

## Interview with Jim Hokit

Intro: Today is Monday, July 21<sup>st</sup> of 2006, and we're here in Montrose, Colorado at the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association building doing an interview for the Colorado River Water Users Association and I would like you to introduce yourself so we can get your name pronounced correctly and everything.  
(Pam Stevenson doing the interview)

A. I am Jim Hokit previous manager of the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association and retired for four years now.

Q. Let's get some background about you. Can you tell me when you were born and where?

A. Yes. I was born in Oklahoma, southeastern Oklahoma, on May the 24<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

Q. What did your family do there?

A. We were farmers. I raise cattle and some row cropping.

Q. In 1941, you missed the depression and the dust bowl.

A. Yeah, I missed the depression and the dust bowl. I think I was fortunate.

Q. But your family must have gone through that? Survived that I guess?

A. Yeah, my parents did. They struggled somewhat there with the dust bowl days in Oklahoma. Some of the stories about it are pretty interesting. A lot of people knew what the so called "Oakies" were in the dust bowl and my parents did experience that.

Q. They stayed?

A. They stayed.

Q. They didn't head to California or whatever?

A. No, not permanently. They did go out a time or two to work a little bit and then come back. They were back there and settled in on a farm by the time I was born.

Q. Did you have brothers and sisters?

A. Yes. There are six of us children in the family. I'm the third from the top. All of us are still up and going.

Q. You were kind of a middle child?

A. Right, middle child.

Q. What kind of farming did they do?

A. We mostly raised cattle. We had mostly hay crops, corn grains, and cattle.

Q. Was that for cattle feed then?

A. Yes for our own feed.

Q. What was the town like that you grew up in, small town?

A. It's a very small town. Actually it was ten miles to the nearest town where I actually grew up. It was rather rural area and the closest town was a very small town. Probably five thousand people at the most.

Q. What do you remember about growing up as a boy?

A. I remember working hard a lot it seemed like. We had a lot of farm chores to do of course and cattle to feed. It was non-irrigated land so there was none of that going on. Trying to get the hay up while it was dry and not getting wet and things like that. The equipment that we used back in those days was not quite as fast and modern as some of the things that are used today. We were a lot slower at getting the job done.

Q. That's probably why there were so many kids so you could all help out!

A. I would imagine. I think there is a lot behind that, farm families being large families. There's a lot of help there, free help.

Q. What about school? Where did you go to school?

A. I went to school, it was actually a country school called Buffalo Valley, Oklahoma. There were only twenty-four students in my graduating high school class. It was pretty small.

Q. Were you a good student?

A. I was an average student I guess I should say. If I applied myself, I did okay. Sometimes I didn't apply myself as well as I should have. I basically graduated as an average student.

Q. What were you thinking as a boy what you wanted to do when you grew up?

A. Well I guess I really didn't know. I thought farming was an interesting field to be in but it's kind of a hard field to get started in financially because it takes a lot of capital, so I moved off into construction work and followed that for a number of years.

Q. What was your first paid job?

A. My first paid job was actually working as an operator on hay equipment for neighbors that did custom baling. I was still in high school of course or junior high, or high school. I actually hired out part of the time and helped a neighbor that did a lot of custom haying.

Q. Did you ever think about going to college?

A. Yeah, I thought about going to college. I never did actually enroll. I basically took a lot of correspondence courses and stuff over the years but not immediately out of high school.

Q. What about the military?

A. The military was not a great lot of interest to me. In fact, I have a bit of a problem. I have what they call a "lazy eye". I got an eye problem and it probably wouldn't have allowed me to be in the military at that time because at my age, there was not a lot of demand for military. I didn't get my draft notice until I was twenty-two years old.

Q. So you didn't get drafted?

A. Didn't get drafted no.

Q. It was in between wars.

A. Yeah. I kind of fit in between there.

Q. So you got into construction. What kind of construction work were you doing?

A. Doing a lot of was building construction but actually moved on over into earth moving type construction, heavy equipment operations, and built dams and things like that.

Q. Big, big construction.

A. Yeah.

Q. What first brought you to Colorado?

A. I actually went out to Denver in my younger years. I was on a building construction job and kind of liked the area. My wife is actually from western Colorado so our oldest son was getting old enough to start school. So we were looking at place not to be around the big city or having to do a lot of moving. So came to this area, worked on the construction of the Silver Jack Dam, and decided we wanted to stay.

Q. Where did you meet your wife?

A. I meet her in Oklahoma City actually. She had moved there and I had moved there in the construction work, met her in Oklahoma City.

Q. What part of Colorado is she from?

A. She was from this area, right in western Colorado.

Q. So you were closer to her family then?

A. Actually her family had moved back there but we choose to move out here to start our kids in school and everything.

Q. So you said you were working on a dam project at the time you moved here?

A. Yeah, I worked on the Silver Jack Dam which is just east of here up off of Highway 50 a little ways. I worked for Johnson Brothers Construction.

Q. What were you doing?

A. I was operating a piece of dirt hauling equipment.

Q. And how long did that job last?

A. Lasted three years.

Q. So then what did you decide to do?

A. I put my application in to the Uncompahgre Water Users. I thought that maybe that would be a good place to work. I actually got hired on as a ditch rider for the Uncompahgre Water Users.

Q. What made you think it would be a good place to work?

A. It was permanent. It was always going to be there. If you ended up being a decent employee, you would probably have a good long term job.

Q. Was it hard to get hired on there?

A. No, not really. It took about six months to a year before they had an opening that I'd fit into.

Q. What year did you start?

A. 1973.

Q. What was your job?

A. I started as a ditch rider.

Q. What is that? What does a ditch rider do?

A. It means you go out and control the head gates and so forth on the canals, turning water off and on for the farmers.

Q. How did you know how to do that?

A. They train you. You spend some time on the job with the previous person that was doing that. They pretty much train you as to what their process is and what needs to be done.

Q. How did you like that job?

A. I liked it pretty well. I didn't think it was quite enough pay so I kept applying to move up the ladder to do different jobs.

