

Interview with Keith Catlin

Intro: I'm Pam Stevenson doing an interview for the Colorado River Water Users Association and I'd like to let you introduce yourself and give me your full name.

A. I'm Keith Catlin from Montrose, Colorado.

Q. Where were you born?

A. I was born just north of Alamosa, Colorado, about two hundred miles from here.

Q. When were you born?

A. May the 6th, 1932.

Q. So you are a native Coloradoan?

A. Yes, I am.

Q. What was your family, what did your family do?

A. Both my wife's and my families both are in agriculture as far back as we can remember. We were either farmers or ranchers which ever it was that we happened to be.

Q. So you grew up in farming?

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A. Yes I did.

Q. Do you come from a big family?

A. No, there are just two of us. I got one brother who passed away a year ago but there were just two of us boys.

Q. What kind of farming did your family do?

A. Since we moved over in this area, we've done mostly rural crop and vegetable crops and that kind of farming is what we've done here. In San Luis Valley, we grew a lot of grain and alfalfa and was kind of more livestock at that time.

Q. So growing up as a boy what did you think you wanted to do when you grew up?

A. I think probably there was probably never a doubt that I wanted to be a farmer. I've driven tractors and did things before I was big enough to do them. I was involved in agriculture all my life.

Q. What about your education?

A. I went to high school in San Luis Valley in Mosca, and that's as far as I went. I guess the rest of it was education by hard knocks.

Q. What was your first job?

A. I really haven't had a job other than a farmer. I've worked away from home short periods of time during the winter and that kind of stuff but I've been involved in farming all my life.

Q. And you grew up during the depression?

A. Right after it, yes. We kind of know what it's like in hard times and short of money and a lot of other things.

Q. Did your family always own the land they farmed?

A. They owned part of it, yeah. They've always owned a farm and we rented other ground and stuff to farm.

Q. You were a little young for World War II so . . .

A. Yeah, I didn't get that one. I've kind of missed all the war conflicts. I've never been in the Army. I've been farming all the time.

Q. When did you move over to this area?

A. In 1949, in the fall of 1949 we came here. My wife and I got married one day and we started moving over here the next day. We spent our honeymoon in the trucks back and forth hauling the stuff back here. We've been here ever since then.

Q. Why did you choose this area?

A. Water is the reason we came here. In the San Luis Valley where we came from, the water was . . . about the time they started sprinkling irrigation over there and we were still doing flood irrigation and that type and about the last part of September, we'd almost always run out of water and we were tired of a crop getting almost finished and then run out of water. We had some good friends that lived over here and they convinced us that maybe this was the place we ought to be and there was plenty of water. So water is what brought us over to the Montrose area.

Q. Where did you buy your first farm?

A. It's just about a mile and a half west of town and we're still there on the same place. We started there and have continued.

Q. How many acres?

A. There's about four hundred acres there where we live and I've bought several other places besides that since then. Between my son and me, we farm about twelve to fourteen hundred acres a year. We grow a lot of Olathe sweet corn. We grow pinto beans. I kind of specialize in seeds. We grow quite a lot of certified beans and seeds for the University of North Dakota. We grow for two different bean companies out of Idaho with green garden beans and yellow garden beans that we grow for seed. So we kind of specialize in seed. We grow quite a bit of barley for Coors and alfalfa and some of the other normal things.

Q. Sounds like quite a diversity.

A. Yes, it's a little bit of everything.

Q. Has it changed over the years?

A. Yes it has a lot. Farming has gotten more intent and difficult than it used to be. When we first moved here, the sugar beets were the big crop. We were very involved with sugar beets. They closed our factory and we had to flounder around for several years trying to find something to replace them with. I guess we never have really found anything. Sweet corn is the closest thing to taking their place of anything we've grown. We grow a lot of onions and that stuff too.

Q. You mentioned its Olathe sweet corn but your not in Olathe, how does that work?

A. Well, Olathe is really a variety that's been patented by that name. What happened, it started out being Olathe sweet corn was the name that they gave this corn. And then the fellow that we grow for patented that name and used it as a patented name for the corn we produce and grow and ship all over the United States. A lot of our corn is contracted to Kroger stores so it's shipped everyplace. About seventy-two percent of our corn is contracted to move all over the United States.

