend the rest of the afternoon replaying the hands. I remember

Howard McNabb picking up the phone one time and calling the division head. Here was an engineering assistant calling a division head. He said, "Sali, get over here!" A minute or two later, Sali, the division head, came running over to McNabb's desk. McNabb said, "Wickser just told me, remember that hand we went down one on and I couldn't understand how?" "Yeah," said Sali. "Well, Wickser said that Bill Rice stole our ace of trump!" "What do you mean, stole it?" "Remember I laid the cards out there. They were sitting right out there and while I was pondering my next play Rice just picked up the cards and set them in the pile." That was typical of what might go on for three hours in the afternoon, just replaying a bridge hand.

Next I worked with Don Trestik in a design squad. All of this was in the same section under Senior Water Works Engineer, Gerry Jones. Gerry's office had two doors to it, one on each corner in the old-fashioned way. Out of one door he could look straight out and see McNabb, Cassidy, and a couple of other character's, as I call them. They were so upset that Jones could look at them, just raise his head and see them, that they talked to Mamrelli who had Jones keep his front door closed from then on.

I look at that and maybe that fits the bit about doing something meaningful. It was fun working there with nice people, and I did learn a great deal, but it was such a goof-off area that it was hard to imagine that it was particularly meaningful.

NELSON: You were low man on the totem pole there I guess. Does that mean you did the grunt work or the unpleasant stuff?

WICKSER: Actually, they treated me very well. I think what happened was that I was young and eager while they could care less about doing a

lot of work so that as long as I was willing to do the work, they didn't care. None of those guys really had any career plans. By career plans, they weren't looking for promotion. They were filling a chair. Some of them had made a lot of money investing during the depression. They were older people and not going anywhere. So, here's a young buck. If he wants to go out and do all this hard work, let him. We'll have more time to play bridge.

NELSON: Russ Rawson was a contemporary of yours?

WICKSER: Yeah, Russ and I attended U.S.C. together. I got to the Department first, then talked him into coming aboard a little later. I think our discussions with Paul Lane interested Russ into moving up to the Owens Valley, which he did when Paul took him up about 1963 or 1964.

NELSON: How would you describe Paul in those days?

WICKSER: This was many years ago, of course. Paul was always a warm, personable guy with a good sense of humor. Didn't seem to get up tight about anything. I remember being able to talk to him and get my views across to him. Whether he agreed with them or not you always felt he was very open. At that time I had a short business relationship with him. It became more of a social one because he looked to us as people who might better relate to him than some of the older folks who had really kind of checked out. Paul was just yearning for Bob Phillips to move back so he could move to the Owens Valley. So, we had that different relationship, Russ, me, and Paul. Of course, Paul had some old friends from the old days in planning.

NELSON: Did Paul have a lock on the Northern District job?

WICKSER: I don't know, but it's my impression that he pretty much did. I'm not quite sure why. In hindsight, having been up there myself, I would say that it was because of Paul's personality. He was a solid performer, but he was the type of guy who could get along well with the people up there. That proved to be the case later on. I think he had some early involvement in second barrel (2nd L.A. Aqueduct) feasibility studies, working with Rollo Triay and others, and that may have had something to do with it too.

NELSON: I've heard it said that the northern district job was almost a prerequisite to ultimately running the Water System.

WICKSER: The Northern District is really a mini-Department. As the District Engineer, not only did you have all the water local issues, you had governmental relations with two county Boards of Supervisors, Bishop City Council, county planning commissions in two counties, plus the media. You managed 300,000 acres of property, including range and agriculture, plus residential and commercial properties in the towns. You ran the water systems in three towns, plus Laws. You had a sewer system in Independence. You had some construction, operation and maintenance. You had a commercial operation there because we collected water and electric fees as well as monthly rents on leases. You were sort of the spokesperson for the power side in terms of public relations, not technical matters. So you had to work closely with both the hydro-generation group as well as the power distribution group. You had your own warehouse, fleet repair, a small machine shop, just about everything you could imagine.

When I moved to Independence, we had three hundred employees because we had just finished Second Aqueduct work. In numbers, that was about fifteen percent of Water System personnel. The Power System probably had sixty to seventy employees.

NELSON: Let's skip back a few years. How long did you work in distribution?

WICKSER: Until September or October 1963. I remember it well. A few of us had gone to an AWWA (American Water Works Association) conference in San Francisco. That was the California-Nevada Section. We met Joe Siegel, a DWP Water Works Engineer who had recently been named to head up the Second Los Angeles Aqueduct design group. I think it was called the second barrel design group at that time. I had applied for it as had a couple of others. While there Joe told me that he had selected me to go on over to his group. So, I probably went over in October 1963. I think that for a young kid out of college, that might have been what locked me into staying with the Department.

I worked there until March 1964 as an Engineering Assistant. Glen Romine was my Associate (boss). We designed Unit One of the Saugus Pipeline.

Then I made Associate Engineer and had my own squad at that point. Initially, I didn't have anyone working for me except a drafting technician, Mike Infiesto. We started the design of the Antelope Valley Pipeline. Subsequently, we moved up to the new General Office Building (GOB -111 North Hope). Most people moved into the GOB in 1965. However, the thirteenth floor had a fire on it just before occupancy, so some of us didn't move into the new quarters for six months or so.

Somewhere in that period between March 1964 to early 1966, Frank Salas

came to work for me as an Assistant, also Bob McPeak. We finished the Antelope Valley Pipeline. We then moved on to Jawbone Pipeline. Although we did the route alignment for all of it, we didn't do the design work on the above ground portions. We also did the Dove Springs Pipeline. As I recall those sections comprised the second aqueduct work that I was involved in. We four were a small group, but along with a lot of work, we had a lot of fun.

I will say however, that Second Aqueduct work taught me just how cheap the Water System was. Basically, we had a hundred million dollar project. The biggest project in the history of the Water System. We had two hundred miles of desert to cross and we could not get a four-wheel drive vehicle! We had old Chevy pickups that had the spare tire mounted under the bed of the truck near the back bumper. You went busting out across the desert in those things and about every other day we'd lose a spare. It would rub off the bottom and we would have to backtrack to find it.

Finally, we convinced them that we needed a four-wheel drive. They sent us an old surplus World War II jeep. It was great, except that every time we'd put tension on the front wheels, it would go back to two-wheel drive.

NELSON: Let's backtrack a bit. What were the origins of the Second Aqueduct?

WICKSER: This is something that I want to do a lot more reading and analysis myself. Clearly, the decision to move forward with the second aqueduct from the Owens Valley has led to a huge amount of controversy over the past thirty years.

It's my understanding that a lot of the decisions for moving forward

with the project were driven by external forces. In the 1930's the Department had gotten into the Mono Basin for the purpose of eventually bringing water south into the Owens Valley and then into the aqueduct to Los Angeles. In the late 1930's we had obtained a permit from the (State) Water Rights Board to export water from the Mono Basin. During the '50's and even into the early '60's, maybe '61, the state was saying, to the effect, "You have filed for all this water, but you're not putting it to use. If you don't start using it we're going to let someone else come in and file. We're wasting good water into a dead sea (Mono Lake)."

Another issue was the law suit between Arizona and California over Colorado River water rights which was in progress at that time. There was a real concern that the suit could go against California, resulting in the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MET) losing a substantial amount of water.

Our long-range planning at the time anticipated that L.A. would be requiring thirty-some percent of the total amount of water that MET would be bringing from the Colorado River. It was obvious that an adverse court ruling would have a serious impact on the L. A. water supply.

Another factor had to do with continuing litigation over ground water rights in the San Fernando Valley groundwater basin.

So, at that time we had several sources of water that were in jeopardy. At the same time Los Angeles was experiencing tremendous growth. Our demand projections at that time predicted that by the early 1980's we would be using 750,000 acre/feet of water in Los Angeles annually. Currently, (1997) we're in the 630,000 acre/feet range.

Now the State Water Project had been authorized, but, it was uncertain

when construction would start, or more more importantly, when L.A., and the other regions would begin to use its water.

It's also worth noting that feasibility studies for a second aqueduct actually date back to the 1930's.

Finally, in the late late '50's-early '60's, because of the factors I have mentioned, we had to do a new feasibility study and decide if it was a "Go," or "No Go."

By June, 1962, the final feasibility report was completed. In May, 1963, a report was sent to the Los Angeles Board of Water and Power Commissioners (Board) recommending we proceed with the project. In July 1963, Board approval was given.

Economics also dictated proceeding with the project. It was unclear at that time what MET's pricing policy would be on the State project water it would be receiving. Would State and Colorado River water costs be blended and charged at a uniform rate? Or would State and Colorado River water be priced differently? So, our feasibility study looked at the financial impact upon our customers. It was a one hundred million project producing cheap water vs loss of control and the uncertainty of what we would be forced to pay for MET water.

As you can see, there were a whole lot of things going on at that time and I want to look into them in more detail myself.

NELSON: Why didn't we just ask for more Colorado River water?

WICKSER: The Colorado River Aqueduct was approaching full capacity at that time. If there was going to be a cutback in supply because of the Arizona vs California litigation it would place an additional burden on all MET members, including L.A., resulting in less water available to L. A., and probably water rationing for all of Southern

California until at least the state aqueduct was completed and became available here.

We certainly had the rights for the MET Colorado River water, but would there have been the water available? Could we have told the other MET members, "Sorry, Charley."? I doubt it. In 1976-77, during the drought, L. A. couldn't take all the water it needed from MET, although we had the rights to it, under the preferential right issue. Again, in 1991, we were not allowed to take the water we needed because the philosophy was that everyone should share equally in a drought.

I suspect that in the '60's, had we not moved on with a second aqueduct, we would have had to share water with the other communities and there would have been additional periods of shortage and possibly rationing.

As we look back now, Arizona didn't take all of its allocation as quickly as they believed. Our growth began to slow a bit, and actually the second aqueduct's construction schedule dragged a bit. So, it all kind of balanced out. However, I think the projections and thinking at the time was accurate given the indicators they had. In any planning, the worst-case scenario must be addressed, although you hope it won't happen.

NELSON: Was the thought of increasing it's capacity at some future time considered in the construction of the First Los Angeles-Owens River Aqueduct?

WICKSER: It's clear that even in the '20's they anticipated going into the Mono Basin. In that period, William Mulholland decided that the first aqueduct was not going to solve Southern California's water problems. He then sent survey parties out to the Colorado River to

determine aqueduct routes to bring some of that water into the region.

Then in 1928 MET was formed. I think that in the late '20's they decided that there was more water in the Eastern Sierra. I don't think that when the first aqueduct was built that they ever anticipated expansion. However, Mulholland had always planned to build Long Valley, or Crowley Lake Dam as we know it today. That probably would have been started in about 1917, except he ran into a problem. Fred Eaton, former L. A. Mayor, and the man who first showed Mulholland the Owens River that flowed into a dead Owens Lake, had purchased a great deal of land in Long Valley, and was unwilling to sell it for what the city thought was a fair price. Mulholland refused to pay Eaton's price. So Crowley Lake Dam, rather than being built in the late 'teens, wasn't begun until the mid - 1930's.

In the meantime, work had begun on the Colorado River Aqueduct and work had even begun on the Mono Basin project at the same time. It was believed that Mono Basin water could be brought into the aqueduct system without enlargement. This proved true as there were no enlargements made in the aqueduct to accommodate Mono Basin water.

It wasn't until the decision was made to move on the Second Aqueduct that the lined canal in the Owens Valley from Haiwee Reservoir north was increased in capacity and "curbs" or sidewalls were installed.

This was the only enlargement made to the First Aqueduct, although a bypass channel was built around South Haiwee Reservoir as part of the Second Aqueduct project.

NELSON: It's been said that the First Los Angeles-Owens River Aqueduct provided water for two million people. What is the estimate for Mono Basin water?

WICKSER: Enough water for another five, six hundred thousand people. One of the good things that happened with the First Aqueduct that could have been the "choke" point, and a real expensive thing to fix, was the tunnel that went from Fairmont Reservoir in the Anelope Valley, under Elizabeth Lake, and terminated at Power House No.1 in San Francisquito Canyon, and ultimately in St. Francis Reservoir. That tunnel could carry the water from both aqueducts. It had a capacity of 1,000 cubic/feet per second. Both aqueducts combined flow is about eight hundred cubic/feet per second. I don't think the larger size of the Fairmont tunnel was in anticipation of future aqueduct expansion. It was deemed necessary for hydro-power generation operations at Power House No. 1 and the lower, Power House No. 2.

NELSON: I remember a picture that appeared in Intake (DWP employee magazine) that showed Joe Siegel, you, and another young engineer, Raul Sosa, in a room filled with maps and paper pertaining to the Second Aqueduct.

WICKSER: Raul was one of the early one's with Joe and myself, Jimmy Powers, Walt Hoyer, Mitch Sakado, and Bob Olson were the others I remember.

NELSON: That was an all-star cast. Most of those fellows rose to high, and in your case, the top water job at the DWP.

WICKSER: Actually, it was a prize opportunity for all of us. They had "pick of the litter" for anyone they wanted working on the project. Some, like Walt Hoyer, didn't stay very long because he promoted very quickly and moved on. I was fortunate in that I promoted and stayed on the project. The Intake picture was taken

in early 1966 right after we moved into the General Office Building. We moved into the twelfth floor where the whole southwest corner of the floor was basically vacant, so we had this huge area where we laid out topo maps for route studies and so forth.

NELSON: Talking about the General Office Building, it was listed on the Water System books, Why?

WICKSER: The General Office Building is on the books as an asset of the Water System. It was financed by the Water System and is owned by the Water System to this day. All costs of operation is borne by the two systems based on percentage of useage. Typically, the breakdown is seventy percent power, thirty percent water. Originally, the building was in the Water System's capital expenditure program. Basically, we're just renting space to the Power System.

NELSON: On December 14, 1963, Baldwin Hills Dam failed. What were you doing when you heard that news?

WICKSER: I was at our apartment in Glendale watching a pro football game. I can't remember now who was playing. At that time I had just left Western District design squad which served the water district where Baldwin Hills Dam was located. I remember when the game was interrupted with the news flash, I said to myself, " Ah baloney, that won't fail, it's a modern dam." I sat in disbelief when the station switched to the dam and I saw a portion of it break up. Having grown up in the Inglewood area I had ridden my bicycle in and around the Baldwin Hills area. My wife had attended Dorsey High School which was just on the other side. So I knew Village Green, which was a housing area that was damaged. I knew the area fairly well so I sat in disbelief

at the scenes I witnessed on TV.

NELSON: Were you involved in the investigation following the failure?

WICKSER: No. Others handled it. I was working on the Second Aqueduct at that time. Most of the followup work was accomplished by the Dams and Geology group and the field forces. Subsequently, work was done by the Planning Section, and Design squads figured out how the system would function without Baldwin Hills Reservoir.

NELSON: How long did you stay in Second Aqueduct design?

WICKSER: I worked on the four projects that I mentioned earlier. I think there was still some design work going on when I left. In June 1967, I promoted to Sanitary Engineer in what was then called the Sanitary Engineering Division. I went to work there under George Adrian. I replaced Roy Van Meter, who was sort of the "father" of backflow protection devices. I had the backflow protection group and watershed protection group.

The watershed protection group was sort of a fun job. At that time the movie studios liked to use our Franklin Canyon Reservoir, particularly Upper Franklin for location shooting. "Combat" was one TV series they shot scenes for regularly. Some "Beverly Hillbillies" scenes were shot there as well as a lot of others. Our guys had to be out there to make sure they didn't do something that would damage the water. The movie companies would pick up their pay while they were out there. They would sit there all day watching the proceedings, getting paid and were invited to take the catered lunch with the movie people. It was tough duty! It was always fun when they would come back and report in.

NELSON: How did you become a Sanitary Engineer?

WICKSER: Well, it was interesting. I had been in the second barrel when they offered the Water Works Engineer exam. As I said I promoted to Associate Engineer when I was in the Second Aqueduct design group. Then the Water Works Engineer exam came along and I did not do well on it. I passed up but I wasn't high enough to promote. I don't remember now but Lester Louden, our chief chemist, or more likely the Sanitary Engineering Division Head, George Adrian, called me and told me that he had two or three vacancies for Sanitary Engineers and none of his Associate Engineers were registered engineers. He encouraged me to take the exam. I took it and came out number four, but I was number one because I was the only one who was registered. So, I missed the train for the Water Works Engineer, but fortunately I got on another path with the Sanitary position. I worked down there for about three years, probably 1967-70.

NELSON: What major problems confronted the Sanitary Engineering Division at that time?

WICKSER: At that time backflow prevention was sort of "in" and people were trying to sell backflow devices that weren't reliable, so we were working with the U.S.C. Cross Connection Control Foundation to certify backflow devices that we felt confident would function properly. We were also establishing a system to ensure that once someone installed the device, they would test it on an annual basis, which was required by state law.

That was one area. The other area which was sort of unique at the time was - We received a call from Forest Lawn Cemetery

in Glendale indicating that they were pumping groundwater from their own well, which they were authorized to operate under the settlement agreement for the San Fernando Groundwater Basin.

I think they paid us but they were allowed to pump. Anyway, they said they were getting a gasoline odor. We went out to investigate and found that whenever they were pumping groundwater, their lawn area smelled like gasoline.

We began an investigation working with the trade organization, at that time, Western Oil and Gas Association. As it turned out and this is my speculation, Mobil Oil had a eight or twelve inch gasoline line running up San Fernando Road, adjacent to the cemetery. I suspect the pipeline ruptured. No one ever acknowledged that on the other side, but WOGA, as we called it, stepped in and helped in the cleanup process.

As I recollect, we had places where there was a foot or two of free gasoline floating on top of the groundwater. Some of the guys in my section developed a small, portable pump. WOGA had drilled a number of six and eight inch wells down to, or a little below the groundwater surface. We then extracted free gasoline off the surface and WOGA collected it. In addition, Forest Lawn installed a big separator that WOGA had engineered, where the gasoline would be vaporized and separated from the water.

This was about when they first started testing service station gasoline storage tanks. WOGA was doing the testing which I suspect was so that the blame could be spread among a larger number than just Mobil. That project was still on-going when I left Sanitary Engineering Division.

But what was particularly interesting, and I believe it still to

be the case, while we finally got rid of most of the free gasoline, there were still the vapors in the ground because the soil had been contaminated. There was still a little gasoline suspended in the soil particles. It was then that people found out that given time there's a natural bacterial action that takes place in the soil that will consume the hydrocarbons. So, finally the problem went away. We had removed the major aspect but the smaller amounts were finally taken care of by nature.

That was sort of a first for us and others, because we received a lot of calls from all over the country because no one had experienced it before and they wanted to know how we handled it.

NELSON: About that same time, but in another part of the city, of course, the Department took over the Conservative Water Company, an independent water company that served a small customer base in South-Central L.A. Would Sanitary Engineering do any special inspections when an old, I guess, system was brought aboard?

WICKSER: Water quality was not the high profile item in those days as it is today. Sanitary Engineering was sort of the poor relation in the Water System at that time. You might recall that we resisted building a water filtration plant, I'm jumping ahead here, even after the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1972. We resisted for a long time building a filtration plant. I don't think we agreed to its need until the the late 1970's or early '80's. We just celebrated the plant's tenth anniversary in 1996.