Q. What did you move up to?

A. I eventually moved up to the Manager of the organization in 1980.

Q. And in between?

A. In between, I was what they call Water Master. That is one of the supervisors that oversee a portion of the ditch riders and the construction work on the project. Then at that time, the association had position called operations manager that kind of overlooked the construction of the entire project not just a portion of it. I served there for a couple of three years.

Q. Then you became the Manager?

A. Yeah, I became the General Manager.

Q. What year was that?

A. In 1980.

Q. Was that considered pretty fast to move up from a ditcher rider to manager of the whole project in seven years?

A. Yeah, I guess it was but I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. It worked out for me. It had never happened before.

Q. That was a pretty quick move. They must have recognized something in you. Tell me about the water users when you started with them. What was the organization like and what were the big projects you were working on? What were the issues?

A. Well, the association was pretty much in a financial strain. It was pretty tough to make ends meet. I mean anything that you did meant, extra meant increasing the rates to the growers out there. That being an association, the only revenues that was coming in was the assessments to the growers and that was kind of tough to do. We came up with some creative ideas. We had a lot of structures on the system that needed improvements and changes; they were pretty deteriorated so we applied for a rehabilitation loan through the Bureau of Reclamation. And managed to put together about a seven million dollar project, different projects around over the entire project and managed to get that land and begin upgrading the project a lot.

Q. What were some of the things that needed to be upgraded?

A. River diversion structures, we take water out of the Uncompahgre River at about five different locations down the river. So some of those were pretty deteriorated and in pretty bad shape. So we began replacing those. Some of our major diversions out of the canal were in pretty bad need of repair. The association operates Taylor Park Dam. Owns and operates it which is a hundred miles east of the project. The needle valves that were in Taylor Park Dam were roughly fifty years old and they were showing a lot of wear. So we replaced those needle valves with check flow gates under the project.

Q. What's a needle valve?

A. A needle valve is a valve that actually moves back and forth horizontally and the water comes out around the shoulder of the valve to regulate the flow that is going out. It moved back and forth to create a bigger opening. Jet flow valve of course raises up and down and just creates a bigger opening at the bottom of a round hole.

Q. That sounds like a pretty major conversion.

A. It was a pretty major project. There was to forty-eight inch needle valves which you know weigh several ton each.

Q. What are they made out of?

A. They are made out of cast iron, cast steel. They had a needle valve failure at Bartlett Dam which is down in your area I think. It actually took a life of a person, an operator, who was moving it. The Reclamation was worried about the long term stability of the valves.

Q. That must have been a big project and a long way from here, if it's a hundred miles away.

A. Yeah, we'd release water out of Taylor and bring it all the way down the Gunnison River through the Blue Mesa, Marble Point, and Crystal Reservoirs and then back out into the Gunnison Tunnel.

Q. The Gunnison Tunnel that's under your domain too?

A. Yeah, the Gunnison Tunnel is part of the Uncompahgre Project Act. It was the first federal aspect of the project that was built. It started in 1904.

Q. How's it holding up a hundred years later?

A. With lots of repairs and concrete replacement, it's still a good tunnel. There's been some deterioration of the concrete, ground movement, and so forth that's cracked it and caused repairs to have to be made. We've replaced quite a bit of the lining in the tunnel over the years, the concrete portion of it. It's still in good operating condition.

Q. That was really the foundation of the whole water users wasn't it?

A. It was the foundation of the whole project of getting additional flows into the valley where you could service more acreage.

Q. Do you think this valley would ever become what it is without that tunnel?

A. No, not at all. There's just not enough flow in the Uncompahgre River to have a dependable supply to grow the crops we grow here now.

Q. The whole idea of digging that tunnel must have been a pretty far fetched idea a hundred years ago? Do you think if someone came forward with that idea today, it could happen?

A. It may take a long time to make it happen. Yeah, I guess at the time it was . . . the idea was conceived, the person who thought of doing it and began investigating it slightly was considered not very stable mentally when he started talking about the idea. He pushed it hard and long enough and people began to realize that this is a feasible project. We could irrigate eighty, eighty-five thousand acres out of it then it's feasible to do.

Q. I was reading a little bit. That tunnel wasn't easy to build.

A. No it wasn't easy. There were a lot of lives lost. Building a tunnel from both ends to meet in the middle at the same time with the engineering capabilities that they had in those days, it was quite a feat.

Q. There was quite a celebration when it was finally finished.

A. Yea, they brought President Taft to Montrose in September of '09 and had quite a celebration. There's still a lot of photographs and history around the valley.

Q. I saw a picture downstairs in the hallway there. It was a great picture.

A. I took some of those pictures that were just small photos and had them enlarged for some of our decoration inside the office building here after we remodeled it and restored it. I thought the old antique pictures would fit in well with the old building.

Q. It's great to see those pictures. I'm glad you got there out where people can see them and appreciate the history. Now were you involved in the restoration of this building?

A. Yes. We needed to do something with it. It was getting in pretty bad repair. We got to work out a deal with the Bureau of Reclamation and the Colorado Historical Society and managed to get some grant money, outside funding, and pretty much kept the building as its original. There are some of the things that you couldn't keep original. There were plastered walls in here but we ended up having to take that out. We went ahead and put sheet rock back and did the plaster texture on the walls where it looks like it's the same. Have the same door moldings, window moldings, and the crown molding around the ceiling and all that. We managed to keep it pretty original.

Q. I understand it's registered as a historic building so you have to abide by some of those things.

A. Yeah. They expect you too and of course, they're helping with the funding of it. It's worth doing when you can do it that way.

Q. This was originally the Bureau of Reclamation's building so I would think they have a little soft spot for it.

A. They did have. The Bureau helped us all they could.

Q. What were some of the other things; you said the project needed to be renovated and rebuilt?

A. It was mostly diversion type structures and dams and rivers where we needed to replace old wooden diversion structures. A lot of them we put in automatic gates where they were manual gates before, where you can run electricity to them and have the gates automated where they're on sensors. And if you have higher river flows come up, then the gates will automatically open and bypass that. So we upgraded several of those where it makes it a lot more convenient and a lot better control.