Q. Is that your biggest crop now?

A. That's one of our major crops, yeah. It's very time consuming and intent. It takes a lot of attention. You have to pay a lot of attention to the water and also

spraying in for bugs that can get on it to keep it top quality. We sell a premium quality corn and we have to make it good to get it sold.

Q. How do you irrigate it?

A. Our irrigation is all row irrigation. We use a lot of siphon tubes and grated pipe is the way we do most all of it now. The water is free flow water, it's not pumped. It runs out of reservoirs or the rivers to supply water to our valleys.

Q. Do you use any sprinklers?

A. No. We haven't gone to sprinklers. Our ground doesn't adapt to well for sprinkling. It's got a lot of clay in it. I think they're coming out with some new types of sprinklers that probably will work. I can see that happening in the future. There are two or three of them being put in the valley now that they're experimenting with. I think that will be a way.

Q. How about drip irrigation? Did you ever try that?

A. I've been involved with it a little bit. It's great. It works good. The cost of putting it in is one of the big things. The quality of crops that you raise off of it is great. It will be a real possibility too. The people that are using it are really pleased with it, especially on onions. They're using it on more of their higher paying crops and the quality and the quantity of the crops they're getting off the acres is good. It looks like it'll work.

Q. I interviewed a Howard Wuertz. He's using it for watermelon and things down in Arizona, which is a water intensive crop.

A. Oh it is a water intensive crop.

Q. Tell me how did you get involved with the water issues in Colorado?

A. I guess I've always been interested in water. As far as being involved in it . . . we lived here for probably about twenty years and I never went to a Uncompahgre Valley Water Users meeting or nothing. I decided one time that when they had their annual meeting, that I ought to go down and see it. I went to that meeting and it just so happened that I got elected to the Board. I guess that was maybe my first mistake. Since then, I've been involved with water very deeply in almost every way. I've been on the Board for I guess it's been about twenty-five years or more now that I've been involved with the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Board. I'm the president of the Board and have been for a few years.

I'm involved with the Chipeta Water Company which is a domestic water company. I'm also the President of that Board. The governor appointed me, I guess it's been about seven years ago, to serve on the Colorado Water Conservation Board. So I've been on that Board now. This is my third term that I've been appointed to. So water is a big part of my life.

Q. Tell me a little bit about the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users . . .

A. Well, we're a non-profit organization that delivers water to about eighty thousand acres of land. I forget all the numbers and miles of ditches we've got, but I think it's about five hundred miles of ditches and then we've got a drainage system in all. We've got a tunnel that comes underneath the mountain between

Uncompahgre Valley and Gunnison Gorge that's about six and a half miles long. We bring in about a thousand second feet of water through that. During irrigation season that furnishes about sixty percent of the water for this valley. The rest of it comes out of the Uncompahgre River. We do have some storage on the Uncompahgre and we have storage in the Gunnison area, above Gunnison, two on the Gunnison River up there. So we've got a reasonably good water supply. We do run short of water and run on percentage. We call it rationing. When we get down below a hundred percent, right now we're running at eighty percent of water delivered to the farms. So you just have to take better care of it. Maybe get up and night and change water a little and a little and do some things you have to do to make it go a little further.

Uncompahgre Valley is the organization that took over running the Reclamation Project after it was developed and got into delivering water. We've run it for, I guess, a hundred years now that we've had responsibility of taking care of it. The Uncompahgre Valley Water Users has paid off their debt to the government. We don't owe, we've paid off the project and done it, I guess about . . . I forget now. It seems like it was about twenty-five years ahead of schedule which is kind of unusual. That doesn't happen at a lot of places. So we feel kind of proud of it. We have a lot of improvements that we are trying to make. We are putting in underground pipe and stuff to help control the salinity and the selenium in the valley. The East side of our valley has got quite a lot of Mancos Shale that under lays it that were trying to get the selenium and salinity controlled so it cleans up the Colorado River for the endangered species and that kind of stuff. We worked on that for several years and we're continuing to work on it. It looks like about three more winters projects a head of us right now putting in pipe and stuff. We'll continue to try to clean up the process and hope we get better at it. The canals and the system is really the lifeline of the valley. If we didn't have it, this would be a desert. There would be very little growing here. So it's a very important part of this country and an important job.