So, in those earlier days the feeling was that if it's wet and looks halfway decent, it's probably good enough. Oh, we did our bacterials and all of that. But the detection limits weren't

there. A little red water in the system, as long as we had chlorine residuals, wasn't looked upon as a terrible thing. So when we acquired these other systems we would check to see if they had cross connections, what was their source of water, and was it suitable. More important was what were the fire flows, what was the condition of the pipe, how much was unlined pipe.

Much of the Conservative Water Company had pipes running down alleys. They had hydrants on two inch pipes. In other words a substandard system that we would have to go in immediately and replace most of it to bring it up to our standards.

In the late '50's we did the same thing out in the Culver City area.

Also, during the time I was in Sanitary Engineering we were testing some waste water reclamation methods down at the Hyperion sewage treatment plant, west of LAX. I was not involved in that program which was ramroded by Larry Russell and Bill Ree. They were running San Fernando Valley effluent through a carbon column tertiary treatment and, from what I understand, producing a very potable water. San Fernando Valley sewage water was selected because that was our high quality aqueduct water from the Eastern Sierra.

When I was a student engineer with DWR I worked in their water quality section. I collected samples from various reclamation activities as far north as San Luis Obispo and Lompoc. That wasn't quite the concept for reclaimed water that we have today, but it was highly treated water. We monitored it for turf and landscaping applications, and that was back in the 1950's, early '60's.

NELSON: I have a note here about fire ratings. Does that mean

that we had to have a system with all the hydrants in place?

WICKSER: That was a long time ago. I had some involvement in a superficial way. To obtain a favorable rating from the fire underwriters rating bureau, which could affect our customer's insurance rates, hydrants had to be spaced a certain distance apart and you had to maintain certain water flows for a certain time durations, like 1,500 gallons per minute for four or six hours from a hydrant in a residential area, and maybe 6,000 gallons per minute from any three hydrants in an industrial area, and they had to be within five hundred feet. This was very important and we replaced a lot of old two- and four-inch pipe with either larger pipe or cement lining some old six- and eight-inch pipe to increase their carrying capacity.

The push behind this was that this could lower the insurance rates for everyone. This was a capital improvement that when explained, always received favorable approval.

Our system is basically designed for fire flow, not consumption. Pipe sizing could have been much smaller if all we were concerned about was what people consumed.

NELSON: You were in Sanitary Engineering for about three years?

WICKSER: Yes. Then I lucked out, doing well enough on the Senior Water Works Engineer test to be promoted to Senior Planning Engineer in November 1970.

There's an interesting story to that that I learned about later. Toshio Mayeda was the Senior Planning Engineer who had promoted to Principal Engineer in the Water Engineering Design Division. "Toe" favored me for the job, but I found out a couple of years later that

my good friend, Duane Georgeson, was lobbying against me. The reason was that I had been working for George Adrian, down in Sanitary. Unfortunately, Duane did not have a high regard for Adrian and was concerned that I was just like George. Later on, Duane acknowledged that he had been mistaken in that assumption.

If it had not been for "Toe", Bill Simon and Rollo Triay, who I had worked for in the Second Aqueduct group, I would not have gotten the job, because Duane had the ear of Paul Lane and probably Bob Phillips.

NELSON: How was your job interview done?

WICKSER: My recollection is that it was pretty much standard. There would be two or three people doing the interviewing. At that time I believe the top three names on the civil service list for the position were interviewed, maybe more. As I recall, the interviewers were "Toe", Rollo Triay, and the third name escapes me. Maybe it was only the two of them. They probably took their recommendation on who they wanted to promote to Bob Phillips, who headed the Water System at that time.

NELSON: How many Senior Water Engineers were there at that time?

WICKSER: There were about twelve of us. I remember, and Mary and I laugh about it, when I went to work for the Department I thought it would be great if I could ever make Associate. After I had been here my dream was to make Senior Engineer. Boy, I thought, that would really be a coup.

NELSON: Had you still been laying brick?

WICKSER: Oh Yeah. We bought this house in '63. It was a tract house

under construction. We moved in during March 1964. So all the brickwork, block walls, patio, you see is my handiwork. We added a second fireplace that my dad and I built. Ironically, I didn't know it when we bought, the brick contractor who was doing the fireplaces, had worked for my dad. When he found out who I was, he let us add the fireplace and it cost us a couple of hundred more for the fireplace framing. We changed the facing to stone on the fireplace upstairs.

Some of the guys I worked with were buying homes at that time, so I did a lot of blockwalls and brickwork for them. Some of the work was barter, some for cash.

NELSON: In the early '70's The Interagency Committee on Owens Valley Land and Wildlife was formed. What was its purpose? Has it worn well over the years?

WICKSER: This was, what I would call vintage Paul Lane. Paul was up there at the time and probably said to himself, "We've got a bunch of agencies here which are important to all aspects of the valley, but, there is no coordination between us. We need to get together and talk so that we each will know what the other fellow is doing."

It is my understanding that it was Paul who really developed and promoted the interagency committee. Jumping ahead to 1973, when I moved up there, I became very active in it.

I think that up to six or seven years ago the Interagency Committee functioned pretty much the way it was originally intended. I think the culture and charge of some of the agencies has changed because of the environmental movement so that the effectiveness of the Committee

has lessened. Fish and Game has a new agenda. Forest Service, which was sort of a multiple use agency, is much more an environmental agency. BLM was more like us, not so sensitive to the environment. Now they are where Forest Service was when I was in the valley. So there are a lot more environmental pressures and, I think, a lot less interest in working together. There are more conflicts. Maybe a feeling of being co-opted if you work too closely with Water and Power or someone else.

The thing that made it work when I was there, and for Duane Buchholz as well, was that he and I personally attended committee meetings, as did the forest supervisor, the area manager for BLM, etc. Sometimes even their bosses from Sacramento, San Francisco, or Long Beach were present. Paul or Duane Georgeson came up sometimes. It was an important meeting. In reviewing recent minutes, Water and Power is still well represented but so many of the other agencies are now sending low-level people.

In the past we spent time working together on, for example, the tule elk overlook, Fish Slough, Buckley Ponds. There were a lot of projects we worked together on, including the Interagency Visitors Center on the south end of Lone Pine.

You know, when you are working together on something you develop a better relationship. Nowadays, it does not seem to be there. I think it's the nature of society in terms of good guy-bad guy, environmentalist - raper/pillager type of thing.

It appears to me to be a gradual drifting away. During this last year, I was putting a lot of pressure on Glen Singley to be more involved.

However, I do see more interest shown in the last few meetings where others have started to attend again. But, I think that until such

time as the Water System can complete the environmental mitigation activities in the Owens Valley that it pledged to do under the Inyo-Los Angeles Agreement, and Fish and Game leaders and others see that we are doing the right thing and begin to believe in us, or some fresh folks step in, the committee will struggle.

I think there is an opportunity if we can get the right type of people in there to revitalize it in the next ten years. But, we're going to be so busy during the next ten years doing environmental enhancement in the Eastern Sierra that I think people will become more comfortable with our commitment. That could be a key element to the revitalization of the Interagency Committee.

NELSON: People still do not believe the Department commitment?

WICKSER: Definitely, a lot of people don't believe it. Some, even if they believe us they cannot forgive us for what they perceive the Department did in the past. Of course, we continue to be the favorite "whipping boy" up in valley, not so much for the old-timers, but for the people who have moved in more recently.

I remember seeing an article that appeared in a northern central-valley, San Joaquin, to avoid confusion, referring to the Department and its "scheme" to obtain water from the Sacramento Valley. Clearly, it's not us, it's the Metropolitan Water District, but DWP is the image that's out there and fun to throw rock at.

Even Mike Clinton, from the Imperial Irrigation District, in a couple of letters written to MWD, in frustration over what's happening with the Imperial and San Diego water exchange, refers to the "Muhollandism attitude of MWD." It's something that's not going to go away.

NELSON: It's 1970 and you're a Senior Planning Engineer. What are you planning? Everything's done!

WICKSER: We were doing things like updating the city and valley Master Plans, upgrading system-type planning. We were looking at new pump-tank systems up in the Santa Monica Mountains. Those were large activities. "Toe" Mayeda was my boss. He had moved up to assistant division head in the design division. Bill Simon was the engineer of design. It wasn't very long after that Simon retired and Georgeson moved into the slot. Duane had returned from the Owens Valley; worked in water executive for a brief stint, then went to Water Operating Division as the assistant division head, then moved over to design division.

Then something happened in the early morning of February 9, 1971 that sort of changed everything. I remember my particular role at that time was, in the evening hours, over in the basement of Parker Center at the Emergency Command Center. The immediate concern was how to remove water from Van Norman Reservoir so that if an aftershock occurred the damaged dam didn't spill its contents into the north San Fernando Valley. And, by the way, we need to keep some water in case we have fires. It was a juggling act.

The first priority was to bring the reservoir's water level down a ways to stabilize it. So, we began blowing off eight hundred cubic feet per second, some of it into the system and some just flowing down Bull Creek flood control channel.

The Army Corps of Engineers, with great fanfare, brought in pumps to help in the lowering process. After about two days of total frustration of them trying to set up their pumps and get them working, by the time they would be set, the water level had fallen and they would

have to start all over again. Those pumps were capable of moving ten cf/s, so if all eight were operating they would be pumping one-tenth of what we were doing.

Well, the media and other city officials were running around trying to get the picture, so I finally got them in position so I could explain what we were talking about. The pumps were not a big deal. They looked good on TV, but at best they could do ten percent of the job. Finally, at about four in the morning, an LAPD Captain or Deputy Chief, says, "Hell, what's all this big fuss been about. That doesn't mean squat?" And I said that's what I had been trying to tell them for three days. So that's where I spent my nights. During the day, I was in the office.

We were looking at system operation changes that would leave as much water in the system as we could. We were concerned about the Granada Truck Line because of all its failures. We were already thinking of replacing it in the long-term.

After the earthquake crisis subsided, planning took the lead in developing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), for the replacement of the dam. Planning was in charge of that project. I was in charge of working up a contract with A. C. Martin for the first EIR. During that period I don't think you were ever successful in having your first EIR approved because the process was still evolving.

When the first EIR was completed I had moved on to working on the feasibility studies for the filtration plant. This probably started before the earthquake, but with a new division head and the knowledge that the Safe Drinking Water Act would soon be law, we started thinking about filtering our water and where could a filter plant be constructed.

The fact that we had an earthquake had an impact on where we might

build a filtration plant. As it turned out in the construction of L.A. Dam, or L.A. Reservoir, we constructed a pad downstream of the dam for a future filtration plant. It was an alternative to the current location of the plant, Los Angeles Aqueduct Filtration Plant (LAAFP). At the time we estimated it would cost very little to build the pad as opposed to coming back later and doing the work. We had a lot of earth to dispose of during the dam/reservoir construction.

Don Grussing and I visited East Bay MUD's filtration plant in the Bay Area. I think they were our peer in regard to some similarities of systems, particularly, open reservoirs in a large urban setting. They had already built filtration plants on many of their reservoirs and were building them on their other reservoirs. We had not done that yet. We had a lot of conversations with them on siting. So the first feasibility study for the filtering of Aqueduct water was completed in '72 or 'early '73, something like that.

NELSON: Was East Bay ahead because they had to filter their product?

WICKSER: I think they were ahead technology-wise in the sense that they had a stronger feeling for the need to filter their water than we did. On the other hand, their water, I think, coming in to their large in city reservoirs was raw water, not too dissimilar to what we had. Their's came down an aqueduct and flowed into their in-city reservoirs where the water was simply chlorinated. Later, they added the filter plants.

Up to that time we resisted any filter plants. We pointed to the "Great Purifier" at Haiwee Reservoir, where impurities settled during the one- to two-month time period it took for the water to move through

the reservoir, then it came down a covered aqueduct and flowed into the Van Norman reservoirs in the north San Fernando Valley where there was additional settling time. Van Norman was open to the atmosphere, but we just dosed it good with chlorine. We had a little higher turbidity then compared with now. But it was decided the water was OK.

NELSON: When the earthquake hit, what happened to our water distribution system? How did you continue to move water throughout Los Angeles?

WICKSER: That's so long ago it blurs with the 1994 Northridge quake. My recollection is that the McClay and Chatsworth highline's were heavily damaged. The Granada Highline was damaged. The outlet works coming out of the Van Norman complex saw some of the old riveted pipe damaged. I know we had a lot of breaks in the distribution system and some damage to De Soto and McClay reservoirs. Frankly, I can't remember the exact extent of damage twenty-seven years ago. Because of our system's multiple connections we were able to reroute water from other reservoirs, and in extreme, particularly, some hillside neighborhoods, we supplied water by tanker truck until water service was restored.

NELSON: How did the aqueduct tunnel that cuts through the San Andreas Fault do?

WICKSER: Great. We shut the aqueduct down and inspected the tunnel, but found no offsets or significant damage. Of course, there was no direct action on the San Andreas Fault that cuts through Elizabeth Tunnel. However, the '71 quake did considerable damage at Terminal Hill, both to the first and second aqueducts.

As a result, and since the two aqueducts were down for inspection, and repair, we started thinking about developing the San Fernando Groundwater Basin to a greater extent. That would mean more wells, more capacity, so that it could become our in-city water supply in the event the aqueducts were ruptured.

Some of the old riveted pipe and tunnels, say from Soledad Canyon into the city had suffered a little movement and damage and there were minor leaks. There weren't huge problems with the aqueducts, except at Terminal Hill, above the Cascades. The second aqueduct was on piers going up the back side of Terminal Hill. The pipe ruptured at the top.

One of the advantages the Department enjoyed was a very capable and dedicated field workforce. They were able to move right in and start making repairs immediately. I think at that time we had Sheldon Pump Station and were able to pump water up to the McClay area. We had the same thing going westerly, although the Granada Trunk Line was basically replaced, we had trouble with it again in '94. But, you look at it and there are not many alternatives.

If FEMA money becomes available we will be looking for another route for the Granada Trunk Line as a result of the '94 situation. Chatsworth Highline was seriously damaged in '71, and subsequently replaced by the MET West Valley Feeder that the Department leases from them.

NELSON: I imagine the Department stockpiles critical parts for use in emergencies. Items that cannot be "grabbed" off the shelf after an emergency, like the '71 and '94 quakes, occur.

WICKSER: In terms of pipe, we have "bone yards" as we call them containing a lots of short sections of different size pipe. The

shop at 1630 North Main can roll big "butt straps," that can be used.

We've also had good experience with the pipe suppliers. In a crisis they can set up and roll butt straps for our pipes very quickly. Sometimes you can find sections of pipes somewhere else in the country which can be quickly shipped here.

We do regular drills on how to respond to emergencies, and so forth. But basically, the key is in having well-trained employees who know how the system works. We need people who can go into a situation and say, "We need to close this gate, but if we close it, we've got to open this other gate valve, so we can move water around. We've got to adjust this regulator station so we can bleed from this service zone into this other one because we can't get water in the normal way."

For those types of decisions, you can get help from engineers in the office, but largely it's the regulator crew workers, gate operators, and the field superintendents who have the knowledge to be able to make split-second and correct decisions in emergencies; people who have worked the system for a few years.

I remember in '71 there were a whole bunch of us who knew how the system worked fairly well. I certainly wasn't a master at it, but there were people who were real well informed about the system. In '94, it dawned on me that we didn't have the depth of talent in that regard anymore. It was sort of frightening to me to think that there was only a handful of people out there with that same knowledge. And now we've lost even more, including Larry McReynolds, and a whole bunch of people. Wayne Kruse will probably be retiring in the near future. He is just an unbelievable, knowledgeable guy. This relatively sudden loss of engineering talent is a scary thing because we've also lost key field people as well. So, our emergency response capability is going

to be reduced even further in the future as a result of all this downsizing.

NELSON: Everyone remembers where they were at the instant of the 1971 earthquake, a little after 6:00 a.m. Where were you?

WICKSER: I was here just about ready to get out of bed. I jumped up and came flying in here to make sure my young daughter wasn't frightened. The home was moving so much that I ran into the door jam. I couldn't make it through the door on the first try. Once I found out that everything was OK here, no structural damage, but a couple of things falling off shelves, I raced off to my office, getting there about a quarter to seven.

NELSON: During your early time in planning who were you working with?

WICKSER: John Holmstrom became one of the Water Works engineers. He was assigned to governmental relations and things like that. Henry Miedema was the engineer on pump tank systems, as I recall. Bill Kingston was engineer for the master plan. The squad leaders were: Bob Wilson had the valley, Wayne Kruse had the city. They were the key players in how the water moved throughout the system.

NELSON: Around that time came the final settlement on the Baldwin Hills matter. The Department was given some money from the oil company.

WICKSER: Yes, my recollection of the settlement is that there was no blame affixed, to a large degree because our insurance company also insured the oil company. So it was sort of coming out of one pocket into another. We're pretty sure we know what happened, but we got some money out of it so there was no pressing for further damages against

anyone.

NELSON: There was subsidence and differential movements due to, I believe, Standard Oil Company's pumping operations in their Baldwin Hills oil fields.

WICKSER: I don't know if they were pressure injecting at that time or not. But, it was basically creating some foundation material movement in the area the dam was located.

NELSON: Before we go on, let's go back to a couple of personalities. Gerry Jones was one of your first "big" boss'?

WICKSER: He was a Senior Engineer when I started. He was a warm person. I came from a family where I've always appreciated older people; always enjoyed listening to their stories. At that time Gerry seemed like an older person. His appearance was such that you may have thought he was a "hayseed," but, the more you listened to him the more he revealed a keen understanding of a lot of basic engineering. I wouldn't say he was a high theorist, but a very practical engineer. He had a lot of experience and was tremendous at being able to explain things, "painting" a picture, so you could visualize the situation. If you gave him the opportunity you had to be impressed with the man. He was the type of guy that if you just looked at him and said, "Ah, what does he know," you missed a great deal of knowledge.

NELSON: I think he liked to affect that "hayseed," as you called it, persona.

WICKSER: I think so. But Gerry was instrumental in my Department career in a big way. Typically, some guys would come and then leave

the Department after a short stay for another agency. I was an Assistant Engineer at the time and the City of Beverly Hills was advertising for Assistant Director in their water department. I was active in the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) at the time and had met the head of the water department and talked to him. He basically offered me the job. I came back and talked to Gerry about it and he said, "Well, you can be a big fish in a little pond, or a little fish in a big pond." He assured me that I had a good potential at the Department and said, "You go to these small water agencies, so, OK, maybe in three years you'll be the top guy. Where do you go then? Do you want to bounce around to every place? You start getting into a lot of politics in those small outfits. You have a good future here and will make Senior Engineer some day."

I hoped he had not been pulling my leg. But, I listened to him. Otherwise, I would have probably left.

NELSON: What about "Sali?"

WICKSER: I have one fond memory of Sali. It was in the early days of the Second Aqueduct and we were looking at Jawbone Pipeline. I had been up there with the surveyors and we had layed a route using large lime crosses. Phillips, Simon, and Mamrelli were all going to come up and take a look at it.

We had two little bubble helicopters we had chartered. There was the pilot, a passenger and a jump seat between them. It must have been in early spring because I remember we'd been out to an awards affair for the basketball league or something the night before. I had apparantly drank more beer than I should have.

The next morning we all met at the Van Nuys Airport at about

six in the morning. I was not feeling real terrific. It was a windy day. So I got in the helicopter with the pilot and Mamrelli. We hadn't been in the air ten minutes when Sali brought out this big, black cigar and lit it up. The wind is blowing his smoke into me and we're bumping up and down. I'm sitting most of the way up, thinking, if I can't hold this down, which way do I turn?