We did quite a bit of piping of the different portions of the system to eliminate slide areas where we had problems with an open canal on the hillside sliding out. We went in and closed in some of those areas and put in **grain** lining in some of those areas. Eliminated a lot of our leakage and seepage problems that way.

Q. Modern technology the things they didn't have when they built it originally probably.

A. Right, modern technology that makes it a more stable system.

Q. Talk about the system. How many dams do you control? How many miles of canal?

A. We've got, since I'm retired I'm still calling myself we with the project. The system has five hundred and seventy-five miles of canals and laterals. It's got two hundred and fifteen miles of drainage ditches that are dug to help drain some of the subsurface soil out of the area to keep from having a water table problem. The project maintains those two hundred and fifteen miles of drainage

ditches also. We've got six river diversions that we maintain and probably somewhere in the neighborhood of seven thousand delivery structures. There's a lot of maintenance out there to be done.

Q. What's a delivery structure?

A. It's a turnout point where you turn water out of a canal or lateral to the farmer or the user on that system.

Q. You've got the one big dam. Do you have other dams that you are responsible for too?

A. No. The only storage dam that the association is responsible for is Taylor Dam. The others are river diversion dams.

Q. So they're not big?

A. No. They're not as big and you don't have to worry about them moving anything too much.

Q. What were some of the problems you confronted during your time as manager here?

A. One of the tougher problems was dealing with the increasing rates to the growers out there and pulling money out of their pocket to try to help upgrade the project and make it a better system. I consider that increasing the assessments is one of the tougher decisions that have to be made.

Q. How does that work? Are you increasing per acreage or water use?

A. No. It's a per acre use. Being a Reclamation Project, there's a certain amount of water allocated for each irrigated acre under the project. They can use up to that amount with a minimum charge. Most farmers get by with the amount allocated to each acre. They don't run an excess of water very often. So you collect that minimum assessment for each acre that is irrigated.

Q. How much has the rates gone up say in the last twenty-five years since you've started here as manager?

A. They've gone up quite a bit. I can't exactly tell you what the rates are right now but when I started, they were around nineteen dollars an acre. That was a pretty reasonable water rate per irrigated acre. I think they are in the mid to upper twenties now. They've gone up quite a little bit.

Q. Almost fifty percent.

A. Yeah. We tried under the loans borrowed from Reclamation; we tried to get as much mileage out of those funds as we could to upgrade the system as much on a rehabilitation loan rather than . . . they've had a longer term payback then assess do it as you need it. It's kind of tough to do sometimes.

Q. They do need to be paid back eventually.

A. Yeah. They have to be paid back eventually. That was another real good aspect of the project. The association had about four different loans from Reclamation and the Reclamation decided all of the sudden to sell out their existing loans at a discount rate. You know discount the loan to what it would be worth, what was the value of that loan at the end of it. So they discounted them down to that amount and we managed to borrow the money from the State of Colorado and pay off all of our rehabilitation loans at one time and got that big discount. It really worked out well.

Q. Keith was talking about that the project operates in the black as to oppose to some projects that are more in debt and that you should keep it out of debt pretty much.

A. At about the time Keith and I started, it was basically in debt pretty heavy. But we managed over the years to bring it totally out of debt and then actually paid the project off about forty years before the last debt was due. We've done well financially that way.

Q. With Keith on the board and president of the board, explain how the project works. You were the manager, paid staff, and the board actually runs a lot of the policy and things. Explain how that works.

A. The board is elected by the shareholders out there. You have one vote for every irrigated acre you have. If you're a farmer with five or six hundred acres out there, you're a farmer with five or six hundred votes. They're elected out of each zone of the community. There are nine Board of Directors and they have to live in the area they represent. There are three in each area. They're elected by the shareholders out of that. The board basically hires the manager. That's the only

staff that they hire. The manager is responsible for putting together the employees and the entire staff and see that the place runs by the policy that the board sets up. There are monthly board meetings so if there's policy issues out there that needs to be dealt, then the manager takes it to the board and they will create or set policy for that. Of course, we are a Colorado corporation so we have the regulations we go to through the corporation process and plus there are bylaws and articles of corporation that guide you on what you can and can't do.

Q. Are you a non-profit?

A. It's a non-profit, the Colorado Non-Profit Association.

Q. So how was your relationship with the board?

A. I think it was good. I managed to get along pretty well with pretty much all the board. I didn't have a lot of problems in that respect. It was a good board to work for.

Q. They must have liked you because they kept you here for over twenty years.

A. Yeah. They kept me quite awhile.

Q. Was it usual for a manager to stay that long?

A. One of the ladies that work downstairs researched the records and I was the longest term manager that they ever had. I guess that was unusual, yeah. The one before me was here only four years I think. The one before him was eleven

years. It was pretty unusual to stay as manager for twenty-one years not necessarily because of keeping the board happy, but some of the pressures that's on you. It gets a little bit stressful at times. You got the general public on one hand, you got several thousand farmers on the other, and then you got the Bureau of Reclamation, and all the politics of running a project. There is a little stress there at times.

Q. Not to mention just the employees that are doing the work.

A. Forty some employees out there too. Personnel can be a bit stressful at times too.

Q. I guess you must have done a good job if they keep you here that long. Was it unusual for a manager to work his way up the ranks like you did?

A. It was. In fact, I don't know of any other manager prior to me that had done that.

Q. What kind of backgrounds did other managers have?

A. One of the requirements for being manager here is to be an engineer or to have the equivalent experience and classroom work to be an engineer. All of the managers prior to me, most of them had a degree in engineering. I didn't but I had quite a bit of practical experience plus some education in that respect.

Q. They thought you could do the job.

A. The manager has to be approved by the Bureau of Reclamation for this project. I managed to get the Bureau to approve me.

Q. That can be challenging sometimes to get through the bureaucracy.

A. Yeah. I had worked with a number of the Bureau personnel out of the Grand Junction office for all the years I'd been here before that. They had a number of engineers down there that were supportive of me taking the position.