Q. The water users you mentioned had a debt.

A. When the government built the project, they developed it and then turned it over to us but we had to pay back the cost of development and digging the tunnel and building the reservoirs. This happened about 1904 to 1909 I believe it was. Then in 1932, we built a dam above Gunnison. That we built for our storage because we were always running short of water in the valley at that time. And this storage pretty well sets us up for a good storage ride. With that debt, we were obligated to pay the government off. It was a no interest loan but we had to pay back all the money that was spent on it. We had the opportunity to sell some of our loans back to the government here when they did some reorganization. So we were able to pay off the debt and we are now operating debt free as far as our debt to the government.

Q. Was that a debt that the farmers had to put up their land for?

A. All of our land is all mortgaged to the government that is right, every acre in the valley. We're also allotted two hundred of a second foot per acre, every acre in the valley is allowed the same amount of water. Most places don't have more water than the other guy. We're all pretty much equal and that's worked out really well. There is a mortgage on our ground. There was. It's still paid off. We kind of keep it there. We've had a good relationship with the Bureau of Reclamation. They've been really helpful with us. We still work together with them continuously as though we still had a debt with them. They own our water right. It's held in their name for us. It's just been a good partnership that we've had with the Bureau.

Q. I guess the building were you're located used to be their building right?

A. That's true. This was the original building they started with. It's been about eight years ago now, I believe don't quote me; we came in and refurbished the building. Restored the building, thank you, restored the building. Moved it off the foundation and modernized the electrical system and all the stuff we had to do. Now it's back in its original shape, in good shape. We're proud of it. It's been a real asset to the community.

Q. It must be one of the oldest buildings.

A. I'm sure it's pretty close.

Q. So you came to one meeting and the next thing you know, you're on the Board. How does that work?

A. Well, when you go to a water users meeting . . . well, I guess that's something we need to explain too. We've got nine members on the Board. There are three of us from the Montrose area, three of us from the Olathe area, and three from the Delta area. So each year, one of those people from each area comes up for election. I just happened to be down there that time and there was somebody from . . . and we kind of try to keep it in areas so that everybody in the valley is pretty well represented. I just happened to be down there at that time when the area I was from was up for reelection and the guy that was there didn't really want to go, so they talked me into running and I've been here ever since.

Q. What does the Board actually do then?

A. We set policy. We set all the things that the water users do. We're pretty much responsible for it all. Then we hire managers to manage the things that we tell them to do. They do the daily work of it. We're not involved in that at all. But we have to set the price of the water that we're going to charge for it every year in order to make the budget work. See to it that we've got enough money to do the things that we need to do. We set the time that we start charging for the water and the time we're going to shut it off if they aren't paid. There are a lot of things that the Board does. It seems like we're getting more and more involved in more politics all the time because there's more politics in water now than there is in working water. We're all involved with in that.

Q. Are most of the Board members farmers?

A. Yes they are. In fact, I guess they all are. Yeah most of them, they're all farmers. They've been involved in agriculture; a lot of them are old time farmers.

Q. How many employees does the water users have?

A. If I remember right, I think there is forty-two that we have now.

Q. And what do they actually do?

A. There are a lot of things that they separate their jobs into. Some of them are what we call the construction crew and they go out and repair and keep the banks of the canals working and flexible, putting in new head gates, installing the pipe, and that type of work. That's kind of their job and we have what we call water riders that go out on the ditch and deliver the water to each one of the farms at the amount they are supposed to have. They ride those ditches

everyday to see that there is no trash and that everybody is getting their share of water and they do all that. We have the office crew that takes care of all the office work that they have to do. Then in the winter time what happens is that the ditch riders, their jobs are seasonal so they come back to the shop. And they go on the construction crew and they're part of the people that put in our water systems and our underground pipe that we're installing. They've got really good at doing a good job and doing it pretty fast. So we're proud of the work they do. They've really become good.

Q. So do they actually physically open and close the gates for the water?

A. Yes they do. Most of the time that head gate is locked and they've got a key that they unlock it and give the amount of water to that place that it's supposed to have and see that everybody gets their part.

Q. It's all done manually?

A. It all is, yes. It's all done manually. In fact, that is one thing that we'd like to do is update and improve our system with some more mechanical and modern things, that is our goal as far as our head gates are concerned.