Mamrelli was, I guess, even less impressive than Gerry Jones on first impression. I never really got to know him very well. My memory of him was in him arguing over a bridge game. I never knew what type of an engineer he was. I think he had a lot of experience in the old distribution - water operating activities. But, my exposure to him on a one-on-one basis was just about limited to what I've related.

NELSON: What about Duane Gerogeson? When did you meet him?

WICKSER: I guess I met Duane quite early on. It seemed like in those days the young engineers got together for parties and did things after work. I don't remember Duane being particularly active in stuff like softball, basketball, or any of the sports.

Duane and I were both in the design division; Duane in planning and I was over working for Gerry Jones. I really got to know Duane when he started the Water Engineers Club.

On our first Water Engineers Club tour to the Owens Valley, we took our own personal cars. Horace DeWitt was our guide and we had about six cars. Horace would be in one car and we'd be driving along and we would see his gesturing and know he was giving out some interesting information. So we would all have to stop and gather around him for the information. Everyone would try to drag him to their cars for the next leg of the trip.

When Duane started water engineers, that's when I got to know him better. I remember going to his home in Reseda once for a New Year's party. I think I first met him in about 1962, through Don Trestik, who was my Associate. Don and Duane had worked together when they were Assistants.

Something that Paul Lane probably started, Duane continued, and I certainly endorsed and think it was very valuable to the Water System, was in encouraging people to rotate and serve in different positions. In the Senior and Principal levels it was mandatory. We rotated people. There was no, "How would you like..." We moved people around to different divisions and different sections. We tried to push it down to the Engineer, and even Associate level.

I felt it broadened one's experience and prepared them for more responsibility. The Power System had a program that provided regular rotation for its Assistants and Associates but didn't go higher. A lot of credit goes to Paul for that, but I think Duane continued it, and I certainly did.

NELSON: What happened next? You're now in planning.

WICKSER: When I went to planning Duane was in the Owens Valley, I think. No, I think he had already returned from up north. I can't remember if Duane had already returned or was up there at that time.

Ron McCoy was the next one to go up to the Owens Valley. I remember how envious I was that Ron was going and wished that it was me. That was about 1970, and I told myself that "My ship had sailed."

Duane came back and went into Water Executive for a short period of time, and then he went over to Water Operating as the assistant division

head. As a matter of fact, when he was in Water Executive. on a temporary basis he was a Senior Engineer working as the executive engineer. Then he went to Water Operating. Then he ended up being design engineer while I was still in planning. I don't know if he was head of design at the time of the '71 earthquake or not. I think it had to be a little later than that when he headed design.

So it wasn't until early '73 that Paul Lane asked me if I wanted to go to the Owens Valley. Paul was the system head at that time with Bob Phillips, General Manager. Bob was the head of the Water System during the '71 earthquake. When Bob moved up to GM, Paul took over the Water System, and Duane moved to the Aqueduct Division. I know Ron worked for Paul a year or so before the bumps up of Phillips and Lane were made. The rest of his time in the valley, Ron reported to Duane.

So when it was time for Paul to bring Ron back from the valley, Paul talked to me about going up. I told him, yes, I thought I would like to. It was then that I talked to Duane who would be my boss as head of aqueduct. That's when Duane told me that he had lobbied against me for the planning job. But now, he wanted me to go up north.

So I moved to Water Executive and stayed there for about six months until Ron came back. Ron came back to Aqueduct Division as assistant division head.

I had about six months in Water Executive as the Executive Engineer and that's where I met Eldon Cotton. I may have known him earlier but, the time in Water Executive was where I really got to know him. Eldon was the staff engineer reporting to me. Ours has been a lasting friendship ever since then.

My family and I moved to the Owens Valley in late August 1973. As I recall I had about a two-hour overlap with Ron McCoy. He went

on vacation for a couple of weeks. When he got back I was able to talk with him when things came up.

NELSON: Was there a set tour of duty for the guy up there?

WICKSER: Paul told me it would be a three to five year assignment. He had been there for five and a half years. Duane was there a little over three years, and Ron was there about three years.

We moved into a little city-owned house on Brockman Lane, renting it from the Department. It had about forty acres of pasture around it that was leased to a packer. It was a great place for the kids to play and grow up. The house had belonged to an old settler, Alex Reeves, when his wife died, it became available to us. I was the first Department employee to live there.

Richie Conway, Conway summit and Conway Ranch family, lived a few hundred yards from us over off Highway 395. He came over to welcome us and get acquainted. He must have been in his seventies then. He'd often stop by and tell the kids stories. He was a all-around great guy. From one of the old families.

Richie told us that our house had been built in Tonopah, Nevada, and that it had been moved to Bishop around the turn of the century. I had gone up in the attic and found old newspaper remnants people had stuffed in cracks for insulation in those days. Some of the dates that I could make out were in the mid-1890's, to 1905 or so.

The house had one by twelve's for internal walls, no studs. The exterior studs, joists, rafters, etc., were all rough cut, full dimension lumber. The wiring was on the outside of the wall. When the wind blew it was cold! We'd wrap the windows with plastic sheeting, taped with duct tape, otherwise, you'd freeze to death. It had three

little bedrooms, living, dining and kitchen down stairs. there was a loft area. It was pretty good sized, a little cramped for us, but OK. It was a lot of fun living there.

NELSON: What was your motivation in going to the Owens Valley?

WICKSER: It was a lateral move, although subsequently, I did receive a small raise in pay. The reason I wanted to go there is that I had been visiting the Owens Valley with my family since 1948. I loved to hunt and fish, and I started skiing when I was in college. So, to me it was just a wonderful place to be assigned to.

After being with the Department for over ten years I realized that it was a prime job and that there would probably be promotional opportunities if I didn't stub my toe along the way. But, I think I would have gone up there in any event. It was a lifestyle Mary and I thought would be positive for our kids, and they were the right age for it. Our son was four and our daughter was seven so that seemed to work. We thought it would be great, but if it wasn't, we could tough it out for three to five years.

As it turned out, I was there ten years and the family stayed an extra year so our daughter could graduate from high school. I commuted up and back on weekends. I would typically leave Bishop at 4:00 a.m. on a Monday, and get into the office in L. A. at about 8:30 a.m. On Friday, I would leave the office between 3:00 - 4:00 p.m. and get home between 7:00 - 8:00 p.m., sometimes 9:00 p.m., sometimes 10:00 p.m.

One night I left Independence on my way to Bishop. It was dark and you could see headlights. I got up by the Indian Reservation where you lost sight of the road behind you. There were no lights visible on the

road behind me at that time. There's a mile to three miles max stretch of divided highway by Fort Independence. Would you believe that before I got to the end of that divided road, a black Porsche whizzed by me. He had not been visible on the road - he had to be doing a hundred-twenty, because I was doing seventy.

NELSON: In the past many Northern District Engineers came back to eventually lead the Water System.

WICKSER: If you look back, there was a guy, Silvis who was the first district engineer up there in the early '40's. There was another guy, Sid Pratt, who was there until Bob Phillips went up. I'm not sure either of them was called district engineer. But, you had two people who were probably there for six to eight years each, who retired there as far as I know.

Bob Phillips had gone up there as a student engineer in '35. He went back later as an Associate and the office engineer. Subsequently, he became district engineer in 1958 or 59. Paul Lane replaced him in 1961, I think.

Of the latter group, Ron McCoy, was the only one who didn't make system head, and continued to work for the Department for awhile. Duane Buchholz would probably have made it, but he elected to take the Focused Separation package and retired. He would have been my choice to replace me. In fact, I would have probably retired earlier if Duane had stayed around.

Bob Wilson was up there on an interim for about a year and a half.

The irony was that when I brought Buchholz back, it was hard to find anyone who wanted to go up. That was mind-boggling to me. But, I

think it shows the difference in lifestyles now. There are more spouses working, more elder-care issues. I know a couple of guys I talked to couldn't go because they had parents who needed their care. Society doesn't seem to be as mobile as we were, because of family concerns. We were able to pack up and move.

NELSON: How were you notified that you were to become Northern District Engineer? Did a message come over the transom?

WICKSER: No, it was very informal. Paul Lane called me into his office one morning. Paul used to get in real early. I mean six in the morning, maybe even before that.

I remember being called into his office one day and he asked me if I would be interested in going up. I told him heck yeah, I think I would, but I would need to talk to Mary. Mary and I had already talked about some day, wouldn't that be nice. But, that's different than talking about actually going.

I went over to talk to Duane Georgeson to see what he thought. I'd gotten to know Duane better over the years, even when he was up north. I was in Sanitary Engineering so I went up there because of a huge 1969 snowpak, when we had water coming down what was called Hogback Creek and dumping into the aqueduct just north of the Alabama Gates. It was very turbid water, so I went up to see if we could do anything about it, and that's when Duane and I got to know each other a little bit better.

NELSON: Were you given any briefings prior to moving north?

WICKSER: That's why Paul moved me into Water Executive, so that he and I could talk a couple of times a week about philosophy, issues, and so

forth. We had a lot of conversations, mostly dealing with philosophy. Paul was not the detail person. His was more the style and values guy. After I got up there and needed to talk something over with someone, I usually called Duane or Ron. Duane was usually harder to get in touch with, but Ron was usually available.

At that time we had the old crank-style telephones, which was part of the Owens Valley communications system. We also had the regular telephones, but they were not as reliable. I soon learned, to my advantage, that if I heard something from Georgeson that I didn't want to hear, I would yell, "Duane!, Duane!, I can't hear you, there's something wrong with this line." He'd come back, "Don't give me that crap, Wickser, I lived up there. I know what you're doing."

Bob Phillips was GM, but I also had conversations with him when his expertise was needed on certain matters. I had a lot of advice and coaching, even though they weren't sitting beside me.

Duane and Paul, and to a lesser extent, Ron, came up from time to time to help out and talk about things.

Initially anyway, on big issues, Duane would personally come up. Later, he didn't come up nearly as much, particularly, when he became Water System head.

NELSON: Duane was Aqueduct Engineer and your immediate boss. I imagine that as Northern District Engineer, you talked to the system head quite a bit.

WICKSER: Yes, particularly with Paul because he was interested in that. Even with Bob Phillips to some degree. He lived there. His wife was from there and there were relatives in the valley. Every now and then I'd send a letter down and Bob would call me, "Ah, Ah, This is

Bob Phillips. Who's Tex Holland? Is he related to Bell Holland?" I'd reply, "Yeah, it's one of her sons." "Well, G-- D--- it, she's an old friend of mine. They've been around a long time and been good friends of the city. You make sure you treat them fair." "OK, Bob, Tex lives next door to me and we get along fine." "Well, fine, that's what I want to hear. Make sure it's fair."

We moved up to the Owens Valley, like on a Thursday. I went into the Independence office on Friday; they were having a farewell luncheon for Ron. The next day, or within a couple of days, on Labor Day weekend, I got a call from people at the Owens Gorge, an eight year-old boy had fallen into the aqueduct down by the Rustic Motel, which is just north of Haiwee Reservoir. That was my first day in the Northern District, and an eight year-old is in the aqueduct. I drove down and met Carl Ruiz, who was our Construction and Maintenance Supervisor, out of Lone Pine.

I then drove to the motel to talk to the mother. As I got out of the car, I heard something I'll never forget, I heard this wailing from half a mile away. The mother was walking along the aqueduct just wailing. I thought, my gosh, what a job I've gotten into. First day on the job and we shut down the aqueduct and are searching for the body.

It turned out that he was an epileptic and he, his brother and a kid who lived there were running across one of our overheads on the I beam and he lost his balance. He was the first of four drownings that occurred on the aqueduct over the ten years I was there. Prior to that there had only been one drowning that we were aware of.

That precipitated our aqueduct fencing program. We'd always had barbed wire to keep cattle out, Now, we replaced the barbed wire with chain-link fencing along the concrete lined, open canal.

NELSON: I guess Paul Lane was instrumental in the removal of billboards and other signage, at least on city lands. Has the signage returned?

WICKSER: There are advertising signs on the Indian Reservations because they are not subject to federal law. When Paul was District Engineer, Ladybird Johnson came up with the highway beautification program. In Independence, there was this little eatery, called The Pines Cafe. Every day, Paul would go down for his coffee break. Johnny Johnson, who subsequently became an Inyo County Supervisor, and a major player on the later Inyo-L.A. Agreement, owned the Pines Cafe. He was very active in Little League, and there's a field named for him in Independence. Johnny had some advertising signs on our property. So the day after Paul sent letters to our permittee's telling them that they must remove any signs, not contiguous to their place of business, Paul went down to the Pines Cafe for his typical morning coffee. He was greeted by Johnny who refused to serve him, telling Paul to get the h--- out of his place.

NELSON: When you arrived at Independence, I guess Russ Rawson was there, an old familiar face.

WICKSER: Chuck McCauley was the Water Works Engineer and basically my assistant. I didn't really know Chuck. I had met him a few times. Russ was the Range and Wildlife man Paul had brought up. Bob Wilson, who I had worked with in planning section, had moved there a year or so before I went up. He was the Associate Engineer. There was Cy Jeter, who was our property manager. He had replaced Mona Osborn. Art Fonda had moved from Dams and Geology and became superintendent after Bill Gardner had retired. There were a couple of others who I had known, but can't remember at the moment.

NELSON: Did you get a briefing on the major players in the Owens Valley before you moved up?

WICKSER: Well, I was informed about some elected officials. What their philosophy was. What their backgrounds were. One county Supervisor was Herb London. Herb ran a pack station out of Rock Creek. Herb was a leasee of ours. He was a good old boy, always looking for favors, but he was not a City-hater. John K. Smith was the county administrator. He also had a lease from the Department. The word was that he was a real City-hater. So I received some info on some of the key players.

Perhaps the most sage advise I got was to be careful about who I talked to, and what I said, because of the relationships up there. You never knew who was related to who.

Duane had always been one of those people who attended everything. When I got up there I looked through the files and was amazed at the number of organizations we attended. I called Ron McCoy about it and asked him why we belonged to so many groups. Ron said, "You know Duane, he never found a committee he didn't want to be part of."

I was really given a lot of freedom in what I did. I slowly weeded out many groups and committees. My whole philosophy was that I was more of an internal manager, where Duane was always the external guy.

I found out who the important groups and people were during the first six months or so. I remember one of the first meetings I attended was the Inyo Associates, kind of a county-wide chamber of commerce that was fairly favorable to the City, although some members had some problems with us. I think that it was there that they nicknamed me, "King James, King of The Colony." Inyo County had always considered

themselves a colony to the city of L.A. So, I was "King James."

You had to be careful what you said to everybody. Objectives that Paul and also Bob Phillips shared with me was that we had to be straight with the people. Straight and simple, in the sense that we shouldn't be "gamey," that is trying to play manipulative games with them. We were to be straight forward with them and consistent in our story. That was a very easy way for me to operate since it had always been part of my value system.

Duane was perceived by many as being somewhat of a "gamesman." So they were a little "leery" of him. Ron wasn't there long enough to gain their confidence. He was liked by some and treated with caution by some. I think mainly this was because he followed Duane and stayed a short time. So I really had a chance to go my own way. The big issues were coached to me a lot, but I didn't get a book on everybody.

NELSON: City equipment is not to be used for non-city work, unless, I guess, it's for public safety during some calamity, or Acts of God. I imagine a lot of Owens Valley folks looked to the City to help out in grading baseball diamonds, and the such.

WICKSER: In the Owens Valley, our employees, both on the water and power sides, are so instrumental in getting things done. No matter whatever it was, you wonder how the valley would have survived if it hadn't been for our employees.

I mean, they are the movers and shakers. You find them on the volunteer fire department, the civic clubs, coaching Little League, leading Boy and Girl Scout units, whatever it might be. The Department had already established the principle of allowing its equipment to be used for civic

benefit. Typically, what would happen is that if we needed to grade a field for Little League, we would provide the equipment and fuel and one of the operators would donate his time. So we didn't pay wages for those activities. I once borrowed a painter's truck with a paint gun on it so that we could paint the Boy Scout and Girl Scout cabins. Actually, they were old barracks from Manzanar. They had been moved onto department property in Bishop,

As part of a Lions Club project, we did the painting with a Department truck and donated Department paint for the scouts.

That was part of our PR and good neighbor program. The problem we had was employees and their neighbors ending up with Department wheelbarrows, shovels, brooms, stuff like that. We kidded that once we finished buying enough wheelbarrows so that everyone in the valley had one, we could cut back quite a bit on the budget.

We did have a lot of that. Ladders, clippers, etc., that somehow found their way into someone's garage. Probably, because of the smaller area, more of that took place than would have down here. On the other hand, maybe I was closer to it all.

NELSON: Let's go back a bit here. Sam Nelson. Did you have any dealings with that former, well-liked, Department General Manager?

WICKSER: Yes, I have two good stories about Sam Nelson. When I first came to the Department I was trying to get a draft deferment. McNabb, who I mentioned earlier, wanted to take care of me because I played golf with him on Saturdays. So he got a letter into Charles Manore, who was Nelson's secretary, for Nelson's signature, to send to the draft board requesting my deferment.

On another occasion, I was standing waiting for an elevator

where the Boardway, Hill Street, and the 2nd Street buildings came together. I guess the elevator to the 2nd Street Building was what I wanted. Anyway, the door opens and Sam Nelson walks out, see's me and says, "Hi Jim, how are you doing today?" That just floored me, because I was just a young Engineering Assistant, and quite a ways down on the Department food chain. I don't know how he knew my name, but he did.

Later, I was in the Department's Speakers Club, and had a speaking assignment at the Crenshaw Rotary Club which met at Rudy's Restaurant out on Crenshaw Blvd. near Martin Luther King (Santa Barbara Ave.)

So I'm up there talking about water supply and Sam came rushing in. He was making up for a missed Rotary meeting. Seeing him there I said something like, "Oh, my gosh, I've got to be careful now, the General Manager is here."

Afterwards, Sam came up to me saying that I had done a wonderful job, had covered everything, and had a good presence before the group. He was that way.

NELSON: Did you ever meet Pat Brown?

WICKSER: When I was in Water Executive, the state aqueduct was dedicated out at Perris Reservoir, I think. I was asked to take Councilman Gil Lindsay (9th Dist.) and his wife there. So I drove them out to the first event which was held at the famous Mission Inn, in Riverside. I'm sitting next to Gil when Pat Brown came up and we exchanged some small talk. Sometime later, after he was out of office, he attended a dinner in his honor in Long Pine. Those were my only contacts with him.

NELSON: Jim, let's back track again and cover a few things that don't easily fit anywhere else. In 1928, MET was formed, as I recall, by thirteen Southern California agencies, and water entities, including the Department. From the completion of the Los Angeles-Owens River Aqueduct in 1913 to the formation of MET, and the completion of the Colorado River Aqueduct, Los Angeles had about all the growth water there was to be found in the area. This factor seemed to be an incentive for small communities to annex to the City. The formation of MET and anticipation of a new water source, the Colorado River, for the Southern California area, seemed to stop further annexations to the City. I've heard the "conspiracy theory" expressed that MET was encouraged to form to help throttle the further expansion of Los Angeles. Long question. What do you know or think about this?

WICKSER: That's an interesting question. I think that until recently, and by that I mean the pending deregulation on the energy side, most people seemed to believe that Los Angeles actively supported the creation of MET while knowing that it would probably close the door on further forced annexations to the City.

Now, there is some reflection back that Southern California Edison was a very quiet player in the formation of MET because clearly, if MET had not been formed, and more communities annexed to Los Angeles in order to have a water supply, it was likely that Edison would lose electric services in those area's. It's not clear or well documented really how factual that speculation is. No evidence to my knowledge has come to light.