Q. Did you think you would stay that long when you took the position?

A. No, I didn't. I gave myself about five or six years just looking at the average of the previous managers. I thought if I could last six or seven years that would probably be doing pretty good. I managed to make it a little longer.

Q. What were some of the biggest issues you confronted here as the manager?

A. I think probably during the early part of my years as manager is to get the rehabilitation funds together and get the approval of Reclamation, and put together a package that would work for my board, the project, and to fit under the guidelines that the Bureau had to follow for restoring old projects. I would say in the early years that was the biggest challenge.

Later on and on up into the '90's and running the project, you began to run into a lot of the more environmental type issues: salinity, selenium, problems with the water quality, and things like that. They began to be flushed out as major issues. There's quite a bit of salinity in the valley here. Some of the acres we irrigate does pick up salt as the water passes through the soil. The salinity program

became a pretty intense program through the entire seven basin states over the years and trying to find ways to reduce that salinity and working to keep the water quality up higher. That was another big challenge in the later years.

Q. What sort of ways did you find to reduce it?

A. We mostly reduced salinity by piping canals and laterals and mostly smaller laterals that we could've afford to put the money into. Smaller pipe is less money so you can get more mileage out of your money by doing a lot of the smaller laterals. Through that and in conjunction with the **Swell (?)** Conservation Service, we were doing quite a bit of our own field leveling and things like that, we tried to work in the same areas together and of course concentrate on the higher salinity areas. We managed to reduce our salt loading by quite a lot.

Q. Has that always been a problem? Has it gotten worse or was it that it got more attention?

A. I just think it got more attention. It would've always naturally been a problem because it's in the soil and it was in the soil before it started to being irrigated. A lot of that soil has been irrigated for a hundred years, so I'm sure a lot of the salt has leached out and it's not as much as a problem as it was. It became more of an issue probably not more land on this project, more land in the seven basin states come under irrigation and flows were slightly reduced and meeting the compact with Mexico to keep the salt loading down to a certain level. The Department of Interior started focusing a lot more on trying to find ways to reduce it. This was an attractive project to do that on.

Q. I guess the water starts up here and it gets salt here and it gets more as it goes down.

A. Once the salt is dissolved into the water, it doesn't leave it until you get to a desalting plant or something. I guess the economics back in those days didn't look so good with the desalting plant at Yuma. So they started researching areas like this to try to get more out of it before it ever got in there and trying to keep it from ever getting into the water.

Q. That plant is still sitting there but not being used.

A. That's what I understand.

Q. I guess it was one of the less successful ideas.

A. They may in the future ideas; they can renovate it somewhat and make it a more cost effective way of doing it. I don't know.

Q. You're up here running the Uncompahgre Water Users, do you really think much about where the water goes from here or are you mainly concerned with getting it here and don't worry after that?

A. On a day to day basis, you're more concerned about getting it here and out to your growers and trying to keep the project running. When you look at the bigger picture, naturally you are concerned about where it goes and what goes where after it leaves here because of the Colorado River Compact and obligations of our little area having to fit in, in that entire big picture too. You think about those

things, yes. But usually you're so busy and a day to day basis that you don't have time to think about where it's going after it leaves.

Q. I know there are some issues about the use of it for the tributary rivers using up all the waters, the Colorado wouldn't have any water if everybody used it at source.

A. That's correct. The Gunnison is one of the major tributaries to the Colorado.

Q. In your position as the manager here, did you get involved with more statewide boards and commissions and things too?

A. Oh yeah, yeah. I served on a lot of the water community type things. I heard you say that you are filming this for the Colorado River Users Water Association. I've been going to that for the last twenty some odd years probably. I usually attend it. I serve on the Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority Board still. I have been on that for seven years or so now. It's a state entity that helps funding for the building of water supply and wastewater treatment plants around the state and upgrading mostly domestic supply systems for people. Smaller communities included because a lot of times they're the ones that can't afford upgrades on their own so if we can lump them in a big bond sale with the bigger metropolitan areas, we can help them fund their little projects too.

I'm also serving on the Gunnison Basin Roundtable for the House Bill 1177 in Colorado that's looking at ways for the state to cooperatively try to meet some of the areas that are in short supply, and figure out ways to get water in those short supply areas without injuring the ones that may not have a short supply. Locally,

I serve on a Tri-County Water Conservancy Board which is a rural domestic water supplier. They operate Ridge Way Dam.

Q. A lot of boards and commission and things that you're on and still on.

A. I'm still involved somewhat.

Q. One you didn't mention and maybe you're not involved with is the Colorado River Conservation District? Are you involved with that at all?

A. I've been involved with the Colorado River District quite a lot. I never have served on their Board of Directors. We work with them continually on things that we're doing in our basin. Their staff is kind of assigned to different regions and within the Colorado River District boundaries, we have a couple of their personnel that we take our issues to. Of course, we have our representative on the Colorado River District Board from our county and we can channel things through them. The Colorado River District has always been good to work with on issues and concerns that we have here at the project.

Q. It sounds like you have a lot of hierarchy on water organizations here in Colorado.

A. There is. There is. I think there are more water attorneys in Colorado than there is in most of the other states.

Q. I imagine you got to work with a lot of those attorneys too.

A. Yeah, I worked with a lot of attorneys over the years.

Q. I know Keith has talked a lot about more legal issues now than engineering issues sometimes with water.

A. They seem to get into the mix of things pretty quick. The legal part does. I served a lot of years on the Board of Directors for the Colorado Water Congress which is a Colorado statewide kind of a lobbying entity that works on a lot of the water bills and so forth that's going before the state legislature.

Q. You just mentioned House Bill 1177. That one just passed recently?

A. It was just passed a year ago. What it established was a roundtable in each major basin of the state of water people involved in water related issues and each city and county and water district is represented on these basin roundtables. We create some policies; in each basin they can be slightly different. We have two representatives off of each one of those roundtables that goes to the Interbasin Committee. All of the basin meet together as one group and try to start figuring out ways, aside from litigation, to negotiate some of the water concerns, movement of water and so forth within the state, and how to meet some of the demands that are out there that in the long term, we can see there's going to be some short supplies.