Q. As there is more growth in the valley, the homes I see being built all over the place, where do they get their water?

A. They're still on the same water system that we are. It's handled a little different in some ways. What happens whenever a subdivision comes before the county commissioners here, they'll send their plan to the water users. Our manager studies it and decides what we need to do. If that part of the ditch needs to be

piped or if something special has to be done for it. But other than that, we have what you'd call a Homeowners Association agreement that we demand everybody that goes into the subdivision, sign this before we deliver water to them. What that does we still deliver the same amount of water to that parcel of ground, but there will be one person elected in that Homeowners Association to be responsible for collecting the money and seeing that we get paid for it. Also, for them to rotate their own water inside of their subdivision so that the water users are not involved with all that, there are always problems when there's a small amount of water. So the Homeowners Associations have worked really well for us.

Q. So will the homes have irrigation for their lawns?

A. Yes they do. In these subdivisions, they do have. Well, practically all of them have got domestic water pipes to them and then they'll have a way of getting irrigation water to their place so they can have lawns and gardens and stuff that they've always had.

Q. So all the subdivisions that are being built, they're being built on former farm land that already had water?

A. Not all of them, but a big part of them are. There's a lot of barren ground that's been developed and put into subdivisions that does not have water for it. So that's a different thing. Then they have to get their irrigation water through the domestic water system and that's very expensive.

Q. So do you supply that domestic water?

A. Well, that's kind of an interesting question. We have an arrangement with the Project Seven which supplies water to the whole valley here. They supply the drinking water to Montrose, Olathe, Delta, Peter Water Company, Menoken Water Company, and I guess that's all. They have a treatment plant that they clean and treat the water with, about seven miles east of Montrose. The water that goes to that treatment plant comes through the Gunnison Tunnel and we put it in a reservoir out there for them to use. They process the water and then it's delivered by a pipeline all over the valley. We got an arrangement with them; the water that comes out of the Gunnison Tunnel is very pure clean water and easy for them to treat and clean up to be drinking quality. So they take that water in exchange, we exchange the same amount of acre feet of water that they use that way with the Dallas Creek Project up here in that reservoir. So we transfer the water from that and in exchange get water out of the dam. So we do supply the water for all of them in a round about way all over the valley.

Q. So as the valley grows with more homes is that going to be less water for the farmers?

A. There will be more and more of it used for drinking water. The amount of water will still stay the same for the farms that are involved. It may come from a different place through the Gunnison Tunnel, it'll come from Dallas, you know. There is a lot of growth in the valley so who knows what is going to happen but water will still be available . . . our basic job is delivering water to agriculture.

Q. Do you see that changing though?

A. I think that it'll probably change it some ways. I can see in the future there will be some water lines and water systems put in that are piped and delivered to these different subdivisions as a secondary water system. I can see that happening.

Q. As the subdivisions grow, do the open canals that the farmers use are those being covered and being put into pipes and things?

A. There's more and more of that happening all the time and through the subdivisions a lot of that's done, yes. We have easement reserves along side all of our ditches and canals. To where if they pipe then, we can get away with a lesser amount of easements so a lot of times they pipe it because of that.

Q. And safety?

A. Oh yes. It's been a big help to everybody because we have less evaporation and loss and seepage and stuff.

Q. Pollution too.

A. Pollution too exactly.

Q. So you've been on the Board of the water users and you said that you're currently President?

A. Yes ma'am.

Q. How many years?

A. I've been on the Water Board about twenty-five years I guess it is. I guess I've been President for seven or eight years. I don't remember for sure.

Q. No term limits?

A. No, no term limits. I think if you'll do it, you've got the job that's the way it works.

Q. It sounds like a lot of work and you've had to learn a lot.

A. There's a lot of involvement. If you're interested in what you're doing, it takes time and effort to do. You bet. You have to dedicate yourself. Sometimes neglect your own job in order to take of this job. I've been very fortunate because I've got a son that's been working with me for a long time with water. And I've got some really, really good competent men that have been with me for a long time. I've got one man that's been with us for forty-two years and another that's been with us for twelve. So we've got good labor.

Q. Do you just have the one son?

A. I have two boys. It just so happens that Mark, my oldest son, he's the manager of the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users. He's been manager there for I believe it's been around five years now and he worked as assistant manager for quite awhile before that. I think he's been here about eight or nine years, I forget.