But in the '20's, for whatever reason, although Los Angeles funded seventy-some percent of the cost of the Colorado River Aqueduct,

water people believed that it was the right thing to do to include other agencies. Perhaps it was felt that with regional participation they would have more clout, plus greater public acceptance for the Colorado River Aqueduct, than if it were solely for the City of Los Angeles.

NELSON: You made brief mention of the litigation with the City of San Fernando. Can you elaborate a little on that subject?

WICKSER: There were a couple of lawsuits associated with the San Fernando groundwater basin. The first one was early on with the cities of Glendale and Burbank. Subsequently, another suit was filed that expanded the parties to include San Fernando, and two hundred other "pumpers" in the basin.

I'm not nearly as well versed on the subject as I should be, but the final State Supreme Court decision in 1975 basically gave the rights to the San Fernando groundwater basin to Los Angeles, except some proportion of imported water that was used by other basin cities. For example, Glendale, Burbank, and San Fernando bought water from MET. The court determined that a certain amount of that water that was used for landscaping, irrigation, etc., helped recharge the groundwater basin to the benefit of Los Angeles. Consequently, those cities were given the right to pump that amount each year.

The Department probably pumps about ninety percent, the others about ten percent. Other "pumpers," Walt Disney, for example, pump from the groundwater, but pay us an annual fee based upon the amount of water they pump.

Two important findings came out of the Pueblo water rights suit. It reaffirmed that the Pueblo rights dealt not only with the surface waters

in the San Fernando Valley, but, the groundwaters as well.

Much like any place else, when there's an abundance of water people feel that they can just drive a well on their land and go get it. That's probably what Glendale, Burbank and San Fernando did initially.

NELSON: The longest-running litigation was against San Fernando?

WICKSER: I think the longest litigation was against all the parties. There was some earlier litigation, in the '30's, I think, with Glendale and Burbank, which was not protracted.

NELSON: The 1972 Safe Drinking Water Act was briefly mentioned. What overall impact did that act have upon the Department?

WICKSER: The Safe Drinking Water Act, and I believe its been reauthorized twice now, most recently in '96, is still a work in progress to some extent that has now moved beyond your traditional water quality standards and began to recognize health effects and disinfection byproducts.

Recently, the press has began to write about trihalomethanes (THM's) In the past we said that if we chlorinated the water, that would make everything fine. Now, through various research, we're finding that if there is naturally-occurring organic matter in water and it's chlorinated, THM's are created. Also, what we have found is that if you have turbidity, you generally have to apply more chlorine to ensure that the bacteria is killed, and can't hide in the cloudy water.

Prior to the operation of our filtration plant in the San Fernando Valley, we would bring down water from the aqueducts. Generally, it was of a high quality, but sometimes, there would be a little turbidity present. At those times, we'd just jack up the chlorine

to make sure we had no bacterial problems. Unbeknownst to anyone during that era we were creating THM's.

The associated risk is always debatable. There is talk of a health risk in the range of one in a million additional cancer deaths for one who consumes a liter a day of this water for seventy years. Those were some of the standards mentioned.

What it all meant to the Department was that it was going to have to filter the water wherever the water is open to the atmosphere. Secondly, we need to be much more sensitive to the degree of chlorination we provide. Thirdly, we need to look to alternatives to chlorine, whether it's chloramines, peroxide, or something else, to minimize the disinfection by-products.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the scientific health communities are struggling with this issue of eliminating microbials and bacteria in the water, while minimizing the creation of potentially harmful disinfectant by-products. In gross terms, do you want to die from bacteria, or die from cancer?

The most recent re-authorization of the surface water treatment rule emphasized the Information Collection Rule (ICR) as a means of gathering sufficient data to try to determine in a negotiated process with EPA as to what the standard should be. Where is the middle ground where we can feel safe bacterially, as well as feeling safe from carcinogens.

NELSON: As technology advances we're able to detect organisms that were unseen and unknown in the past.

WICKSER: Absolutely. At one point in time, parts per million was the minimum detection level. Now, we can detect parts per billion

and parts per trillion. About half of our wells in the San Fernando Valley are inoperable, being contaminated by Trichloroethylene (TCE) and Perchloroethylene (PCE), which, until the early 1980's were undetectable. Now we are talking about them in three to five parts per billion concentrations. Folks have probably been drinking that water since World War II. TCE and PCE probably reached our wells by the mid-'40's, but we were unable to detect it with the state of the art equipment we had at that time. We are still developing ways to treat the problem.

NELSON: The Department has always be extremely careful about allowing access to its open reservoirs, at least from Haiwee south. Now Haiwee is open, at least to fishing. Is this loosening, because of the filtration plant?

WICKSER: One of the things I find very troublesome is that of the state Department of Health Services taking one position, while the state Department of Fish and Game takes a different position.

A very strange thing happened about five years ago. We were informed by a group of warm-water fishery people in the Owens Valley that there's an obscure provision in our deed from the state to the land upon which Haiwee Reservoir sits that requires that the land should remain open for fishing.

What's strange about it is that I doubt if there has been a water course there in modern times, that is 15,000 years ago when the glacial waters began receding - and that's not real modern times is it? Yet, this group came along, and our city attorney agreed, because there's the provision in the deed, and now because there's water, we had to open Haiwee to fishing.

In the same breath, Department of Health Services said, no, we couldn't open Haiwee because it's a drinking water reservoir and it's treated as a terminal reservoir by Health Services.

We're allowed to fish up on Crowley and Grant lakes, but no body contact is allowed in either reservoir, at least by definition. You can water ski, but you can't have body contact. If you fall, you're out!

So, we were required to open North Haiwee Reservoir to fishing. I believe we're presently allowing waders and float tubing, but no boats.

I think this has been sort of a red herring, no pun intended. We don't see any numbers of fishermen there. I was amazed that anyone would want to fish there. Of course, there were those false rumors of wonderful fishing. Because we had treated Haiwee, with copper sulfate, chlorine, and other treatment chemicals for so many years, there is virtually no algae in the reservoir that could sustain any kind of fish.

A few fish, carp for one, are carried down the aqueduct, but it's hardly a trophy fishery. So, we spent money to provide parking, fencing, outhouses, and so forth. I've been by there a number of times and rarely, after the first year, did I see a car parked there.

In the Second Aqueduct report, we talked about the fact that by increasing water export from the Owens Valley by fifty percent, the amount of flow-through time in Haiwee Reservoirs would also decrease.

Originally, flow-through time was estimated at sixty to ninety days, depending upon the time of year. Now, it's thirty to sixty days, depending upon the time of year. If we use the by-pass channel around Haiwee, it's even less.

The old philosophy was to keep people off the reservoirs and watch what was happening on our Owens Valley watershed. That's why we only allowed cattle and alfalfa. We didn't want crops that required herbicides or

pesticides. We also encouraged the communities up there to have a sewer system with proper treatment, which finally occurred in the '70's.

We're still concerned about watershed protection. Even in the in-city reservoirs, such as Stone Canyon, Hollywood, Encino, that have runoff. They are located in canyons and seem much like natural lakes. We're very concerned about the watersheds there and that's why the Department owns virtually all of the surrounding watershed.

NELSON: In talking about the Second Aqueduct and the increased flow, where did that water originate? Was it Owens Valley groundwater or surplus Owens River water?

WICKSER: The feasibility study for the Second Aqueduct talked about a more efficient irrigation policy for the Owens Valley. Prior to the Second Aqueduct, when there was a "wet" year, we allowed our ranchers to use as much water as they wanted. In a "dry" year, the ranchers didn't receive much, if any water.

In the '60's, we talked to our ranchers and told them that we were going to reduce the amount of acreage we irrigated, but that we would provide "firm" water, year in, year out, for the land we irrigated.

The way we could guarantee that was by pumping the groundwater basin.

So, Second Aqueduct water was sort of a combination of more efficient water usage, a planned extraction of about seventy cubic/feet/second of groundwater, plus about seventy cubic/feet/second additional coming from the Mono Basin. The interesting thing here is that we went to the Mono Basin. I think I mentioned earlier that we planned to develop the water resources from the Mono Basin, with planning, as least, beginning as far back as the 1920's. The federal government withdrew a million and a half

acres or so of public lands in Inyo and Mono counties, through Executive Orders and Congressional action, to protect our water rights. Basically, by the withdrawals, those lands could not be used by anyone else for any purpose, except under the 1872 mining laws. People could not go in and homestead, and things like that.

The federal government also passed a law, I think called the Thirty-Six Act, by which Los Angeles had the right to buy any federal property in Mono County that was needed in our water-gathering activities for a dollar and a quarter an acre.

We deposited enough money for twenty-five thousand acres but the deal was never completed. There was a lawsuit, I think it was called the Akins Case in the '30's where we paid the property owners around Mono Lake for viewshed rights and rights to lower the lake.

It is my recollection that the City paid eighty to ninety percent of the fair market value because we were going to affect the lake level, which in turn would affect their view and distance to the lake waters.

The State Water Rights Board granted us a permit to extract two hundred cubic/feet/second from the Mono Basin. In 1940-41, we completed the eleven-mile Mono Craters Tunnel, and built Grant and Crowley lake dams, which were the main features of, what was called, the Mono Basin Extension.

In "dry" years, we would use Mono Basin water, in "wet" years, the surplus would flow into Mono Lake. Finally, in the '50's, the state Water Rights Board told us we needed to use the water on a consistent basis or we might lose it to someone who would put it to beneficial use.

This also triggered the need to move ahead with the Second Aqueduct.

NELSON: The Second Aqueduct was completed before the California

Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) became effective, wasn't it?

WICKSER: The irony of it was that the Second Aqueduct went into service in, June, 1970, while CEQA became effective in November 1970. The first EIR lawsuit against a public entity was filed by "The Friends of Mammoth." It had to do with the construction of a huge condo complex, as I recall. Mono County was sued for granting the building permit. The courts ruled that the CEQA applied to governmental entities as well.

Inyo County saw that as an opportunity to sue us in 1972, asserting that an EIR was required for our project. Superior Court Judge, White, in Sacramento, ruled that since the Second Aqueduct was finished and in place before CEQA became law, and CEQA was not retroactive, therefore Inyo had no grounds for their suit.

Inyo appealed to the Third District Court of Appeals in Sacramento and the Court became our dear friends and bedfellows for the next two decades. They ruled that while the Second Aqueduct was indeed completed prior to CEQA, part of the project was pumping groundwater, and that was an ongoing project, not totally completed prior to CEQA, therefore, they ruled that we must prepare an EIR on increased groundwater pumping in the Owens Valley.

Well, what was increased? If one looks at averages prior to the Second Aqueduct, the long-term average was something like ten cubic/feet/second. On the other hand, there were years in which we pumped one hundred fifty cubic/feet/second, or perhaps more than that back in the late '20's, early '30's, and again in other dry cycles.

So our first trauma with the Third District Court of Appeals was our first EIR on increased groundwater pumping. They chastised us for too narrow a project description. I think Ken Downey will be

able to give more insight into this subject. So, I'll just cover the highs, or should I say, lows.

We then prepared a second EIR on a broadened-out project that dealt with more than just increased groundwater pumping. Water use on land and surface waters and so forth were added.

The Court didn't like our effort on the second EIR either. They took shots at us, saying we were obstructionists. We thought we were following their directions, although it seemed the target was constantly being moved or tinkered with by them.

During this period, about ten years, we were still granted the right to pump a heck of a lot of water. As a matter of fact, we were pumping more during this time than our long-term wish would have been.

The Court played with pumping rates. At one time we could pump two hundred twelve cubic/feet/second. We finally ended up pumping one hundred forty nine or one hundred fifty six cubic/feet/second. But, in any case, we were pumping a heck of a lot of groundwater as needed to fill the Second Aqueduct.

Finally, Inyo woke up. They had the courtroom victories, but we were still pumping the groundwater basin. I think this realization caused them to want to sit down and talk with us.

On the other hand, the Court was antagonistic towards us. They were getting a little nasty. We were never sure when they might just say no more groundwater pumping. Fortunately, the Department had a good Board of Commissioners at that time, with Jack Leeney and Rick Caruso leading the charge. They sat down with some Inyo County Supervisors, Johnny Johnson and Bob Campbell, I can't remember the others at this time.

They all agreed the process was not getting anyone anywhere. Inyo was

paying a lot of money to its lawyer, Tony Rossman. The Department was wasting a lot of valuable staff time. There was a lot of hostility among the agencies and it was really difficult to work on cooperative projects that needed to be done in the valley.

So as a result of that meeting, an Inyo-L.A. Standing Committee was soon formed. By the way, the Standing Committee is still in place.

An important aspect of the Agreement is that it brought the Inyo County elected officials to the table with their Los Angeles peers.

The Los Angeles team included: Councilmembers John Ferrero and Joan Flores, two Water and Power Commissioners, Leeney and Caruso, our CAO, Keith Comerie, the city attorney, represented by Ken Downey initially, then Ed Schlotman. Department staff included Paul Lane, Duane Georgeson and myself.

In the past Inyo had to work basically with Department staff people, such as myself, as District Engineer, Georgeson, as head of the Aqueduct Division, and Lane as head of the Water System. So it was bureaucrats dealing with elected officials. I think that was probably not an appropriate situation. It worked alright with Mono County because we didn't have any major problems early on, but not so in Inyo.

Anyway, the Standing Committee led to a relationship developing with Inyo County leadership. As a result of that, the LA-Inyo Agreement was created. The LA-Inyo Agreement brought up a whole bunch of things. Not only groundwater pumping, but surface water use, maintaining irrigated lands in the Owens Valley, divestment of the town water systems. etc.

Let me back track a bit. If you lived in the Owens Valley, you possibly rented your business building and land from the Department. Possibly rented your home from the Department. You paid your water and

electric, bill to the Department, if you lived in Independence, you also paid a sewer bill to the Department. Besides you heard about the Department raping, pillaging, and burning the environment. With all of those interfaces, we stood a good chance of getting people honked off at us.

Our wish was to get out of everything, except for running the Aqueduct and the watershed lands, including the ranch lands.

So, part of the LA-Inyo Agreement is that we would give up the town water systems. I wanted to get rid of the electrical system up there too, but couldn't convince the Power System to do so.

Basically, the LA-Inyo Agreement sets the framework for a partnership in accomplishing cooperative tasks. The big breakthrough came when Jack Leeney and Rick Caruso presented the Inyo folks with the idea that Los Angeles should be able to take as much water as they wanted from Inyo County, PROVIDED, NO ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE OCCURED. Inyo agreed. So, that is the underlying principle to the agreement. The other issues were more of the annoyance type.

I mentioned earlier how I was called, "King James of the Colony." People joked, and maybe it wasn't a joke with some, that Inyo County was just a colony of Los Angeles.

So, we were, and are, attempting to move beyond that era. When I left the Valley, Duane Buchholtz replaced me and he carried on a most trustful relationship. I think that my ten years there, plus Duane's time, led to the building of a solid, trusting relationship with those folks. It didn't mean that everyone agreed with everyone else. But, there was trust.

I think for a long time the people up there weren't sure that they could trust us.

NELSON: Meeting with their peers, and with staff support, I imagine the Inyo leadership felt more confident that they could make decisions, and enter into agreements without the charge that they were in L.A.'s "pocket," so to speak.

WICKSER: That's a good point. Prior to the formation of the Standing Committee, Inyo County had very little technical capabilities, so L.A. would come along and say, "We're going to pump here. Don't worry, it's not going to cause any damage." They had no way of knowing. Part of the LA-Inyo Agreement provides funds to the county for a Water Department. So, Inyo has a lot of technical people now who can interface with our technical people.

A technical committee was also formed as a part of the Agreement. This committee makes recommendations to the Standing Committee. Inyo and L.A. are pretty much playing on a level field although, our folks in the valley now think Inyo has more people on their payroll than we do. Considering our cutbacks, that may be true, although I think the field is generally level.

NELSON: What was Mono County's involvement as the Mono Lake issue developed?

WICKSER: In the Mono Lake issue, Mono County never participated. A couple of times, particularly, when they were back in Washington trying to create the national scenic area, Mono County testified that they were supporting the bill.

But Mono County never became a player in any of the litigation, or for that matter, any of the real negotiations on Mono Lake. This was totally contrary to Inyo, where the county was a party.

In the Mono Lake issue, the county was not a party. I think that led to us not being able to negotiate a settlement on Mono Lake. Who do you negotiate with? The Mono Lake Committee? CalTrout? and a couple of other parties up there. They are entities only to the extent they want to be entitites. So, you reach agreement with the Mono Lake Committee, and lo and behold, then those people go put on a different hat and say, "We're Friends of the Negit Island Rookery. Now you've got to negotiate with us." We never had a single, governmental entity to deal with.

Mike Gage was our Board president. We had Mary Nichols and Dorothy Green, three very strong environmentists. This was in the early '90's. Gage was trying to broker a deal with the Mono Lake Committee. He, Mary, and Dorothy worked very diligently to solve the problem.

Finally, Mike Gage was so outraged, He felt that Martha Davis had double-crossed him. I was at another meeting where Mary Nichols stood up, pointed her finger at Martha Davis, and basically told her that she had lied and if she (Davis) ever did that again, she (Nichols) would discredit Davis to everybody. Mike, Mary, and Dorothy tried to negotiate, but every time they thought they had a deal the Mono Lake Committee would renege.

In all of our dealings with Inyo, they said they didn't want to talk about anything in the Mono Basin. I think Inyo might have had some concern that if we would lose in Mono, our position in respect to Inyo County might shift. We assured them that we would keep the issues separate.

In hindsight, some people were critical of us for not negotiating a settlement in Mono, like we did in Inyo. I don't think that was a possibility, unless the County would had stepped up to the plate and

become the principal player. In that case, we might have been able to broker a deal.

Clearly, I think there was a time when we could have settled with Mono County on a much lower lake level than we ended with. At the same time, there is no scientific basis for the lake level we now have. It was a political solution. I think the lake level should have been closer to 6380' to 6383' or something like that from a scientific standpoint.

One of my frustrations in the Mono Lake matter was the fact that the L.A. City Council did not take a position on Mono Lake. Our Board took a position, back in the '80's, indicating we would not do irreversible environmental damage to the lake. That was not specific on lake elevation, but it was pretty specific on philosophy. Although the Council never took a position on Mono Lake, Zev Yaroslasky and Ruth Galanter, both expressed support for saving Mono Lake.

It wasn't until we had the state board hearings on the EIR for Mono Basin/Lake that Zev made a statement to the state board advocating the end result in lake elevation, as did Jim Strock, who was the director of Cal EPA.

The state board's draft EIR advocated a 6383,' or 6386' lake elevation. The board increased that to 6391' or 6392', depending on how you wanted to interpret it. This was based on what I call political intervention from Jim Strock and others. Then the Mayor, and Ruth Galanter and others, jumped on the bandwagon and the City agreed to it without further negotiations or litigation. That was really the first time the City took an official position and it was at the end of the ballgame.

NELSON: That eight-foot difference in lake level over that body of water represents a sizeable amount of water, doesn't it?

WICKSER: Yes. Don't hold me to the numbers, but traditionally, we had taken ninety thousand acre-feet of water out of the Mono Basin annually. This is on long-term average, or since the Second Aqueduct went into operation. In the future, when the lake reaches 6391' or '92', we'll be able to divert about twenty-five to thirty thousand acre-feet annually. We talk about an acre-foot of water being enough for two average families for a year. Thirty thousand acre-feet of water would be enough water for about one hundred fifty thousand people.