Q. So that is sort of a new organization or structure? How does that differ from the ones that have already been around like the Colorado Water Conservation Board?

A. It differs like from the Water Conservation Board in respect, it's kind of a coming straight from the local citizens. It's supposed to work from the bottom up rather from the top down. If it ever gets all shook out, any time any major decisions are

made by the Colorado Water Conservation Board for funding of projects and so forth then they know the information for that or the input from that is coming from the ground up. We think is a pretty good process. Our director for the Department of Natural Resources, Rush George, came up with this creative idea and has done a good job of pulling the communities all together and getting people to volunteer their time to do this kind of thing. It still has its hurdles to get over but I think if it can stay together, there's opportunity for it to become a process that will keep a lot of water cases out of court and settle through negotiations.

Q. So these roundtables are made up of diverse interests?

A. Right. They're made up of diverse interests. The City Council can appoint anybody that they choose to represent them. County Commissioners can select somebody to represent them and the environmental community is covered, recreational communities are covered. They each get a representative on each roundtable. It's a pretty diverse group. Not all the people who sit on the roundtable have had a history of water related issues but I guess that can help the water community educate some more of the general public on what the real issues are out there. I think it's a good deal.

Q. In the past, the water seemed to be mainly controlled . . . the people most interested anyway were farmers.

A. Yeah, that's true.

Q. So that's changing a little bit to get more flavors. Keith mentioned that the Board on Uncompahgre Water Users was all farmers pretty much on the board. Do you see a time where that board will be other people then just farmers?

A. The bylaws would have to change because you have to be an owner with land with water assigned to it under the project to sit on the Uncompahgre Water Users Board. The bylaws would have to change before you could be a non-farmer sitting on this board or a non-water right owner. You may own land and not farm it yourself, have somebody else farm it, and still sit on this board. But it's basically an all farmer board. No, I don't see that changing here simply because the rules don't allow it.

Q. Even as you have more farmers sell out and you have housing divisions on that land? You don't think those people aren't going to want a voice?

A. They're probably going to want a voice. I don't know how you are going to handle that specifically because if you only own one acre, you only got one vote. If you own five hundred acres, you got five hundred votes. The structure of the bylaws is such that it does try to keep the control of the project under the person that is still in the agricultural business. I guess that person with one acre, if he could go out here and convince enough large acreage farmers to vote for him then he definitely could sit on this board.

Q. As long as he owns that acre?

A. Yes, as long as he owned the acre and lived in that district.

Q. Keith said it was getting hard to find farmers willing to put in the time so maybe that will happen.

A. It very well could happen. Because it is getting hard, most of the farmers are trying to operate bigger to survive. Boards take up time and it's hard for them to dedicate the time to do it.

Q. Maybe the board can change the bylaws. The Salt River Project has changed some of those bylaws. Some of the positions are one person, one vote. It's not done by acreage.

A. I heard they changed that. I haven't been on the Salt River Project in about twenty years. So I don't know too much about it.

Q. They have their elections for their board and the council and we live in that area so we can vote but most people don't bother. The farmers are the ones that care enough to go vote.

A. They're the ones with the main interest.

Q. They are getting some non-farmers on the board; mostly politicians retired governors and things. The CAP Board has had a lot of those people. They know the issues at least.

A. Right. Well sometimes it's hard to get people up to speed with all of the issues that are out there on a project like that or this.

- Q. Water is a complicated issue. I'm sure you know that. Did you have to do a lot of really learning that as a manager here when you started off?
- A. Yeah, I did. Fortunately, I, the organization had a good attorney that was willing to spend a lot of time with a new manager that was fairly naive on water related issues. I had him and the president of our board at that time was a pretty dedicated person. I spent a lot of time with them learning and trying to get up to speed. I guess a lot of people have a fear of asking dumb questions but if you don't know the answer, it's not a dumb question so I certainly asked a lot of questions when I was trying to get myself up to speed on it.
- Q. You knew how to manage the water, the physical part of it, but the legal issues and the political.
- A. The legal and political issues are what were hard to get your arms around.
- Q. And that probably changed a lot over those twenty-five years too?
- A. It was constantly changing.
- Q. Who did you see as your greatest allies when you were running the organization here? Who was really on your side and supporting you?
- A. I think the Bureau of Reclamation was very supportive of this project. They have their rules and regulations that they have to go by that as a manager or operator of the project, you can't always agree with. They pretty much had a blanket set up of rules and regulations. They were certainly our ally when it came to things

that we needed to do and get done. They were interested in the project and keeping it going. I think they were a great ally.

Q. How about opponents? Who were you always running up against?

A. It seems like a lot of problems we had was with regulatory type agencies that couldn't quite agree with the way we operated the project. Sometimes when you have a senior water right, you can divert enough water out of a river to dry it up and that's the water law. And when you close those head gates down and take all the water that's in the river and it's dry for a few miles, some of the public gets a bit concerned about that but it's the way it works. I guess that would be some of the major opponents when I was running the project are the ones that didn't want us to fully exercise our right to take our water.

Q. Do you have the names of some of those agencies?

A. They'll probably going to be at the Colorado River Water Users meeting next month. The Federal and Fish Wildlife Service ended up being a bit of a thorn in my side a number of times. Hopefully none of them take it personal. There were some of the things that they wanted to see and tried to do that were pretty much against our way of running the project. That was one of them. In recent years, Water Quality Control Division since selenium has come on to the scene as a concern and is readily apparent in this valley, setting up some of the zones and so forth that was considered navigable streams or whatever that selenium levels could only be at a certain height and it was naturally occurring. We had to keep the water to not exceed those limits when that stream was being used as a carrier for part of our system. We would possibly empty water out of a canal into a natural drainage for two or three miles and take it back out again. Some of those reaches were made into lower level selenium carriers and there wouldn't

be any water in there and it would be a dry stream unless the association's water was being transported through it. So it was really hard to wrestle around those issues. If we hadn't of put our water in there, it would've been a dry stream. And with our water in there, it had to meet those salinity standards. It's a no win situation actually. I'd seen that as quite a challenge. It's not resolved.