Q. Is that any kind of a conflict of interest?

A. I think a lot of people thought it was going to be when he first started when I was President and Mark was being the manager. But I think we've handled it really well. We've tried to keep everything separated as far as our personal life is

concerned. It's kind of strange whenever he comes to me and if he says, "Dad I've got a problem." It's his problem. It's family problems that I've got to talk to you about. But he said if comes and says, "Keith, I need to talk to you." I know it's water users problem. We've pretty well separated that and I hope that we've handled it to the satisfaction of everybody. There's no favoritism and stuff as far as anything like that but I'm sure people, especially when he first started, thought about it. I'm sure they did.

Q. Let's keep it all in the family.

A. It could happen but we've worked really, really hard at not letting that happen.

Q. You said there are some other Boards and things that you also served on?

A. Right now, I'm serving on the Chipeta Water District. That's a domestic water supply company that supplies the water mainly west of Montrose on the Mesa area. I think we've got about thirty-two hundred taps if I remember right that we deliver water to out there. I got involved in that kind of because of domestic water that we were . . . one thing that did help us pay off our water bill to the government is when they came through here, and we had signed the contract with the Bureau of Reclamation to take the water out of our ditches during the winter months to stop as much salinity and selenium coming back into the river. It was mainly salinity that we were talking about at the time. So we made a deal with them that we would shut our water off in the winter time and they would in turn, come back and put domestic water to all of our fields where we patron animals. We called it the Winter Stock Water Replacement Program. By doing that and some of the process we went through, helped us make some extra money and pay off our debt quicker. So that's one thing why we got it paid off so quick. That's also the reason why I got involved with Chipeta Water was

because of the Winter Stock Water in time to help them figure out how to get water to all the places so it would work for the livestock growers so we all could stay in business. It was just another process that I thought I needed to be in.

Q. You call it Chipeta?

A. Chipeta.

Q. How do you spell that?

A. C-H-I-P-I-T-A I guess it is. We'll have to look that up. I'm not a good speller. I haven't wrote anything or spelled anything in twenty years.

Q. And they provide domestic water?

A. Domestic water.

Q. Is that a lot of homes?

A. I think there is thirty-two hundred taps that we deliver to homes. It all homes. I want to go back to this Winter Stock Water. What they do, you call in to Chipeta and tell them I've got livestock on a certain field and they'll come out with what's called Winter Stock Water tap and turn it on for the winter. So you can water livestock there. There's not a minimum charge on it but you have to pay for all the water that they use. It's been a real good deal for the valley. It's kept livestock here and also kept it affordable for them to go.

Q. And where does that water come from?

A. That water comes from the same place through the Project Seven system and through the tunnel. It's the same water.

Q. Do you use any groundwater up here?

A. Do you mean by that wells and stuff?

Q. Yeah.

A. Very little. There's a few in the valley but very little. Most all of our water is supplied by flow ditches. There are a few domestic wells in the county but as far as irrigation wells; I think there is only two or three that I know of.

Q. That's good. You don't have the ground subsidence that some places have.

A. Our ground is a little bit different. It's a volcanic . . . glacial deposit. It's kind of a mesa area. We have three or four different levels of mesa west of the valley. It was formed by glaciers. So we've got a lot of rocks that are involved and a lot of different formations all the way across the valley. So it's not the same at all. It's a different area.

Q. You mentioned a salinity problem. You said the water that comes from the Gunnison is pure so how'd we get salinity?

A. Well because Mancos Shale underlining a lot of this adobe ground, especially east of Montrose and the east side of the Uncompahgre River there is Mancos Shale under that. Mancos Shale contains a lot of selenium. So when you irrigate this ground, when it goes down and percolates into the selenium and then runs off on top of it, it brings it back to the river. So that's where the selenium comes from and that. That's the reason why were helping the east side of the valley is to help control that and not get the deep percolation that they get with a ditch run all running in the same place. These pipelines are proven to be a big help in that. There's more and more that going to be done I think and like I say, we've got three more years of that type of work lined up a head of us now.

Q. I was reading something that a lot of your canals are not concrete lined?

A. Very few of them are concrete lined.

Q. Does that make a difference with salinity too?

A. It does depending on what it does. In the east part of the valley like I'm saying, it does make a big difference out there because of that shale underlines it and it soaks into the shale and then seeps and then goes to the river. On the western part of the valley that's mostly gravel and cobble out there that is underneath the top soils. So we don't have near the selenium or salinity problem there then we do out on the east side of the valley.