NELSON: What do you think was Mono County's reasons for not involving themselves in the Mono Lake issue?

WICKSER: I think Mono County watched Inyo and realized that litigating with the City of Los Angeles was going to be costly. I think they took the position to let the special interest groups, who seemed willing to want to fight L.A., carry the spears. So why should Mono waste money. They could always jump it if they wished. That's my speculation. I never heard it firsthand from anyone, but I knew a couple Mono County Supervisors and I heard that type of innuendo from them.

I think the other thing is, L.A. and Mono County had always had a pretty good relationship. I remember going to meetings in the early '70's. We'd meet in Mammoth with two or three Mono County supervisors. We always kidded that the Brown Act didn't apply to Inyo or Mono counties. They paid no attention to it and would have three supervisors at a meeting with us. Their County Counsel-District Attorney-County Administrator was one and the same guy. He actually tended the bar

a few times when we had meetings at the old Mammoth Tavern. We'd all sit around and talk, then have lunch and a couple of drinks.

I think they had a good relationship with us and they figured there were a lot of other things going on.

In spite of what some may think, Eastern Sierra folks are not environmentalists. They're pretty-much "Rednecks," particularly because at that time Mono County was more so, because Mammoth had not quite grown to the extent it has. But, even in Inyo County, you're in "Redneck" country. The only reason they're environmentalists is to thottle the City of L.A., not because a lot of them are really that interested. I think they're interested in the economy. So, if Mono Lake looks like an economic boom to Mono County, they have some interest in that.

But, the overall theme of Mono County government was that they had other battles with L.A., and they have a good relationship, so they decided not to waste money or good chits with us over this battle that was not of their choosing.

NELSON: Who were the movers and shakers and the power structure in the Owens Valley, when you were there?

WICKSER: The Inyo County Board of Supervisors was meaningful. The County Administrator, when I first moved up, was John K. Smith. He was a very influential person. So was county District Attorney, Frank Fowles, who made the first filing in the CEQA ground-water pumping litigation, Inyo v Yorty. In terms of public policy and influence, Smith was probably the most influential person there at that time.

In the private sector side, the Bishop Chamber of Commerce was fairly significant. Denton Sonke who was the manager, was very

well respected. Some people on the Bishop City Council had some influence. Jane Fisher and P. D. Cook, to name a couple.

Then you had the ranchers. The cattle industry was a substantial lobby in itself. To a lesser degree, there was the Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce, and the Inyo Associates.

The Inyo Associates was a throwback to Father Crowley's days. I guess you might characterize it as a county-wide chamber of commerce. Each town in the Valley was represented in the Associates. Father Crowley spearheaded the forming of the Inyo Associates back in the '30's to try to bring peace in the county by creating a forum where all could come together. The Associates continue even today. They offered a lot of input into the process.

We made it a point to become very involved in the Bishop and Lone Pine chambers, the Inyo Associates, and the cattlemen and packers groups. We felt that these groups were the one's who helped influence the direction the county took.

NELSON: Were these the groups that you were personally involved with?

WICKSER: Yes. I attended virtually every meeting and sometimes had staff people along with me. There were other groups who were not quite so time-consuming that we were involved with too. The Lions, and Rotary club's in Bishop, for example. They provided an opportunity for us to get to know people.

This may sound funny, but I had a philosophy that, "to know us is to love us." In other words, once people got to know us, they realized we were straight-shooters, good people, who really had some of the same interests they had. So, we tried to get involved where there were a lot of people who could judge us.

Another area I though very important was in youth activities. Dave McCoy, the owner of Mammoth Mountain, was very generous to the kids of the Owens Valley. So, virtually all of the towns had ski programs. In Bishop for example, once a kid reached the sixth grade they could go skiing at Mammoth Mountain, instead of school, up to six days a year, assuming their grades were good.

I think the school charged them a dollar and a half for the bus. They paid a dollar for the lift ticket and a dollar for a photo I.D., so they could ski anytime. The parents, through Bishop Rec and Parks, and the PTA, volunteered to be instructors. Being a devoted parent and civic-minded person, I would go up with the kids on Tuesdays, maybe a dozen times during the year and teach them to ski. For my efforts I was given a free lift ticket. It was a chance for us to get to know the other parents. There was a Department value to it, but obviously, it was a nice gesture on the part of Dave McCoy.

I remember one instance, I was working with a bunch of kids who were in my daughter's class at school. The next day, she came home giggling, and asked me if I remembered two girls who I had worked with. I said, Yeah. She that they thought I was real nice and helped them a lot. I told her that was good and I was glad. But, what she said was really funny was when she told them that I was Jim Wickser, who worked for Water and Power, they couldn't believe it. They said, "That's him?"

As a result of working with the kids, I was always invited to guest lecture to the senior problems class at Bishop High School. This gave them an opportunity to see for themselves that we didn't have two heads, that we were really human beings and that we share much the same values as they did.

NELSON: You mentioned Dave McCoy, the developer of Mammoth Mountain. Dave was a Department employee before he found good skiing up there, wasn't he?

WICKSER: Dave's sort of our role model. Dave rode into Independence on his motorcycle one fine day in 1935, with all his possessions with him. He came to work for the Department and eventually became a hydrographer. Hydrographers are the guys who go out and measure the snowpak. During his career with the Department he finally migrated up and became a hydrographer living at Crowley Lake at the damsite. He and others set up a little rope tow at McGee Mountain, which was right across Highway 395 at Crowley. He subsequently found Mammoth Mountain where we had some snow courses, and received a ninety-nine year permit from the Forest Service. So while he was working for us, on the weekends, he had the rope-tow on McGee Mountain and subsequently started developing Mammoth.

If my memory serves me, I think Dave retired from the Department in 1955. He may have resigned, but I think he retired with twenty years. He has always maintained a fond spot in his heart for the Department, particularly, for Bob Phillips. I think Bob was in the Independence office when Dave came along and they worked together for a few years.

When I was up there and Bob Phillips was coming up with a tour group, I would have to notify Dave. When we got to the main lodge at Mammoth, and put our guests on a gondola ride, Bob and Dave would have a chance to talk. Dave is a guy, that in spite of his influence in the community, has never taken advantage of it.

I remember one time he called wanting to extend a chair-lift that would cut across a tiny bit of Camp High Sierra. Camp High Sierra is owned

by the City and operated by Recreation and Parks Department. Dave talked to Duane Georgeson who subsequently referred him to me. Dave said, "Who do I talk to in Rec and Parks?" Both Duane and I said, "You don't talk to anyone, just do what you want to do, and tell them we said it was OK." He said, "Shouldn't I talk to them?" I said, "Dave. if you talk to them, you'll be talking for twenty years!" But, that's the kind of guy he is. Getting back to skiing, Dave's been very generous to the community.

NELSON: How was the media in the Owens Valley?

WICKSER: The media in the Owens Valley, at least initially, was the Chalfant Press, ran by Todd Watkins, then a radio station, managed by Jphn Young and John Daily. That was it in Bishop. I thought they were both fair to us. We used to kid that we wished the L.A. Times would treat us as fairly as those two did.

Then came along Bennett Kesler and John Heston. They were operating out of Independence. First they started with a little newsletter, a rag, I called it. Later, they got into a radio station in Independence or Long Pine, I can't remember which at the moment. They were the real muckrakers. Bennett Kesler was a very hard working, and capable reporter, I think. But she had such a slant on things that she just discredited herself. It didn't seem to matter what we did. We really tried to work with them initially. They would backstab us every inch of the way. I guess they felt their opportunity for success was to bash the City of L.A. As time went on, they became discredited with virtually all responsible people. It was only the few who hate the City of L.A. that supported them.

At one stage they accused us of having them thrown off the radio

station. I personally investigated that one because I was concerned that if there was any truth to it, that is was totally inappropriate and those involved would be dealt with severly. I could never find any City involvement.

They not only caused us grief, but also Inyo County. As we were working together on the Inyo-L.A. Agreement, they opposed it at every opportunity, because stirring the pot kept them alive. They even tried to discredit Greg James, who is the Inyo County Director of Water, the Supervisors for selling out, and so forth.

Our current District Engineer, Glen Singley is a very active Mormon. As a matter of fact, he is the Bishop of the Mormon Church in Bishop. Bob Mitchener, the Inyo County Supervisors Chairman, is also a Mormon and belongs to the same church.

The Chalfant paper had changed ownership an had picked up Bennett Kesler to work for them. So she wrote a story saying that Glen was using his church position to run the County Board of Supervisors and Mitchener was meerly a pawn since he was a follower in the Church.

That outraged the people of Bishop so much, and throughout Inyo County, that they contacted the newspaper owner to tell of their cancellations of the paper and advertising, and saying that this type of reporting was absolutely irresponsible. Consequently, Bennett Kelser was fired.

This illustrates my observations, over the years I served up there, that the majority of the people adhere to a strong moral compass. They could be angry about L.A. for various things, but they would play according to a set of high standards.

NELSON: How about telling me about the Department lease program in the Owens Valley.

WICKSER: Let me tell you about the lease program I know because I don't really know about what went on in the past.

When I got to the Valley, we had two hundred twenty - forty thousand acres of land under lease to ranchers, plus, we had a thousand or more parcels in the towns, both homes and commercial building. Plus, we had about a hundred and fifty or more employee homes.

As I mentioned earlier, we had decided that we would get out of the lease program, except for the ranch lands. So, we started getting out of employee housing, and whenever we had the chance, we got out of business lease's.

Our commercial leases were generally for five years. If we had a problem with a leasee we would deal with the problem. But, we never cancelled leases unless they just wouldn't pay their rent, or were violating some laws, or just a really bad tenant.

It was difficult to be anything but that because those who leased from us thought we were charging too much while those who had their own business' believed the lessees had an advantage because they weren't paying enough. So we had to find that middle ground.

Typically, what would happen is that the lessee would come to us and tell us they were quitting their business, but that they had found someone who would buy them out if we would transfer the lease to the new buyer. In those case, we would automatically transfer the lease to the new owner. We tried to honor the existing lessee.

This happened more than once in the cattle industry, ranches and among the packers.

One has to remember that many ranchers were leasing land from us that had been homesteaded by their Grandfathers. We had bought the property from them in the 'teens or '20's or '30's. Then we turned right around

and leased it right back to them. You can't ask for a better lessee than someone who has that connection with the land.

They would come to us finally and tell us they were no longer interested in leasing from us, but that they were selling their cattle to this other guy and would like to assign the lease to him. We would generally go along with this.

Where we applied a little pressure was in trying to get rid of the town properties. When a business lessee came to us wanting to assign his lease, we tried to work out a deal where we could sell the property.

I think we mentioned the Brown Act earlier. The author was the state Senator from Inyo County, Charles Brown. If you wanted to dispose of land in Inyo County, or any county where a governmental entity owns more than half the taxable land. Then you must give first right of refusal to the existing occupant of the property.

So we're leasing to "A" and we want to sell the land, we must give first right of refusal to "A." That's how we disposed of some of the land in the '30's. Then our City Attorney said, no, we had to sell it at public auction. That led to the situation where the land sat vacant for thirteen months, before we could put it up for auction.

In the '70's, we worked with the Bishop Chamber of Commerce and the civic clubs to modify the Brown Act so that we could sell the lease that "A" is on, assuming he's willing to sign up on it, but it would be subject to a fifteen year lease written by our attorneys, which we felt would be very difficult to break.

We ended up doing that on a number of parcels, including some famous one's, like the Schats Bakery in Bishop. We put the old Schats building up for public auction, subject to a fifteen year lease. It turned out that the existing lessee ended up buying it. He had a

lease with himself, it went away, and he ended up owning the property. Doing it this way, we got around the City Charter and the Brown Act.

We're still trying to sell property that way. But, to my knowledge, there's no favoritism shown by the Department in the Valley.

NELSON: The Department seems to be on the horns of a dilemma. It wants to get out of home and business parcel ownership, but in holding so much property, it can't put it all on the market at one time without disrupting the local real estate market.

WICKSER: Absolutely, it has been done over a period of time. It had to have the acceptance of the lessees, the community groups, plus Inyo County and the City of Bishop.

Part of the reason we had to get out of the ownership business is that many of those homes and buildings were older than heck. Some of the homes, like the one I first lived in, were built before the turn of the century. Some were in very poor shape, inadequate plumbing and electrical, and were about ready to fall down.

Tenants rights issues and landlord laws were on the horizon at that time. It was a good time to start getting out. We didn't want to spend a lot of money upgrading an old house.

On some of the old ranch houses, we asked the lessee's if we could tear down the old dwelling and we would permit them to replace it with a mobile or modular home. We had concern over the safety of those old structures.

The other thing was that even though a person was on a five-year lease with us, it was difficult to obtain financing to upgrade the building. It wasn't too bad in Inyo and Mono counties because the local lenders were aware of our pattern of renewing leases unless

the lessee was a real bum.

It had to be done carefully, If we mishandled the sales program, we would mess up the local economy real bad.

NELSON: Can you recall any long-time lessees?

WICKSER: The Cashbaugh family. I'm not sure when they came into the Valley 1870something, I think. They may be one of the last people to sell us some of their land. They still own land up on Hot Creek. I was talking to Bud Cashbaugh last summer. He would like to sell the remaining land to us. His wife doesn't want to yet. They sold some property to us, but are still leasing it from us. The land's probably been in the family for one hundred twenty years and they've been leasing some of it from us for probably the last seventy to eighty years.

NELSON: Some of the leases come with water. How is that determined?

WICKSER: If you go back to the early days, when we acquired land we took water off a lot of the land to put into the aqueduct. We left some land where you would get water when we had surplus water.

Much of it was native pasture. Basically, all of the crop land went away, except for alfalfa, probably by the late '30's, early '40's.

As part of the planning for the Second Aqueduct, Russ Rawson and Paul Lane had the duty of getting with the lessees and firming up the acreage that would receive water, and those who wouldn't. We never planned on taking all the water in the Valley. Bob Phillips, in writing in the Second Aqueduct Feasibility Report, emphasized that we couldn't, and wouldn't take all the water because there was a need of water for their economy and the environment. He didn't use the

word, environment, but, that's what he was talking about.

It was through Bob's influence, and with Paul, the District Engineer, at the time, and Russ Rawson, the Ranch Land Agent, as we called him, that the good quality land was identified. About ten thousand acres would be irrigated initially. As it turned out, the figure was closer to twenty thousand acres, or perhaps a little more being irrigated.

There are about twenty-two hundred acres of good alfalfa land that's irrigated. The rest is irrigated pasture, or native grasses. We lease ranch land based on its value to the rancher. So there are some grass lands that will feed so many head of cattle per month, AUM's (animal unit months) as we refer to them. Then there was alfalfa, how many tons could be expected per acre.

In the '40's, we created, working with our lessees, what we called the increment factor. We would lease property to them based upon the carrying capacity or value. But, then we had to adjust the rent annually, based upon the price of the product they were raising.

If alfalfa prices were high, the rent went up. If prices dropped, the rent dropped. The same thing with cattle, and at that time we also had a sheep increment. So we had cattle, sheep and alfalfa. Now, we have alfalfa and cattle.

In the Second Aqueduct planning we told people who had that good, identified alfalfa land, that we would give them five acre^{feet} of water per acre. We would charge them X amount base price and then it would be subject to the increment factor, up or down. If they were efficient with their use of water, rather than irrigating five hundred acres, they could irrigate as many acres as they could spread the water to. We helped them to put in sprinkler systems.

There's not enough return on the grasslands to justify sprinkler system costs, but all the alfalfa in the Valley is sprinkler irrigated. Most of the alfalfa people are getting by on using 3.8 to four acre-feet of water per year, instead of the five feet per year. So, they're able to irrigate an extra twenty percent of land per year.

Clearly, if you would look at value of that water, if we were buying it from MET for four hundred dollars an acre-foot, it's not a good business deal. But if you look at it from the mitigation, and the fact that the cattle industry is a significant part of the Inyo economy, plus alfalfa and pasture lands are part of the environment and habitat, it's part of our responsibility. So we have a business relationship that is fair to them, and while it costs us some water, it's probably something that needs to be done.

NELSON: I know this is an old question. Was the Owens Valley a major agricultural producer prior to the Department going up there after the turn of the century?

WICKSER: I had a good friend who recently passed away who was born in the Owens Valley. He used to talk about living there and what it was really like. Another friend's grandparents lived there as early settlers. So I have some knowledge from pretty reliable sources.

These two friends, one was eighty when he passed away. The other gentleman is in his seventies. So, they can go back prior to World War II, into the '30's, and describe what it was like.

They also had discussions with their grandparents, so the timeline is pushed back even further.

It's clear if you look at aerial photographs, or look at the ground, there were probably seventy thousand acres of land in Inyo County, in

the Owens Valley, that at one time or another has been irrigated. There is no good record of how much land was irrigated at one time. In the 1800's, when people started coming into the Valley, Mr. Bishop brought his cattle in the later 1850's, I think, they didn't know about crop rotation. A lot of those soils are not good, much is alkaline until you move up off the valley floor to the alluvium. You can grow salt grass and things like that, but, you're not going to grow alfalfa on that soil.

I think it's pretty evident that people came in, bladed off an area, planted something, and after awhile, nothing much grew and so they abandoned that spot and moved on. If you only receive four to six inches of rain a year, you can still see areas that were once irrigated, but not now. With the knowledge we now possess, it's easy to see that some of those areas were not good candidates for successful agriculture.

I do know that in the Bishop area corn was grown. Also potatoes and other vegetables and crops were grown. I also know, because we let lessee's try it, that you could grow potatoes for a year or two, then they would deplete the soil requiring you to plant something else.

Manzanar was an orchard area. When we lived in Bishop, we had some peach and cherry trees. Maybe one out of three years, we'd have a bumper crop. The other years you'd get a late frost and get virtually nothing. That's the same story I have heard from others.

In the good years, everybody would have so much produce, but they couldn't sell it to anybody, because there was no business there. When mining started to peter out and the miner's and their families left the area. What was there?

Finally, tourism and recreation started to build in the late '20's,

when I believe, a fair road was finished across the desert, but there was no real market.

A lot of the families you talk to were delighted when the City purchased their land and moved out. Others were delighted and took the money and invested it while leasing the land back from us. And many of them took the money and put it in the Watterson Bank and lost everything. We had two employees, Mr. Birchim, who's family sold some land to us and lost it all when the bank folded. The Jones family, who lived right across the street from them in Round Valley, sold to us and put their money in a bank in Reno. When you talked to the two of them who worked for us, you would get two totally different attitudes. The Birchim family subsequently sold property to us up in Little Round Valley, up by Crowley Lake.

The Birchim's wanted us to buy their property because they didn't want it to subdivide. They knew if we owned it, we would keep it as they knew it. They did ask if we would continue to lease to their sheep man and we said we would. Incidentally, the grant deed for that property was signed by President Ulysses S. Grant.

The agricultural value of the Owens Valley is greatly overstated from all the evidence I can find. Yes, there was more agriculture at one stage, but I don't believe it was ever sustained.

NELSON: How many people were in the Independence office when you arrived?

WICKSER: I moved up there in '73 and we had just wrapped up the the 1969 storm problem. We just finished raising the sidewall on the aqueduct; were finishing the by-pass around South Haiwee Reservoir. All that work was done by force account. When I moved in there were about

three hundred people in the Water System. I think Ron McCoy had started reducing the workforce when he was there. Georgeson told me that I was to continue the reductions.