Q. I was going to ask how you resolved it.

A. You turn the canal off to resolve it. Then they've got a navigable stream with no water in it.

Q. So how did you see you role here as manager in all those issues? What was your role?

A. My role basically in issues like that is protecting the association in whatever degree I could and keeping the Board of Directors totally up to speed on the meetings on those kinds of things and getting their input back through me to carry our concerns to those kinds of issues. You can imagine nine farmers sitting around a table and me trying to gather every piece of information they wanted represented there. Most farmers can state an opinion when they need to pretty quick. So sometimes it was hard to decipher exactly what you needed to be doing. I think that was mainly my role was making sure that we suffered the least amount of impact as possible and we continued our operations as normal.

Q. The Black Canyon of the Gunnison and the water right issues have come up recently under your term because I saw you were quoted in some of the articles I was reading. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

A. As you probably already know, the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument was created in 1934 or something like that, back in the earlier days of the Taylor Park part of our project. The storage right in Taylor Park and the Federal Reserve right for the Black Canyon have close to the same date. I think the Federal Reserve right for the Black Canyon actually precedes the storage right for the Taylor Park Reservoir. We also have a direct flow diversion right for thirteen hundred second feet of water out of the Gunnison River, just at the immediate upstream end of the Black Canyon National Park. It was a monument then but in recent years has become a park. We could visualize any major Federal Reserve right going through that canyon as being an impact to the project here as far as our right to store water in Taylor Park Reservoir, and possibly some problems with our direct flow right that would have been senior to the monument and yet could have possibly been impacted by it. We were quite concerned when the Federal Reserve right was exercised, the filing to decree the Federal Reserve right went into place. Naturally, we filed a statement of opposition against it to make sure that we were in the process of went when on and how they quantified that right. They had been doing some stream flow quantification work in the canyon in the last three or four years to try to determine what would be the best levels of flows for the fishery, flushing out debris that accumulates in the canyon and things like that since the Federal reservoirs were upstream of that too, the flows had been regulated pretty well. There hadn't been real high spring run off flows going down through there. So we filed a statement of opposition against it and got in the process. By the way, I guess there was more statements of opposition files against that decree for the canyon than has ever been recorded in the history of the state of Colorado as being opposed to one single water right.

As you may also already know, that has been on-going for the last four or five years or six years. The first quantification of rights that the Parks Service proposed was something that we didn't think was realistic to live with. We had structural concerns for our diversion dam that's in the canyon over there being

stable enough to handle the huge flushing flows they were requesting come down the river. We were afraid it would take our whole structure completely out. So that was another reason for our statement of opposition.

Q. What is a flushing flow?

A. According to the Park Service, it's a flow that you ramp up to it slowly so you don't impact the fish that are in the stream and you get the flow up high enough that it starts removing gravel bars and sandbars and things like that that are in the river. And you leave it long enough to wash all that down to the next reach of river I guess. I don't know where it's supposed to go. It's supposed to flush out that section of the river and not be there anymore. And then you slowly ramp the flushing flows back down so that it doesn't impact the fishery in the river.

I think there are concerns from the State Division of Wildlife as to whether or not this is going to impact the wild Trout habitat that's over there. It'll flush out the eggs of the Rainbows or the Browns whichever ones who happen to be there at the time they're doing the flushing. That was a big concern to us in the spring of the year when we're trying to turn the canal on and take all the water we can to get the farmers up to speed and the Park Service demanding higher flows going on down that canyon.

Q. Is that supposed to sort of replicate like an old fashion flood? Is that the idea?

A. It would kind of represent an old fashioned flood. It would basically represent the hydro-graph if none of the dams were up there, and you had a real hot period of time and all of the snow melt came off at the same time. Is what it would do.

- Q. Because the dams are there, it doesn't do that right?
- A. Yeah, right but in some people's opinion including mine, the fishery in the canyon is a major Trout fishery that wasn't there before the dams were built. There was very few trout in that stream if any. Now it's become a select Trout fishing area.
- Q. I though I saw something that said a group called Trout Unlimited supported the Park Service. Trout Unlimited had some kind of a . . . I never heard of Trout Unlimited but I guess there are some organizations that like Trout.
- A. They're a national organization that supports better Trout fishing habitat areas. They've shown up on the scene a lot in recent years as doing litigation on water projects and so forth when they think there maybe some impact to a Trout fishery, Trout stream.
- Q. All that water that would flush through there would end up at your diversion dam and downstream of that and then you would have to deal with it, right?
- A. Right.
- Q. You basically would have a flood every year or however often you did it.
- A. We would have to deal with flood flows every time they did a flushing flow.
- Q. What brought that up suddenly? I mean the dam's been there since the 30's. Why did this suddenly become an issue?

A. In the 1970's, a water judge directed the United States to quantify their water rights for these national parks and monuments. They did one in Dinosaur National Park and some of those and they quantified some of the flows then got it all established. For some reason, the Park Service never did get around to stating an amount for the Black Canyon over here for all those years from '78, or somewhere around in there, until early 2000. Once they did, they surprised everybody with the amount that they wanted to see there. Basically their original application was for all of the flows in Gunnison upstream of that point. That would put a lot of people out of business.

Q. So where does it stand right now?

A. It's still in litigation. It will probably be there for a lot of years. The case with the Park Service is on stay in the District Court because Trout Unlimited and some other environmental organizations petitioned it to go before the Tenth Circuit Court. So the District Court, Water Courts, is waiting a result of a decision of the Tenth Circuit Court. If you get into this issue with Dick Bratton tomorrow, he'll do a much better job.

Q. He would have represented . . .

A. He would have represented the Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy District. He would be pretty involved from an attorney's angle. Attorneys can always talk better than me.

Q. Yeah, but we can't always understand what they are talking about.

A. (Laughing)

Q. There was another issue that came up I think in 2002 about a hydro-electric power project up there. Were you involved in that a proposal about hydro-electric power?