I think I have mentioned some of the guys before, McCawley, Rawson, Wilson, Jeter, Fonda. There were three C and M (construction and maintenance) supervisors, Cary Thompkins in Bishop; Hank Tensfield in Independence and Carl Ruiz in Lone Pine. Charley Hill ran the shops and Bud Riesen ran the office and warehouse. Stanley Miller, ran our commercial office in Bishop.

We had a half-dozen people living at Cain Ranch and people living at the various reservoirs. We had construction offices in Bishop and Lone Pine. We had a small yard in Big Pine that was basically for constructions purposes, plus we had a commercial office in Big Pine. At the Lone Pine yard we also had a commercial office. We were spread up and down the Valley.

NELSON: Jim, for all of us dummies, what is force account?

WICKSER: Force account is that we did the work with our own field people, civil service, City employee types. In some cases they might be limited appointments, but they all went through the civil service system. This was opposed to having a contractor doing the work.

NELSON: Being limited, does that mean that at the end of the project they would be terminated?

WICKSER: Limited was a civil service term. It was generally for a specified duration with the presumption that at the end the position would go away. I think that mostly what happened in those days up in the Valley, and it was sort of an era of affluence, was that we

would keep renewing those limited appointments. That's why we ended up with such a large work force, well beyond our needs.

NELSON: Could someone retire from a limited appointment?

WICKSER: Oh, I even think you can find that now. We had these daily rates in the Power System, who have been daily rates for twenty-five years. They're good people and work hard.

NELSON: Let's move on to Mono Lake. What were your first inklings that something was going on up there?

WICKSER: It's hard to remember when it began. My recollection is that one of my first involvements in the Owens Valley occurred when Paul Lane and Duane Georgeson came up and we met with Mono County Supervisors. This was one of our meetings that I referred to earlier. We talked about a number of issues, and there was discussion even then, and this was prior to the Mono Lake Committee, about concerns over the decline of Mono Lake.

Actually, Mono Lake began declining in 1919. That was the high water mark in modern times. So, it was declining before we began our diversions in 1940.

My recollection is that at one of those meetings, Mono County officials asked us what we planned to do about Mono Lake. They indicated that some concerns had been raised. I think even Bob Phillips said, something like, "By God, we're not going to put any water in Mono Lake. That's a waste of water. We're going to take it to L.A. It's not going to happen."

It was sometime in the mid-'70's, I think, when the pot started boiling, you might say. I remember Georgeson came up and was on a

Mono Lake Task Force, that was chaired by the Forest Service, or Huey Johnson, Resources Secretary of California. I didn't have a lot of involvement in the Mono Lake issue at that time. Duane was personally involved. I would go along, take notes, and counsel with Duane on it, but he was the primary negotiator.

Later on, David Gaines came along and formed the Mono Lake Committee, maybe that had been formed at the same time. I knew David personally. He was quite a fine gentleman, frankly. Philosophically, we were different, but, I always found him a person of integrity and a nice person to deal with, even though we didn't agree.

Then federal legislation was started to create a National Forest Service Scenic Area. I remember going to Washington with Georgeson and Melinda Thun Rho, who was a Department microbiologist, and testifying before Congressman Siberling, and some of his people about the importance of water supply to Los Angeles.

Then, our Board of Commissioners decided they needed to take a position and out of that came the, "No irreversible environmental damage, but the water was important to Los Angeles statement. That had to be in the late '80's. I think. I know Caruso and Leeney were on the Board at that time.

It reminded me of a big snowball starting to roll down a hill. I don't think most of us perceived what was going to happen. It was just a forest scenic area, for gosh sakes. We got language written into the legislation that it would have no impact on our water rights and that was in the Congressional intent language.

The next thing that happened is that the Forest Service had to complete a master plan for the scenic area and everything they did obviously impacted our water rights. We tried to argue it, but to no avail.

We learned very quickly that we were outgunned. No matter what the law was, Forest Service staff and others were going to do what they wanted. We learned too that Congress was not going to help us. We found that Los Angeles' lobbying power in Washington was dismal to say the least on environmental issues, at that time. The same applied in Sacramento. That was the lesson I learned very early.

NELSON: Why was that?

WICKSER: I don't know if it was that Los Angeles couldn't get its delegation united or what. But, nobody seemed to care about what L.A. thought. As I said earlier, the L.A. City Council never took a position on Mono Lake.

We really never had much support from our Council members. I remember one time Joy Picus going back to Washington with us and tried to talk to Congressman Henry Waxman. Waxman refused to meet with her! Of course, Joy was livid about that.

There was a real growing awareness on my part that we had a serious credibility problem on our hands. An old saying was "ABC," "Anybody But California," which was said to the federal position. And "ABLA," "Anybody But Los Angeles," was said to be the state position.

No one was afraid of us at that time. There was no help, and a lot of people in legislative positions wanted to get even with us because we, in their minds, had had it our way for many years, now it was our turn.

Even when we started the litigation on it, we had to prepare an EIR. Jones and Stokes did the state board EIR which we had to fund. We had litigation ongoing. Mitch Kodama, headed up our team at that time. The Moskowitz law firm provided legal support, and Ken Downey was our

chief attorney.

We did a lot of good scientific work. We had a lot of technical information that showed the California gulls weren't in danger, and that the brine shrimp could survive, but, no one wanted to listen.

The draft EIR came out sort of cutting the baby in half. The lake got down to 6372' at one point with no collapse of the ecosystem. In fact, the gull population was greater than ever.

We got enjoined at one point to curtail diversions from the Mono Basin until the lake rose to 6377'. So, there was a period of several years in which we didn't export water. During that time the lake gradually rose, helped in part because of some wet years. About three years ago, we were able to take forty-five hundred acre/feet. We did that for a year or so, then the lake rose to 6380', and we're now able to take more water.

Before the EIR was finally approved by the state board, we were under Court jurisdiction, that being Judge Finney, of El Dorado County. We were doing different things with, what we called the, "RTC," (Restoration Technical Committee). This was headed up by a consultant by the name of Woody Trihey. The Forest Service. Mono Lake Committee, Cal Trout, and Fish and Game were on one side, we were on the other.

We got caught up in this thing, we couldn't beat it. It was, "We'll plant a tree here, position a rock there, we'll dig a hole here, and that's how we'll restore Rush and Lee Vining creeks."

I guess Mother Nature got angry at that, so after about ten million dollars spent, eight million of which went to consultants, she put down a big gusher and washed all the handiwork into Mono Lake. She probably said, "This is how the creek's will look!"

After that they decided that we might be right and maybe they should

follow our consultant, Platts and Hill, of Ecosystems. Platts and Hill's idea was to put the water down the creeks, observe what happened, then, if need be, help smooth things out. It seemed to work so we finally moved into that mode of operating on the restoration. It's doing quite well. We still have remnants of where we tried to manipulate by man, that has caused irreparable damage. We took bottom dredgings out of the creek with a backhoe and planted in on the side so now we're not getting riparian growth there. Not only did the RTC recommend things that didn't work, but, they actually caused damage.

We spent a lot of money on temporary mitigation activities that didn't work. We're spending more money now on doing things the right way. During state board hearings on final mitigation and restoration activities, we finally reached a table agreement with all the party's and submitted that to the state board. While the state board has adopted the EIR for the lake and the creeks, which basically sets the lake elevation and some of the flow restrictions for restoring the creeks, the settlement agreement, which involves all the mitigation that we are going to have to do is still sitting, not adopted, by the state board.

Now, we're getting some backtracking by Fish and Game where things they could not negotiate with us in the settlement agreement, now their trying to get from us through the 1601 permit process. I don't know where it's going to go. That's still one of the little problems out there.

The balance of the restoration plan that we proposed has been adopted by all the other party's, with the exception of the 1601 issue in regards to the Mono return ditch.

We're somewhat in limbo at this time, except we know the lake

elevation, and the restoration plan has some different flow regimes than was contained in the State Board plan.

The unfortunate thing is that it was a political, rather than environment, decision. More water will be put into the lake than is needed. The driving factor that moved the elevation from '83' or '86' to '92', was air quality. I think we've already found with the elevation at '82' or '83' now, that the air quality issues have been eliminated.

The lake decision was based on the Public Trust Doctrine. In brief, the doctrine says that every now and then, public values have to be reassessed. I don't know if it will be in my lifetime, but I'm optimistic that at some point in time the Mono Lake lake elevation will be revisited, because public trust values will have to be reassessed.

Someday, someone will be in a position to challenge the rulings and reopen it. Clearly, the air quality issue goes away. The PM 10 of dust blowing off the east side of the lake is nowhere near what we're talking about at Owens Dry Lake.

The flows for fisheries is always debatable. Keeping fish in good condition, what does that mean?

On the Mono Lake elevation itself, what is the necessary elevation for a sound ecosystem? I think the current plan is from six to ten feet higher than it needs to be.

NELSON: With the increasing lake elevation, is there a danger of the tufa reserve being flooded?

WICKSER: That's a good point. Already portions of the South Tufa pathways, where you could previously walk out and view the tufa's, are under water.

As you walk those paths there are signs indicating lake elevations. A lot of it will be submerged. The concern is that when the tufa's are submerged, wave action may cause them to crumble and disappear into the lake.

One of the environmental issues is happening right now because we've had a couple of really wet years. This means that a tremendous amount of fresh water is entering the lake. This water is not mixing so you're getting a relatively fresh water lense on top of salt water. Dr.'s Jehl and Melack from UC Santa Barbara, are very concerned over, what they call, "mires mixes." This would be very damaging to the ecosystem, because the brine shrimp and brine fly may not have the salt water and algae to feed on and consequently won't be able to reproduce. Therefore, there won't be food for the migratory birds. The Mono Lake Committee could care less. All they want is the lake elevation.

As far as the Mono Lake Committee is concerned, Martha Davis, the previous executive director's objective was to beat Los Angeles, and Mono Lake happened to be a good horse to ride. She could care less about the tufa's, and could care less about this "mires mixes."

So the issue is not totally settled from a regulatory standpoint. It certainly is not resolved or solved from an environmental standpoint. There is a lot of work to be done by the Department up there, and some money to be spent.

Mainly, the major task the Department will have is the Mono Return Ditch. We must also pay some money to a trust fund for waterfowl habitat issues, and release water.

NELSON: What is the Mono Return Ditch?

WICKSER: Presently, there's a tunnel and then a canal that takes

water from the outlet at Grant Lake to the Mono Craters Tunnel. The Mono Return Ditch connects to the canal so that in wet years, when we need to dump water into Mono Lake so that Grant Lake doesn't spill, we would open the Mono Return Ditch and move the water to Rush Creek, about a thousand to fifteen hundred feet below Grant Lake Dam. Then it would flow down Rush Creek to the Mono Lake.

This is what we were doing in the early '80's when we had the big, wet years. When we tried to shut it off, we got enjoined because we had now created a fishery.

Traditionally, you do not like to operate a reservoir in a "spill" mode. However, we are going to have to do that now in order to meet some of the fishery flows. To mimick nature, in wet years, we are going to let Grant Lake spill, so we can get the habitat, or flushing flows down the creek. In other years, we're going to upgrade this return ditch so it can carry three hundred and fifty cubic/feet/second, and we'll take water out that way to mimick Mother Nature.

In years that we don't have enough to spill, we can still take it out and maintain it that way. We may still have some work to do on Lee Vinning, Walker and Parker creeks for what they call sediment and fish bypass. Right now, our conduit cuts that off. That is not cheap, maybe upwards to a million dollars. These are not huge issues and we're going to be doing a lot of monitoring before we spend that money.

NELSON: One more thing on Mono. Earlier, you talked about David Gaines. He was a graduate student in biology, I believe. He brought some fellow students along. Initially, they were concerned about seagulls, and that sort of thing. It seems like it moved quickly from the scientist type to the political, and a lot of interest groups

jumped aboard.

WICKSER: Yes, you might say professional advocates came on quickly. Martha Davis, for example, who became the executive director. They had a different look and most importantly, they were able to raise funds to promote their views to larger audiences. I've got to give Martha huge credit. She is very effective in what she does. She was a different type of person than David Gaines.

I didn't mention it earlier, but Duane Georgeson worked with the UCLA Public Policy Group, with Leroy Graymor. Early on, we met with them on a regular basis with the Mono Lake Committee, Forest Service, and the others, trying to reach some resolve on the lake, I can remember one meeting where Tom Graf, from Environmental Defense Fund, was present. We were discussing a solution and he came up to me afterwards and told me that Martha Davis was just not going to compromise on anything. It didn't matter what was put on the table, she was not going to accept it. He thought she was making a big mistake and that we were being very generous. He obviously didn't think she was going to be as successful as she was. The decision was political, and give her credit, she was very successful in Sacramento and we were not successful.

There was Assembly Bill 444, by Isenberg. Martha was able to get that through. I worked with Georgeson on the Bill to make thirty-six million dollars available, nine million a shot, over four years for an alternate water supply for Los Angeles. We're using AB 444 funds now to help fund our reclamation projects. In fairness to Martha, she was very instrumental in getting us that money. She was also helpful in obtaining some federal money for reclamation, both for us and West Basin.

That type of money was made available to us mainly because, I think Martha Davis was effective in doing it, but she had to somehow provide mitigation to L.A. for the loss of that water. If we could not obtain water from the Mono Basin, we would need more water from the Sacramento Delta. That was the tradeoff she had to combat. Give her credit, she was able to accomplish it.

Cal Trout got into the Mono Lake issue because they wanted a fishery. It's interesting to note that Cal Trout was only interested in Rush Creek. They could care less about Walker, Parker, or Lee Vining, they weren't good fisheries.

I think we talked earlier about Forest Service. When I went to the Valley in the early '70's, they were a multiple-use agency. Now, they have become an environmental agency. Fish and Game, from being a reasonable group, has gone totally environmental. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has gone from agriculture, mining, and maximizing the return on the resources it oversees, to one even more environmental than multiple-use. We've seen a whole societal shift leaving the Department sitting out by our lonesome's.

NELSON: Before Mono Lake, there was the Tule Elk controversy that grabbed a lot of newsprint and involved an innocent Department. Can you tell me a little about it?

WICKSER: In the early '70's, our ranchers would try to get depredation permits from Fish and Game to control the tule elk, which they considered a pest. The elk was not native to the area, and as its numbers increased, it was causing more and more problems. So, if an elk came in and began eating their alfalfa, the rancher could obtain the permit to chase it off or, in, I suspect most cases, shoot it.

Beulah Edminston, came along to form the "Save The Tule Elk Committee." Incidentally, Her son, Joe, is presently executive director of the Santa Monica Conservancy.

But, Beulah led the charge to save the tule elk. At that time, Fish and Game was allowing the limited hunting of the elk in the Valley to reduce herd size. She was able to persuade State Senator Behr to introduce a bill in either, 1972 or '73, that prohibited Fish and Game from using hunting for herd management until such time as there were four hundred and ninety elk in the Owens Valley, and two thousand elk statewide.

So, from 1973, Fish and Game managed an elk herd, allowing it to grow. A wildlife specialist, Dale McCullough, was hired by Paul Lane to do a study on the elk. We didn't have a wildlife expert on staff at that time, but Dave Babb subsequently came aboard.

Dave Babb was a wildlife biologist in the Bishop BLM office. Banky Curtis was a wildlife biologist for Fish and Game. Dave, Banky, and McCullough probably became the foremost authorities on the tule elk.

We worked with them and Russ Rawson was our participant in the work. There was ongoing antagonism with our ranchers itching to get depredation permits, so we ended up building fences to keep the elk out. We even created an elk field near Tinnemaha Reservoir with an overlook, which was part of the Interagency Committee joint projects.

About that time, Babb, was transferred by BLM to Bakersfield. I think he was there about six months, and with the tule fog, and one thing or another, he called me in desperation, saying that he would do anything to get back to the Valley.

I received permission to hire him on a personal services contract, and

he came back to Bishop, and began working for the Department. That was, maybe 1975. Subsequently, we created a civil service class of wildlife biologist. Since then we have hired three or four others to assist him.

During that time, Fish and Game, BLM and us were trapping elk and relocating them to other places, like Point Reyes, north of San Francisco, and the Tupman Reserve in the Bakersfield area. I not sure as to where they were moved beyond those two places.

I don't know how many elk there are now. I was told that there is in excess of seven hundred in the Owens Valley, and probably in excess of three to four thousand statewide.

Fish and Game is allowing targetted elk reductions in the Owens Valley, via a drawing. The flap seems to have subsided over the tule elk.

I don't know if Ms. Edminston is alive, but the tule elk has been saved.

NELSON: When did you make Principal Water Works Engineer?

WICKSER: It was in 1978, while I was still in the Owens Valley. I was the first District Engineer to make principal while there. That is a special story to me because it tells a story of friendships between people.

I can't remember what the rule was then. That may have been in the era of Mayor Bradley's "three whole scores," take the top one on the list, or whatever. But, I came out number four on the Principle Water Works Engineer exam. list. I can't remember the listing, but the guys ahead of me were: Eldon Cotton, Norm Buehring, and Joe Hegenbart.

A principle position, assistant division head for the Aqueduct Division was created. Its reporting location could either be in Los Angeles or the Owens Valley. I don't know who did what, I'm sure Paul Lane's fingerprints were on it, as well as Duane Georgeson's. But, anyway, a

certification went out for the position.

At that time, I think you had to take the top one on the list, or at least, you had to pick from the top three. So, at four, I wasn't even going to be looked at. Well, lo and behold, none of the three reported. They all knew the job was really for me so they failed to show up. I called and thanked them afterwards. They all said, "You owe me. Wickser." I said, "What do you want?" "A fishing trip." "Sounds great." Buehring had a motorhome. So they stopped by and picked me up and we went on to Crowley Lake, where I had a boat. so we camped at South Landing in Norm's motorhome. We fished for a couple of day, drank a little bit of wine, reminisced, talked, and just had a great time.

That became sort of the annual event. As a payoff, I had to fund this trip. By funding, I had to provide my boat and fishing gear. That's where the four of us developed our long-standing relationship, and we're still doing it!

NELSON: How were you notified of your appointment to Principle?

WICKSER: As I recall, it was a phone call from Georgeson, telling me that he had to take me because no body else wanted the job.

NELSON: How were you notified that you would be returning to Los Angeles?

WICKSER: It was a standing joke that when Paul come up, because he had told me that I would be there three to five years, He would say, "How long, you been here, Jim?" I'd say, Two years now, Paul." Seven years later, he said, "How long, you been here, Jim?" "Two years now, Paul." I had died and gone to heaven as far as I was concerned. I was enjoying the job immensely. I believe I was very successful up

there from all accounts. People trusted me. Phillips, Lane and Georgeson seemed to have a lot of confidence in me.

NELSON: Did you feel that the principle job was it? All you were going to get?

WICKSER: I knew I was going to come back. It was inevitable. I was feeling good about what I had done. I also knew as I moved into my tenth year up there that I was on borrowed time. I'd been a principle for about five years by then.

Truthfully, I was finding in my own heart that I was probably becoming stale. I had probably been there too long. I was not as open-minded as I should be. But, I was having such a good time and my family loved it so much, I would keep my fingers crossed and hope to stay longer.

Duane was head of the Water System at that time. I think Val Lund headed Aqueduct. I was called to L. A. for some reason and Duane left a message asking me to stop by his office after the meeting.

This was in Februry of 1983. Joe Brennan, who headed General Services Division, had just announced that he would be retiring shortly. Claude Carter and Bob Olson were his assistants.