A. Yes, I was involved in that project. In fact, it was this association that was trying to put that project together.

Q. Tell me about it. What was the project? What did you want to do?

A. What we would do is take the water that was coming through the Gunnison Tunnel during irrigation season and we would build a pipeline six miles long from the Gunnison Tunnel down to the Uncompahgre River. We would run a portion of our irrigation water through that pipeline that's delivered at the lower end of the valley. Well, it would go through there and generate electricity and make revenues for the association. We proposed also to run that hydro-electric portion during the winter time during the non-irrigation season, and divert water out of the Gunnison River and bring it through there and generate electricity and then the water would just return to the Gunnison River at Delta. So instead of going down the river and canyon, it would go through the pipeline and into the Uncompahgre and reenter the Gunnison at Delta. Most of the environmental community and Trout Unlimited and some of the recreationists opposed that project because we would be making an additional diversion of flows, non-consumptive, but it would take it out of that reach of the river in the winter time. There was a lot of opposition to that. We had, not being able to use association money, to do a study project like that. We had engaged in some partners that were in the hydro-electric business and they were financing the studies and the applications and so forth to build that project. I guess to put it simply; the environmental community finally just wore them down to where they decided that

they weren't going to spend any more money on it. So they basically just dropped the project.

Q. So it's dead right now?

A. It's dead right now, yes.

Q. It looks like everybody is looking for ways to generate electricity that would be environmentally better than burning coal.

A. It's environmentally friendly. It's non-consumptive. It doesn't use any of the water. It just runs it through a wheel and passes it on. But it was not acceptable to some of our environmental communities.

Q. You don't generate power from Taylor Dam?

A. No. Taylor Dam the releases through there would probably generate enough power to make it a feasible project to do. We've studied it a couple of times and one of the problem with it is getting the energy out of the area. You'd have to build twenty-five, thirty miles of power lines through sensitive areas.

Q. You should have thought of that in the 1930's.

A. Yeah, you're exactly right.

Q. You don't think that hydro-electric power is going to become a source of income or a resource of power here in the immediate future?

A. Not in the near future it won't. As we're seeing more energy demands nationwide and more brownouts and blackouts, we've got some potential here to generate power. But probably until some of our lights start going out here in Montrose, we're going to still have opposition to doing any of the projects that we were looking at.

Q. Where do you get your power right now?

A. It comes from coal fire energy and Craig Hayden area of Colorado, plus a portion of energy from hydro out of the WAPA project. This is Western Area Power Administration. Tri-State Generation is our wholesaler and our local distributor is Delta Montrose Electric. Tri-State gets a small amount of their power from Western Area Power Administration but most of it comes from coal fired plants.

Q. Like you say until the lights go out and then they won't care so much about fish.

A. Maybe not.

Q. Looking back over all your years here, what accomplishments related to the water issues are you the proudest of?

A. I guess what I'm the proudest of probably is managing to get that debt service accelerated and paid off forty years ahead of time. Being able to take advantage of the buy out from Reclamation, buy those old loans out, getting that low interest loan from the State of Colorado, and get it paid out forty years early. I think that

was a pretty good accomplishment and I worked really hard on when it was going on. I was pretty happy about that.

Q. It was a good financial decision.

A. Yeah. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time for things to fall in place. If we hadn't jumped on to it, it could've gone on by without us doing it too.

Q. Are there any things looking back that you would've done differently?

A. Well I don't think so. I retired at sixty years old. I probably wouldn't have stayed until I was much older anyway. I don't see a lot of things that I would've wanted to change a great lot. I think that it really went pretty well. I might have pushed my board and growers a little bit harder, a little faster earlier on seeing how things turned out in the end and try to do a little bit more upgrading of the system while I was doing it. Getting a board of nine farmers to approve a seven million dollar loan is kind of hard. If I would've pushed for ten, I doubt that I would've gotten it. But I would've liked to have had a little bit more. There are a few other things that I would've tried to get done that would've been to their advantage in the long run. It wasn't critical.

Q. What things about the whole water issues in Colorado that are happening today, what surprises you that you wouldn't have expected twenty-five years ago?

A. I guess a couple of the bigger things are front range growth, and we call the front range all the way to Denver, Fort Collins, Colorado Springs, Pueblo area, I wouldn't have expected it to grow quite as much and as fast as it's doing now. It's putting a lot of pressure on that area for new water supply. If I would've had

better foresight or they would've had better foresight, they might have been better prepared for it or to respond to it. To me, I personally didn't expect it to go at the rate it's going now. That's one of the bigger issues. The biggest population in Colorado is on the front range and the biggest water supply is on the west slopes, so there's always the east-west slope controversy. If you talk to some of the Colorado River District people, they can certainly educate you on that rather well.

Q. That's how some of it got started back in the 30's it was a big issue, so this is nothing new.

A. That was the reason the Colorado River District was created.

Q. What about the growth here in the valley?

A. It surprised me as much as on the front range too. Montrose in the thirty-six years that I've been here, up until recently, was a small community and you knew most everybody on the streets. We've seen like twenty-nine percent growth in the last decade and it doesn't seem to be slowing down any. We're facing some pretty major growth issues ourselves that's encroaching on the ag ground. That's somewhat of an impact. You're still delivering the same amount of water but you got a whole lot more users than you used to have. Those small users are as vocal or more vocal than the larger users sometimes. If they just have a couple of garden hoses full of water, they're having just as much trouble getting it over their little acres as the guy with two or three c.f.s going out there. That part as retiring as manager here, I don't think I'm going to miss too much it dealing with the additional population.

Q. We can see the growth as we drove in from the south. We were here two or three years ago and it's huge in just that period of time. There are shopping centers and Wal-Mart and homes.

A. Little shopping malls, I think I heard Keith tell you. You go out here southeast of here and it's just . . . there's houses over acreages that there was one house on two, three, four hundred acres when I came here. They're covered with them now.

Q. So those farmers most have done okay then selling their land?

A. Yeah, the ones that are selling out are doing okay. And I guess you know you have to look at it as that's their retirement package.

Q. Especially if they don't have kids that don't want to farm it.

A. Yeah.

Q. Looking broader than just the valley here and looking at all of Colorado, what do you see as the issues relating to water resources that is the most critical today?