When I sat down with Duane, he said, "What do you think of General Services Division?" I told him that I had worked with Bob Olson back in the Second Aqueduct days and had therefore known him a while. I thought he would be good to work with and was very capable. I didn't know much about Claude Carter. I had met him a couple of times.

Duane said, "No, No, you miss the point. How would you like to work in General Services?" So, that was my introduction to the fact that I was coming back. He told me that he would like to have me come back in April, so I could get a little overlap before Joe retired in June.

I was to keep my mouth shut on the subject. Subsequently, Claude Carter was named to replace Joe Brennan.

I returned to L. A. in April and was interviewed by Georgeson, Carter and Raul Sosa, for Carter's old job. I remember coming out of the interview knowing I had the job, but I played it straight and did the interview. In the Owens Valley, I had fleet, stores,, machine shop, etc., a mini General Services in itself.

As I was coming out of the interview, I met Tom Trainor, a stores superintendent at the time, who was also a candidate. Later, he told me that when he saw me coming out of the interview as he was going in, he knew he was wasting his time.

I worked parttime from April, until becoming Assistant General Services Manager in July 1983. Working parttime meant working a few days in L. A. and a few days in the Owens Valley working with my successor, Duane Buchholz. As I mentioned earlier, I commuted to Bishop on the weekends so my daughter could graduate up there.

Later, Claude Carter announced his retirement and I was named his successor. I remember the day because poor Claude, his last day in the office, and it was a day that a power patrolman rolled his truck south of Palmdale, killing him and his partner. Poor Claude, in his office, four-thirty in the afternoon with Ray Burt, Leroy Hoag, and other Power System guys, ranting and raving that those trucks were no good.

As it turned out, the driver had been under the influence, and the truck had been overloaded to such an extent that the front wheels were virtually off the ground. But, I'll always remember Claude in his office trying to deal with something he wouldn't be able to continue the next day.

NELSON: How did you get the job as General Services Manager?

WICKSER: Georgeson interviewed Bob Olson and me, who were Claude's assistants. I was selected.

NELSON: That must have been a little culture shock coming back to Los Angeles.

WICKSER: I think that when you are so involved with work, it's not so bad. The worst part was this commute on weekends when I would drive back and forth. It was really sort of fun to be back in L.A. and in on all the stuff again. Even today, I find that was an almost ten-year gap in my life in terms of a lot of things going on in L.A. It's amazing, you think, "Oh yeah, I don't remember that."

It was much more difficult for my wife to adjust back here. My wife doesn't work outside the house. She volunteers. To move back here, and if you don't have little kids and can meet other mothers and join groups, it's tough.

I commuted that last year so my daughter could graduate from high school with her friends up there. She went off to college, so that was no big deal for her. Our son was into sports so he came down and went out for football practice and met forty guys and he was happy. It was really most difficult for my wife, but, its finally worked out for her.

NELSON: What was General Services?

WICKSER: General Services was formed back in the '70's from the old General Plant Division, on the power side, and the old Water Construction and General Services Division from the water side. Because they were support organizations, they were slammed

together. At first, it didn't really work very well because there were different salary levels. There was a head of warehousing in water and head of warehousing in power, and obviously, only one was going to head warehousing when the merge was completed. There were a lot of ill feelings. So, when I got there, there was warehousing, I think purchasing was assigned to us at that time. We had the maintenance of the General Office Building. We had the machine shop at 1630 North Main Street. We operated and maintained the Department fleet. We had facility maintenance and landscaping. We had all the cats and dogs there were in the Department.

I remember my first staff meeting. It was like nine different worlds meeting. No one understood why they were in the same division. They had nothing in common.

One of the things I'm very proud of in my career is that I set forth to do some teambuilding with the organization. I spent a lot of time bringing them together as a unit. I tried to make them never forget that we were one customer-focused division. We had a service to perform. Of course I wanted us to become more efficient and effective.

One of the things I brought into the Department with the aid of a guy by the name of Ben Withers was the "Investment In Excellence" (IIE) program, which had been created by the Pacific Institute, in the northwest. The IIE program helped people focus on their inner capabilities and realize that they could achieve things within themselves. This set a tone. I remember we did this with the section managers, Olson, Johnny Johnson, who was an acting general services manager for awhile, and me. It really brought the team together. It was a three-day workshop where we watched tapes and discussed them, and

so forth.

I remember some of my lieutenants talking, "You know we work at 1630 North Main, and I've never been to that guy's office." Then they started getting together for coffee and began talking about mutual problems. I felt very good about that. Then we brought in "Quality Circles," (QC). Claude Carter was really the one who got it going, although he had retired before we got it underway. The key was to get more employee involvement.

So these were some of the fun things I did in General Services. Duane Georgeson was very supportive of me. I was pretty much given carte blanc. Whatever I wanted to do was alright. His objective was that we become more efficient.

A couple of years after I took over, we began major downsizing. working with Norm Nichols, particularly in the shops area. Norm, who was heading the power system at that time, envisioned a coming deregulation and that we needed to exit the overhaul and battery shop business and those types of things.

My style of leadership was in helping people find their direction. Then I became an enabler for them by removing barriers. So a lot of those things, like getting out of the battery business, improving fleet maintenance facilities, and things like that, were really done by Jim Vigue, and people like that. I was just able to help them get there and be successful at it. But, most of the good ideas came from them.

NELSON: Was General Services, the first place where water and power functions were combined?

WICKSER: Actually, it had been combined for a few years before I

arrived. To the best of my knowledge this was the first real combination of things. Of course, we always had a purchasing group that served the whole Department. However, in the other activities, we had twins, one for water, one for power.

NELSON: How did the salary disparities solve themselves? For some reason, power system personnel generally made more money than comparable water system personnel.

WICKSER: It didn't really resolve until the incumbents retired. There were also higher, and more levels on the power side than on the water side. In most cases, staffing was larger on the power side. Most of the problems have been resolved now.

NELSON: I don't know where this might fit properly, but let's talk about Owens Lake dust. Was the dust an issue of concern while you were in the Owens Valley?

WICKSER: The dust problem occurred, or awareness increased, while I was up there. There was the Great Basin Air Quality Control Board. It had been relatively lately organized, maybe in the MID - 1970's. The agency was formed in Bishop and they had a dust problem up there. They came after us later claiming that our diversions of water were a stationary source of dust and needed to be permitted. By diverting the water we were not irrigating something and therefore dust could evolve. If you read Brewers journal, where he marched, or rode with his men into the Owens Valley in the 1850's, or '60's, he wrote about riding through the valley with the alkaline dust blowing up their noses as they rode, and there was nothing there but deltas of marshland

where creeks dumped into the Owens River and an alkaline desert. Going back to our earlier discussion of what the Valley was really like, Brewer's Journal will really tell you.

As part of the dust problem, Georgeson took hold of this issue and we ended up going to Sacramento, jointly with the Great Basin people, and ultimately getting Assembly Bill 270 passed. Basically, they wouldn't required us to permit our diversions, but we would pay them a fee for them to do dust mitigation measures.

All this started well before there was any huge concern over Owens Lake. My guess is that about ten or so years ago the Owens Lake issue really began to raise it's head. I'm not sure if that's when the Clean Air Act was modified to come out with the PM 10 issues. That's when we started working with Great Basin researching ways for reducing dust problems. Under SB 270, we had never considered Owens Lake, or the PM 10 issue. In helping them to develop tactics and strategies to possibly deal with problems, such as Owens Lake, the Department has provided both research and funds to Great Basin.

So we were paying some money for Great Basin staff as well as some money for research on the lake. That has grown and grown, and I think in the last couple of years we have been spending about four million dollars a year for work on dust problems research and a million and a half for Great Basin staff and general issues.

While the legislation indicated that Great Basin would have a plan in place by February 1997, we felt as we worked through this, that we had a cooperative thing going, and they would be more reasonable.

For whatever reason, near the end, I don't know if it was their fear of changes in the L.A. attitude, or it was just self-imposed, by-God, they were going to solve it by '97, but the relationship seemed to wear thin.

So they moved ahead with their implementation plan and that's where we stand today. Somewhere between trying to negotiate something different, because we don't think their plan will work. The California Air Resources Board agrees with us and thinks Great Basin has some flaws in their plan, but Great Basin is moving along with it.

So, on one track, we are prepared to litigate on the adequacy of their EIR. At the same time, we trying to do some demonstration work up there with them in hopes of finding a solution. This is the first time in my recollection that the Department has gotten the attention of L.A. government on an environmental issue, and it's Owens Lake.

Lillian Kawasaki, GM Environmental Affairs Department, had some interest in it early on, and she brought Barb Garrett, from the Chief Legislative Analyst's office (CLA) to help us. Barb is outstanding because she'd done a lot of air quality work for the City in the past and knows a lot of people at California Air Resources Board (CARB). Chris O'Donnell, from the Mayor's Office, who had been Barb's predecessor in the CLA's office has also become involved.

I named Jerry Gewe to be our chief person. Ray Prittie who had been working with Great Basin over the years, continued to provide staff support to Jerry. But, clearly the process we began, was, I think, the right thing to do, that is try to work with the people. Maybe we should have placed more resources into it earlier. But, we couldn't get much interest generated in the issue until real late in the game.

Now, we have the resources in place to deal with it. We will be trying to implement on a broad scale, what Great Basin was looking at on a very small sample. They were looking at things that have to be extrapolated by one hundred thousand from the models they are using. Such as, using rock to hold down the dust. Some of their vegetation

projects do not seem to be doing very well.

As I said to Jerry Gewe, "This is someone else's battle. I battled Mono, I battled groundwater pumping. I don't have the time or career left to battle this." Where it ends, I don't know. There will probably be litigation on it.

NELSON: What's your personal idea of what the final solution might be?

WICKSER: I am concerned that nothing will work, except a lot of water. I am concerned that the City will end up without the political will or power to address it. Addressing it means opening up the Clean Air Act. My prediction is that we will end up losing a lot more water.

NELSON: Hasn't the Navy gotten into the act too, because of alleged impact on their operations at China Lake Naval Weapons Center?

WICKSER: Yes, the Navy has been concerned about air quality for some time. They made some noise about it before the PM 10 issue. Dust and PM 10 are not the same thing from a statute standpoint. But dust was an irritant to the Navy because they couldn't test their napalm bombs certain times of the year because of dust blowing off the Lake. We always found that sort of an environmental oxymoron.

NELSON: Where is Great Basin headquartered, and what is their leadership?

WICKSER: Their office is in Bishop. Their board is composed of two Supervisors each from Alpine, Mono, Inyo, and a representative from the town of Mammoth. There is an Executive Officer, Ellen Hardabeck. Ellen's been around a long time. She was involved with the League of Women Voters in our early groundwater litigation

with Inyo. She's never been a friend of the City. She's a pretty strong environmentalist, a bright person, and politically astute.

Clearly, there's nothing in it for her to cave to the Department. I mean politically, she should fight us to the death, and if she loses, she's still gonna be a hero. I think that's part of the problem. There's no downside from the Great Basin board's standpoint. The board member's standpoint, or the staff's standpoint.

The greatest downside facing the Great Basin is if they prevail and we say, "Ok, we're going to take over the mitigation." Then they will have to lay off some people, because they won't have income. Our dollars help fund a number of their staff positions. We probably contribute about seventy-five percent of their general fund, plus four million dollars worth of research. Some of that is done by their staff, some by consultants.

NELSON: The Department got into the Owens Valley town water and sewer system business. Why and How?

WICKSER: I assume what happened is that in the '20's and early '30's, people up there wanted us to buy the town properties because mining had dried up, and we were buying the agricultural properties. Some believed the local economy would collapse and that we should buy the town properties. We did not want the town properties, but Sacramento prevailed on us to go ahead and buy them, which served us no purpose.

We purchased a lot of that property during the great depression, but we "bumped" the price of the property up to pre-depression times.

We ended up buying about ninety percent of the property. With that type of ownership, I assume we took on the responsibility for operating the

local water system's as well. I think we constructed the sewer system in Independence. I'm not sure why, except that we owned a lot of property there. We also built a lot of employee housing in Independence. I think we thought it was cheaper to build a sewer system, and better for water quality, than continue to have a large number of individual waste systems.

Lone Pine and Big Pine, for example, utilized septic systems probably because we didn't have many employees living there. So we left them alone. My recollection is that we built the sewer system in Independence, probably sometime in the '30's.

We probably acquired the water systems early on when we acquired the town properties, but, I am not sure. There may have been some people who were on wells, who we connected to the town water system, so they wouldn't be damaged by our pumping from the groundwater. I think this is how we got into the town water system business.

NELSON: Have we gotten out now?

WICKSER: Part of the L.A.-Inyo Agreement provides for our disposal of the town water systems after they are upgraded, to the county or a civic group. We have already leased the Big Pine system to the Town of Big Pine Community Service District. They had that for a good fifteen years or more. The other town systems have not been disposed of yet, but within the next few years, they will be transferred to somebody, county, community, or service districts, or whatever.

The sewer system in Independence will, I hope, be transferred soon. I've talked to Bobby Gracey, of Independence, who is on the East Independence Community Service District, which is a small sewer system.

Bobby is a former County Supervisor, and incidently, a former City hydrographer. He thinks they would like to take over the sewer system.

NELSON: Is there money is operating a sewer system?

Wickser: There is a monthly fee that they are at liberty to set. So, they can probably make it. I don't think it's so much a cost thing with them as it is control. They would like to control their own destiny, instead of paying the "d----- Department of Water and Power."

NELSON: Ok, let's fast forward to General Services Division. How long did you lead the division?

WICKSER: From June or July 1984 until May 1987. In May 1987, Georgeson moved me into the Water System Executive Office to be one of his two assistants. We made some other moves a few months later. Bob Olson became General Services head. Georgeson had some other idea's, and I think it was somewhere around December 1987 when Olson, Sosa and Lund retired or announced their upcoming retirements. That gave us the opportunity to move Joe Hegenbart into General Services Division. Bruce Kuebler went to head Water Quality Division and Dennis Williams took over Aqueduct Division.

Dennis had been the assistant head of aqueduct. Joe had been the assistnt head of design, and Bruce had been the assistant head of water operating. I guess Larry McReynolds was Duane's other assistant in Water Executive.

About a year later "Toe" Mayeda retired from Water Operating Division. He had heart problems. Ron McCoy replaced "Toe" as division head. Then Duane decided to rotate Larry McReynolds

and Ron McCoy. They "flip-flopped," and I'm sitting there as Duane's assistant, but didn't know anything about that move.

It was funny, Larry came up to me and he says, "Do you know why Duane moved me? He didn't tell me why, he just said he wanted me to go over there. Did he tell you anything about it?" I said no, Duane didn't tell me about it. Then Ron came over and asked the same questions.

It was one of those things. No one understood at that time why the move was made. I was reading Ron's very candid oral history. He was very frustrated working for Duane, both as his assistant in aqueduct, and then in Water Executive. That's why Ron decided to retire when he did.

Duane probably confided in me more than anyone else. But, clearly in the case of the switch, he didn't confide in me. I don't know if it was the case when he put me in General Services, but it was clearly the case when he moved me up to the Executive Office that he was beginning to prepare me to be, at least, a strong candidate for his job. He gave me Water Quality Division to oversee. I continued to oversee General Services, and I continued to oversee aqueduct because of my familiarity with it.

But mainly it was the water quality issues, and I think Duane saw that water quality was the next big issue, besides water rights in the Easter Sierras. Water quality would produce a lot of expensive issues that we would have to confront.

I got very involved in water quality at that time. Duane, as everyone knows, was a very external guy. So, he pretty much turned over running the Water System, internally to me, in terms of attending meetings, presenting our position, etc.

In fact, in 1989, he had me carry the rate increase over at City Hall that went on and on. He clearly was helping me to position myself as a strong candidate for his job. I suspect that Duane, because he was so externally involved, pretty much knew when Carl Baronky planned to retire from MET.

Duane retired from the Department and went to work for MET while Carl was still there. But, I believe he knew Carl's timeline, and further, believed he, Duane, would be a strong candidate for Carl's job. Unfortunately, the politics of the MET Board went haywire. First of all, Mike Gage became MET Board Chairman. That pretty well sealed Duane's future, I think. That was unfortunate, because I think Duane would have done a good job for them.

NELSON: With Duane leaving the Department. What was the process in becoming the head of the Water System?

WICKSER: I can't remember exactly. I think a memo was distributed to all Principle Water Works Engineers asking if they were interested, and if so, to submit their resumes. I remember a lot of them did and a lot of guys said they interviewed mainly, not that they wanted the job, but they wanted the opportunity to be interviewed.

The interview panel consisted of Dan Waters, Eldon Cotton, and Norm Nichols. Eldon was head of the Power System at that time. Waters headed the joint system, and Nichols was General Manager. We went through an interview, much like we think should be done today. Much like should have been done when Cecilia Weldon was appointed recently. It was unfortunate that the present General Manager, David Freeman, through his advisors, chose not to do that at this time. I certainly don't think

it was fair to Cecilia, and I don't think it was fair to the other candidates. Anyway, the job I interviewed for went through the normal process and I was selected from the group. My understanding is that about a third of the candidates told the interview panel that they were not interested in the job, but wanted to talk about it.

NELSON: What was the timeframe for all this?

WICKSER: It's difficult to remember the timeframe. Roy McCoy retired in August or September 1989, I think it was probably in November that Georgeson told me he planned to retire the following March 1st, shortly after he turned fifty-five.

I think it was in early December when the notices were sent out and probably by the end of January when the interviews were completed. I assumed the post on March 1, 1990.

NELSON: Did Norm Nichols call you?

WICKSER: Yes. Norm called me up to his office and told me that he wanted me to take Duane's place. He gave me the details on when it would be effective, and thereafter a memo to the employees came out with the information.

I think there was one other strong candidate for Duane's job, and that was Walter Hoye. Walt was very disappointed that he didn't get the job. A little later he retired and also went on to MET.

Walt was a prince of a guy. He was extremely loyal to me. You would never think he held any ill feelings about not getting the job. He was a real gentleman throughout the whole process, while doing an outstanding job.

When he found out he was leaving for MET, I was just about ready to go on vacation. He called me at the airport, which indicates just how close I was to leaving on vacation, to let me know he had been offered a job at MET, and was going to accept it. He wanted me to know and also wanted to know when he would be free to make the move.

NELSON: Walt had spend a lot of his career in Design, hadn't he?

WICKSER: Yes, I believe so. Although he had spent some time in Water Operating, some time in Water Executive, and had also worked in the General Manager's office, at least during the time Carl Tamaki was up there. I think a lot of people thought of Walt as Duane's protege. In hindsight I'm not sure Duane thought that way. In looking back, I think Duane did more in positioning me, than he did Walt.

NELSON: That kinda leads to this, Mentors. Who were the people who impressed you, people you looked up to?

WICKSER: I look back at the people who impressed me over the years at the Department. Clearly, Gerry Jones, my first Senior Engineer, gave me a lot of sage advise. I was very comfortable with him. "Toe" Mayeda was influential in my career and helped me early on. Rollo Triay was very supportive and helped me. He was not someone I wanted to act like, per se, yet, he was a very good person.

Paul Lane was an important player to me, not only in helping me in my career, but, by his style. His value of people played into what my personal feelings were. I have a very high regard for our people, I'm a people-person. Paul helped me understand how you can be a people-person, and at the same time get the job done.