A. I think one of the most critical ones is coming up with solutions to meet the domestic demands that are coming on to the state and keeping as much agricultural and production as they possibly can. The water has got to come from somewhere and the easy source for a lot of those bigger front range communities is to buy the farm and use it for domestic supply. I think there is a lot of effort going on in the state to keep that from happening to whatever extent we can. Some of us that have been in the water business for a long time think

additional storage and trapping more of the peak run off type flows is the way to handle some of those problems, rather than drying up farms. I think that's a good solution to the entire state which would include the Colorado River Basin as a whole too. But funding becomes a major issue when you start looking at those and how do you fund major projects anymore? It's just not there.

Q. When they really want it, they find the money. Is the issue the money or is it some of the opposition to wherever you're storing that water? The environmental changes that it will make to build the reservoir.

A. That will always be there. There's a lot of that. The reason the money is short, or part of the reason, is the cost of doing the project has gone up considerably because of the compliance with the environmental issues that are out there. It just cost so much more to do a project then it did twenty or thirty years ago simply because there are too many hoops to jump through before you could get it done. There's realistic impacts there that you need to mitigate but there's also opportunities for artificial impacts to be thrown out in front of the developers that are not real. But it cost money to resolve those issues that are probably not an environmental impact at all in the long run. They can still be used as tools against you when you are trying to build a project.

Q. And even bigger than Colorado, what about the whole southwest region? You said you go to the Colorado River Water Users Association meetings. How do you see the impact of the whole region on Colorado?

A. I can see as a large regional thing that in my opinion there again, I think in some ways to maybe store some more of the water at higher elevations. Have it available in wet years for releasing and in dryer years for the entire basin. I can see, in my opinion, some of those as being solutions to solving the entire

Colorado River Compact issue. If you've got wet years and water is getting by everybody without being used and if it was held in storage, there's an opportunity for that to come down in drier years. That's why I think Lake Powell is serving such a vital role right now for all of us. Over 2002, 2003, look where we would've been without it. The Upper Basin states couldn't have met the compact requirements and made the releases to fulfill the downstream needs. It's serving a vital role right now. If there was more of that in my opinion, it could help offset long term drought problems.

Q. Is there really that much water that's escaping that we're not using? There does seem like there are quite a few places to stop it. Lake Powell is pretty low right now.

A. Well yeah, I still think there's water that gets out of the system.

Q. How high up would you want to put the reservoirs?

A. I don't have any specific locations. If you could eliminate evaporation and losses to some degree that would be beneficial. If you could catch some of the water before it's used for irrigation on higher salinity bearing soils, then maybe the water quality problem wouldn't be as great when you release that water out of a higher elevation reservoir.

Q. So you're talking higher elevation like . . .

A. Colorado and places like that.

Q. I read somewhere that the only river areas that are trying to save the growth are the Alfa and White rivers valleys. Can you store more water from those?

A. There's not as much growth and they're doing some smaller storage projects up in that area. I also think you're looking at small projects. You're not looking at anymore Hoover Dams or Glen Canyon Dams or Blue Mesas as far as that's concerned. You're looking at smaller reservoirs.

Q. Looking in your crystal ball into the future, what do you see as the biggest water challenges that are going to be facing this state?

A. In the state or in the basin?

Q. Both.

A. Maybe in the state is trying to continue to work out this domestic supply through negotiated process. I think that is probably one of the bigger challenges that we're facing right now. As far as the basin is concerned, if everybody gets on the same page as the Colorado River Compact it might not be as big of a problem. I think Arizona and California are still at a bit of odds how the compact should operate. Of course, the Upper Basin and the Lower Basin is still at odds on what portions of the compact really mean. I assume that probably one day that will end up getting litigated.

Q. And of course Nevada is sticking its foot in there and saying they got the short end of the stick.

A. Yeah. They are. They're trying to contract with Arizona; actually they did some I guess.

Q. A little bit.

A. Not enough to meet what they're going to need long term.

Q. And of course nobody even talks about Mexico.

A. No, that's right. A little corner fits in there.

Q. Anytime we talk about Mexico, it's about there people coming up here.

A. Right.

Q. I'm sure that's an issue up here too.

A. Yeah, it is.

Q. Do the farmers up here use a lot of the labor from there?

A. Oh yeah. It'd be an impact. It is an issue they do need to resolve some way too.

Q. Now that you've retired, what advice would you give to the people that are operating the water system, the water users or the state-wide water system?

A. I don't know. I haven't thought about it that much. Locally here, I guess my advice to this association would be to continue your relationship with the Bureau of Reclamation. Keep an ongoing process with them and stay as involved as possible because to me, they're kind of like having a big brother out there that you can depend on now and then when you need it. Statewide they do need to continue chipping away on how to resolve their conversion process from irrigation to domestic or ways to eliminate that.

Q. Do you think you can eliminate that?

A. I don't think you can eliminate it but you can certainly absorb some of the impact. Water conservation, I think, is an ongoing thing. You just have to keep coming up with innovative ideas in way to conserve water. You just have to continue doing that.

Q. Do you think the average person appreciates all the water issues that water people deal with?

A. I think the average person doesn't have the slightest idea what's going on unless they turn that tap on and it doesn't run. I think ninety-five percent of your general public; they see it as a newspaper article now and then and think why are those people fighting so much over it. No, I really think that the general public doesn't know much about it at all. I think informing them; education would be one of the best things that could happen. You have to have their interest first and it's hard to educate somebody that's not interested.

Q. You mentioned the price of water when you first came on board with the farmers. Some people have said that water is too cheap and that's the reason that people don't conserve in Arizona because water is cheap. Is that an issue here too?

A. It probably is. If it was costing them more money to use it, then it may get their attention but I don't know how big of an issue that would really end up being. It's not really bothering them in some of the front range areas. You know water taps at twenty thousand dollars for a water tap and the place is still growing like crazy.

Q. If individuals on their home water bill saw the prices of water equal the price of gasoline . . . .

A. I hate to think of that.

Q. They might start conserving.

A. Yeah.

- - - End of Interview - - -