Every young engineer who went through the Water System at that time had a certain reverence for Bob Phillips. He was sort of the "God Father," in a very complementary sense. He personified what the Water System was. He was a reincarnation of Mulholland, perhaps, or the image of Mulholland.

NELSON: You were talking about the rate increase in 1991-'92, What kind of support did you receive from the Board?

WICKSER: The Board was very supportive. They recognized the need for it and Mike Gage was outraged at the opposition. Unfortunately, Mike had worked in the Mayor's Office and done a marvelous job of alienating the various council members and their staff's. I remember that Jim Derry and I were over talking, and Dan Waters and I would be there, Dan was the General Manager then, being the main spokespersons for it. Mike kept telling me that he would go over there and talk to them. Ron Deaton kept telling me not to send Mike over. Councilman John Ferarro said it could be the worst thing we could do.

While the water increase was over there, there was also a seven percent power increase that no one even questioned. Except, they would not move it along. They wanted to keep it tied to the water increase.

So Power System ended up losing about six month's worth of their rate increase. I've heard that the delay cost the General Fund about forty plus thousands of dollars a day in lost income. Yet, they wouldn't move the increase.

NELSON: How did you keep the Board President from going over and representing the Department?

WICKSER: Mike was a bull in a china shop. But, on the other hand, he

was a very bright, capable guy. Sometimes, you just had to speak up by saying, "Mike, we're better off if you contact the people you want to contact, quietly, but, don't go into the Council Chambers. You know it's a circus there, Mike. Don't get involved in that."

I was speaking with Ron Deaton recently, and Ron said Sam Nelson was the last general manager who had that authority or power, whatever you call it to go over and get what he wanted from the Council. I don't know if it was Sam, or just those times.

Bob Phillips left because of his frustration of dealing with the Council. It's gotten worse. Paul probably had a pretty good relationship with them, but not a whole lot of big things were happening. Nichols left, and Waters left under pressure from the Council.

NELSON: What about the Commissioners. Who impressed you?

WICKSER: I was in the Owens Valley when I really first got to meet the various Commissioners. Actually, I guess the first one was just before I went to the Valley. While I was Executive Engineer, I took Jack Luhring someplace to show him something, I can't remember now. He was a good, solid Commissioner. A banker, I believe.

Bill McAdam was very helpful to us in dealing with our Valley leases. He was only here for a short time, but it was during the Lou Winnard era. Winnard had this fetish about nit-picking each of our Owens Valley leases. I remember we had a lease for Keough's Hot Springs that Lou looked at and suggested we raise the rent twenty-five dollars a month. It was four-fifty, he thought it ought to be four-seventy-five. It was just dumb things.

Coke Cola had an old wood barn warehouse that you wondered how it remained standing, but it was on our property and we were charging them

five hundred dollars a month. I don't remember who said it, I think it was Lou, "Why are you charging them so little, It's a big company. We ought to be getting thousands of dollars a month from them."

John Plunkett, from the CAO's Office came up one time to evaluate the rental rate, so we drove over to look at it. John would make the recommendation. We pulled up and and stopped. John looked for a few seconds and said, "Busch Gardens, it ain't!"

Bill McAdam created a situation where all the leases didn't go to the Board each time, but every so often, six months or so, we'd forward a summary of all leases for their signoff. So we didn't have to go through all that detail. So, I hold a warm spot in my heart for Bill McAdam.

Rich Caruso is the commissioner who I have the warmest feelings towards for his tremendous help and leadership in solving the Inyo stuff. Plus his regard for Inyo and the feeling they have for him as a friend. Jack Leeney was good too, but very unpredictable. I never got real warm with Jack. A guy who impressed me was Walter Zelman. I thought he was a good commissioner.

More recently, Connie Rice was easy to work with. Under Mayor Riordan, there was Dennis Tito, Jose La Gaspi, Judy Miller, and Marsha Volpert. It was sort of a period that started out good, then we went through this musical chairs for General Manager. At first when Ken Myoshi was Acting General Manager, things were going pretty well, but once William MacCarley got here things changed. Bill sort of isolated the Board away from his managers. I never had much real involvement with the Board from that time, except every once in a while, we'd go to the Owens Valley on inspection and briefing trips, and I'd have a chance to talk with them.

I naively let it happen thinking Bill wanted to do it all. I probably shouldn't have let it happen. I didn't realize until later that Bill was manipulating them, at least in my mind. He was creating some false impressions in people's minds. I know he did a job on me and Eldon with some of the Commissioners.

David Freeman has replaced Carley, but is basically doing the same thing. With Harry Sizemore and Ken Miyoshi, the relationship was more of the traditional ways in which we worked with the Board and Council. Because of the above, I never got close to the current Board members.

The Board has lost much of its power under Charter changes, Prop. 5, etc. We also have a different Mayor. Under Tom Bradley, some good Commissioners were appointed. From my standpoint, Tom Bradley was a good Mayor in supporting the Water System. Mayor Richard Riordan is an enigma to me. I've met with him a few times, but don't have a very good handle on him.

NELSON: Is it his personality?

WICKSER: I think you would find him very warm and fun to be with. He's got himself overly insulated.

NELSON: I guess you started your career with the Department when Bill Peterson was General Manager.

WICKSER: Yes. Bill was around for a few months. I'm not sure when Sam Nelson took over.

NELSON: It looks like you served under thirteen or more General Manager's during your career. I'll give you a name and you give me a reaction.

WICKSER: We've talked about Sam Nelson earlier. Edgar Kanouse. I had no interaction with Kanouse. At that time Bob Phillips and Jack Cowan were strongly, and with independence, leading the Water System. To me, down in the trenches, the head of the Water System was my General Manager.

Bob Phillips has been discussed here.

I had become a Senior Engineer when Carl Tamaki moved upstairs. I remember Carl put on some Saturday sessions in the building bringing water and power managers together. He was warm and friendly. I remember him through the Speakers Club. He was, in manner and style, what I would call the "Paul Lane" of the Power System. From what I understand, at first he didn't want the job, then they finally talked him into taking it as interim. After he had been there for awhile, he decided he would like to keep it, by then they had already committed to a nationwide search, or something like that. I thought Carl was a fine person.

I could probably fill two more tapes with stories about Lou Winnard. I was in the Owens Valley at the time. I've already mentioned rental prices. I was wallpapering the ceiling of my home one Saturday, and I'm not very good at it, mind you. Anyway, my wife comes in and tells me that Lou Winnard is on the telephone. I put down the wallpaper stuff, wondering what in the heck is he calling me on a Saturday for. "Hi Lou, what is it?" It was something small and I explained it to him and he hung up. I still didn't know why he had called, but went back to the wallpaper task. A few minutes later I get a call from Paul Lane. "Hi Paul, what is it?" "I understand Lou called you. What did he want?" How in the heck did he know Lou had called? Anyway, I told him what had transpired. "Oh, OK, fine," and Paul was gone.

A few minutes later, it's later afternoon now, I get a call from

Duane Georgeson. "Hi Duane." "I understand Lou and Paul called you." I cite this because it represented the paranoia of the time.

We were having the PURPA hearings up in the Valley and Rick Gutierrez was the Board President at that time. He came up with Lou, and I think, Commissioner Pat Nagle. I remember Georgeson telling me not to let Winnard get alone with Gutierrez. I was to be there whenever they were alone together. Duane was afraid Lou would mis-inform Rick about something affecting the Water System.

I was brought down from the Valley once for a meeting. Here's Lou and Pat on one side, and this in the 15th floor conference room. On the other side is Paul, Duane and myself. In those settings Duane tended to do most of the talking. I forget what the discussion was, Duane would be doing the talking, Paul would chime in occasionally, and I was just sitting there like a bump on a log. After a long discussion on one point, Lou looked at me and said, "Jim, is that right?"

Lou was never a problem to me, except I knew what was going on in L.A. Oh, I shouldn't say he was never a problem, but he treated me alright. But some of those little stupid things like leases and water for the ranchers, were sort of an irritant.

I could go on forever on Lou.

I only knew Jim Mulloy a little bit. His reputation was good, but I didn't really have much involvement with him. He made some good moves on the Power side as I recall. Moving Norm Nichols up and by-passing the Burt brothers. Don't get me wrong, the Burt's were very bright guys and knew how the Power System worked as good, if not better, than anyone else. They were just not good leaders.

We talked about Paul Lane.

Norm Nichols was next. Norm treated me well because I was in General Services when Norm headed the Power System. Norm was pleased with my downsizing efforts, particularly in the shops, which was like ninety percent paid for by Power. Norm just seemed to relate well to me. I remember he talked to me at one stage about filling his position, I must have been Duane's assistant at that time. I remember he talked to me about the candidates he had to choose from. Oh, I know, he even interviewed me for the Power System job, and I said, "No thank you." I told him I didn't really think I was the man for the job. He told me he wanted to give me a shot at interviewing. I must have still been in General Services, because I was a division head supplying services to the Power System.

You sometimes had to stop and think, even wonder, about what the heck he was talking about. He was sort of folksy in his way. I remember one thing, Norm said there was always the beer truck theory. When asked what that was, he said you might never know when you would be walking down the street and be run over by a beer truck. I said, "Oh, OK."

Another thing about Norm, he had that span of control issue. Norm Buehring and I were at some meeting up on fifteen one time when someone poked his head in the door and told us that Norm wanted to see us. We walked in and here they had the whole thing set up with a Department video unit. Norm says, "We're going to be doing a little taping of you guys discussing span of control. Out of the blue, no advance warning. Norm and I looked at each other and said, "Who?" That became the famous video that was played down by the cafeteria.

I think Norm and I shared a similar vision of where the Department had to go and to get there we had to drop those things we didn't do very well. We had to maintain only those skills that

were critical and effective to and for us.

Dan Waters, Eldon and I worked very well together. I had some major disagreements with Dan when Power System was starting to downsize because he wanted the Electrical Engineers to design my filter plant. We worked well together in the sense of communicating and sharing ideas. Dan was easy to work with. He was pretty good politically. He would let me do my business and would help me when he could. I enjoyed working with Dan and thought he did a pretty good job. I was sorry to see him leave.

I've always liked Ken Myoshi because I think he's very sincere in where he's going. But, we're probably one hundred and eighty degrees apart in leadership style. Ken's a write a memo, top down delivery, and I'm one of let's build a concensus, make sure everyone's had their input, not all the time, of course. There are command decisions that only the leader can make.

A typical memo from Ken might be "we're going to cut all overtime by eighty percent." "OK Ken, Come on guys, leave the lights out, we've got to go back to the yard. No overtime." It was that kind of thing. Yet, Ken was very sincere and dedicated to the Department. But, the way he did some things was contrary to my style.

NELSON: It began, I believe with Dan Waters, and culminated during Ken's time. Tell us about "The Transfer."

WICKSER: How quickly one forgets. That was during a time in which the Power System ended the year with a very small net income. So, instead of transferring ninety million or whater, we would be be limited to about sixty million, as I recall. So the Mayor's office looked over and says, "The Water System has a good net income, let's get

more money from them."

We indicated we did not have that kind of money. Because of the surcharge the net income looks different than it really is, because those are earmarked funds. We told them that was not really surplus funds. Phyliss Currie, who I had helped interview for Financial Officer, Ken and I were telling our Board and Mr. Tito that the money didn't exist. We did not have the surplus to transfer. Tito was persistent, as was La Gaspi, but Rice, Miller and Volpert all voted against the transfer and it didn't go.

My understanding is that the three women Commissioners were summoned to the Mayor's office for a talk. Subsequently, the Water System was required to transfer an additional twenty million dollars one year. Part of it was theoretically from the sale of property, such as the sale of forty acres at the former Van Norman complex to the LAPD, for six million dollars, which never happened. We transferred the property but never received payment for it. We had some other surplus property in the Owens Valley that we sold.

I forget the rationale now, but in one year, I think '94, we transferred forty million, rather than twenty million from water revenue. Since then we've not transferred more than our usual five percent.

The force behind this all may have been the Mayor, rather than the City Council. The Mayor was new and trying to fulfill a campaign promise to put more police officers on the streets, and other things. Some of those ugly memories you push to the background and it's hard to remember.

Going back to General Managers. Bill McCarley was sent over by the Mayor's Office and my understanding is that the Mayor, no

longer wanted him as Chief of Staff. Indicative of the loss of power by our Commissioners was that they were not really aware that Bill was coming over until it was a done deal. They were a little upset, because they had selected Ken, so now there was no place for him.

So Ken became the Chief Engineer, because McCarley was not an engineer. They found some hoky theory that McCarley was qualified under the terms of the Charter to be the General Manager, but not Chief Engineer. So Ken was put into the Chief Engineer job, which is probably similar to the old Assistant General Manager position.

Bill started out being terrific with the Water System and not much of a problem. Bill was different, very political. He didn't effect us too much, but he would sit on things until the political time was right to move them. It drove Eldon absolutely up the wall.

Then Focused Separation came around and I went to Bill and told him that I could leave at that time, and that as General Manager, he was entitled to pick his Lieutenants and if he wanted me to leave to just let me know. He told me that it was a decision that I would have to make. I told him I would think about it. A month or so later he asked me if I had made up my mind. I told him that there were some things I wanted to finish up and he had not told me to leave, so I was going to stay a while longer. He told me he was glad I was staying.

About a year or so later, he called me into his office and told me that he thought it was time for a change of leadership in the Water System. I asked him what he meant. He said it was time for someone else to come in and lead. We had a little skirmish over that for a few months. About the same time he basically removed Eldon from his

position. Shortly after that Rick Caruso was reappointed to the Board of Commissioners, found out what Bill was up to and put a stop to my removal.

I found that Bill tried to insulate the Board from the managers. Not only did he do that in terms of decision-making, but I'm pretty confident that he did it by character assassination as well. I know the Board members never seemed to respond to me in the same way after Bill came aboard as they had previously. Of course, I never knew how much of what Bill was saying I should believe.

Anyway, Caruso came aboard and saved me from being sent down the path. Shortly after that Bill decided it was time to leave. Bill was such a destructive guy in terms of keeping information to himself, pitting one against the other, encouraging non-team play, when Harry Sizemore came aboard he was a breath of fresh air in the sense that he softer and more low key, and shared information and met with people. He seemed a straight-forward kind of guy.

I hoped that Harry would be around for awhile. He seemed to have a good rapport with the Council, which is important.

Then David Freeman came aboard. I have nothing negative to say about Dave. He was very straight with me and really didn't ask me to leave. He asked me what my plans were. I had already told Harry that I was nearing retirement. I told him I was eligible to go out at any time, but I had a few things I wanted to wrap up and I had pretty well wrapped them up. But I understood there were going to be some separation packages and I wouldn't mind taking a little money with me. He said he didn't know why I shouldn't. He was very complementary about what the Water System had done.

He was never a problem. Once in a while he would go off into left

field without knowing what he was talking about, but I found the best way to work with him was to write him something, because he reads everything. He treated me fairly in my separation package. I don't think he is a very good team builder, but that may not have been his assignment. I think some of the things he is doing, need to be done, but, it's being done in the worst possible way. I don't think he is listening to the right people. He's receiving poor advice from a few people, and that's why I think he's getting himself into trouble.

NELSON: Did he come with an agenda?

WICKSER: Most certainly, it was to downsize the Power System to make them competitive in deregulation. He meat-axes and that's what he's doing.

NELSON: Talking about downsizing at the Department, a lot of talent has left both water and power. What kind of impacts is that going to have on the future?

WICKSER: I've felt that the Water System, at least in the last twenty years, has possessed a lot of good talent and depth to it. I've often told Eldon Cotton that my management team was stronger than his. I sincerely believe that. So, I can't really respond to what's left on the power side to moving forward. I know they have some very talented people there. But, I don't believe they have the quantity of talented people that the water side has.

I believe that the Water System should have been split off from the Power System in the last few years, because, when we're in the same house, we get caught up in the same stuff. The Department got caught

in the '91 drought and had to cut back on some of their expenditures because the Water System didn't have money. Now we're in the same boat. It even started with Dan Waters in having electrical engineers design filter plants.

Presently, the Water System staffing levels are not out of line. We were in good shape even back when the Barrington - Wellsly Report was completed after the strike, and we've further reduced staff during the Focused Separations of a couple of years ago. I think we are pretty much where we want to be.

Financially, we are in pretty good shape. We're in a position to bring our management team along at an appropriate pace. Now, all this downsizing in the Power System, and the fact that there is a spin off in the water side, means our employees are going to be affected too. I'm afraid this is going to leave a huge gap in knowledge. I don't want to say we're having a "brain drain," because I think the talent left behind is every bit as smart, if not smarter than those who will be leaving, but they don't have the history or background. They're going to struggle for awhile. I just hope we don't face a disaster real soon where they need to call on people, because they're going to have less knowledgeable people dealing with it, I think.

I think this is going to result in the Water System being too small to adequately accomplish its mission. I don't think we're going to be able to do the trunk line program at the pace we would like, because we're losing a bunch of young engineers who are just fed up with it all. I don't know if we'll be able to move the Stone Canyon project along at the pace we are supposed to, because we're losing a lot of people.

I know the attitude of many people is that they just want to get the heck out. It's not what they signed up for. There's no reason for the

Water System to be in this position. But, we live in the same house as the Power System.

I had hoped that during my tenure, we would have been able to report directly to the Commissioners, or even to a new set of Commissioners. The city charter provides the the Board of Commisioners can have the head of the Water System report directly to them. The same applies to the Power System. This was done back in the Scattergood - Van Norman days.

I think this should happen now, mainly, so that David Freeman can focus only on what has to be done, but also to not drag the Water System into all this nonsense. There's going to be consequences, in my mind, from the downsizing in the Water System. They'll survive because of the people there, but, it's going to take them awhile, and we're going to lose a year or two in certain projects or programs.

At the present time, I don't think there are more than ten people in the Water System who, if we had another earthquake, can really understand the system and what needs to be done in a hurry.

NELSON: Your replacement is Cecilia Weldon. She has, I understand about fifteen years service in the Water System. How was her appointment made?

WICKSER: It was made by the General Manager, David Freeman. I think it was a shame in what he did in that regard. Not the selection. I'm not going to talk about the selection, but the process. In that, out of the blue, he named Cecilia, without interviewing anyone. He got some advise that he didn't need to interview anybody. Subsequently, because of all the heat, he ended up talking to the principal engineers in the Water System, but he did not talk with any of the other senior

engineers. Cecilia was a senior engineer. By rights, he should have interviewed all the senior engineers, if he was going to select a senior, and all the principals. Or he should have selected from one of the principals as long as he was going to stay in-house.

That process was unfair to Cecilia, and it was unfair to the other people. It's making it more difficult for Cecilia because she has to move in and overcome the fact that she was named without a proper interview process.

It's a quantum leap from Senior Engineer to system head, by-passing division experience. She's a very capable person and I think she will survive, but, it's going to be awfully difficult for her. I don't have any problems with her skills or potential, it was just too bad the way it was accomplished and the possible negative perceptions that might have been created, that needn't have been. I blame David Freeman for this because he did not seek good counsel. He's listening to those who have gotten him in trouble several times already.

NELSON: To sum it all up, thirty-seven years. How was it?

WICKSER: Wonderful, except for the last year and a half. What bothered me during that period was the fact that the Water System was being pushed or pulled into situations because of the Power System's downsizing. This was not in the best interests of our customers, the Water System, or our employees.

However, we have deep talent and we're going to work through this dark period, as we have in the past, and be stronger for it in the future.

NELSON: Thanks Jim, for your time.

WICKSER: My pleasure.