Q. Do you see doing more concrete lining? I know in Arizona almost all the canals are concrete lined.

A. I think maybe there are some other things. Pipeline, pipes are more successful. There are two things that are kind of wrong with cement. First of all, the life of it is not as long as it should be. In our area if water gets behind it and it freezes during our cold winter, it will buckle and crack the cement. So then it goes to leaking and it goes to pot. There is some new rubber lining and stuff that's coming out now to line these ditches that's a little more flexible and we'll give a chance for the soil and stuff to move. In fact, we're going to put a demonstration ditch in, it looks like not this winter but the winter after this, in one of our ditches out there and see how it works. I can see that being working better in some places better than cement. And then the underground pipe works really well. The life on it is a lot longer.

Q. You're pretty busy on these two Boards and then I guess you got appointed to a state wide Board. Tell me about how that happened.

A. I guess it happened because I'm involved in water and been in the water community for a long time. The Colorado Water Conservation Board has got ten Board Members on it. There are nine that are appointed out of all of the different river basins around the state. So there is one from each basin and I just happen to serve on the Gunnison River Basin. The way it works, it's not a political Board. In order to get on the Board, you have to be balanced. It's about the same number of Democrats and Republicans so it's not politically driven. I just happened to qualify in all those things when it happened. I was really surprised when it happened I guess.

Q. When was that?

A. It's been seven years ago now that I started serving on there. I've got two more years on this term.

Q. So how do you get on that Board? It's not elected like these others.

A. No, the governor has to appoint you. You apply for the job and somebody recommends you and then they research your background and see what you've done as far as water. They want people that are involved in water and have some knowledge about water to do it. It's a very demanding job. It's probably the most demanding Board I've ever been on. I just got back, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of last week, that I was in a meeting. When I went on the Board, it was probably a day or a day and a half meeting. Now almost every one of our Board meetings is probably three day meetings, very grueling from eight o'clock in the morning to sometime at six o'clock at night or after. It's a big job. We set policy for the people in Colorado, it's a policy making Board really. We're involved with recreational interstream flows. We have to have a hearing for them and make our recommendation to the court and the judge to let them know what our views are about the water and the way it's being used. We're concerned about recreational interstream flows. They ask for such a large amount of water that we're afraid that they're going to tie the water up in the state of Colorado and make it so that we can not really use our allotted water out of the Colorado River to beneficial use. Some of these are getting closer to the state line which worries us a lot. We think that our water needs to be used in Colorado, the amount that we've been allotted out of the river. It's a big responsibility that Board is. It worries me more than any of them.

Q. You say you were surprised when you were first appointed?

A. Yeah I was. All I am is a farmer that like to do something with water I guess. I was surprised, yeah.

Q. Are there other farmers on the Board?

A. Yes. There are farmers on the Board. There are water managers on the Board. There are lawyers on the Board. There are people that work for city domestic water people in the cities, so yeah. It's a pretty diversified Board. We're pretty involved in all the things that are going on in Colorado. Right now they've got what they call the "1177 Senate Bill" that created a roundtable Board. There's a roundtable Board in each water basin that's got from twenty to thirty, thirty-five people on this Board. And we're trying to set up a system so that we can supply the needs of the state of Colorado with the water that we have in Colorado, by either being sure that the river basin that we're in has got enough water to supply its future needs and it'll be available for them as time goes on. As this gets to be deeper and deeper and lasts longer, it'll get involved with maybe with transmountain diversions and this kind of thing to see that the whole state of Colorado has got a supply of water. It's a big process.

Q. I was reading about the history of Colorado water. It seems like years ago the battle was between the West Slope and the East Slope.

A. I don't think that's changed a lot. I think they're trying to soften that with this 1177 Bill to where everybody in the state are more involved and more aware of what the other peoples needs are, what they're real problem is. And maybe being able to suggest some things, water saving, reuse of water, and these kinds of things to help everybody so we've all got enough water. There is a real fear in the western slope that some of our water will be transferred to the eastern slope and that will make a shortage for us here, worse then it is now. That's an ongoing thing but maybe we'll be able to get passed that.

- Q. It seems back in the thirties that was the big issue.
- A. It was and it still is you know. It's still there a lot of the, I guess they call them water buffalos in real water language, but they're still concerned about that yes.
- Q. Is it changing as there's more growth on the west slope, more people moving over here? Is that giving you more clout maybe?
- A. A little but not very much, not so much that way. We're out numbered and we know that and we also know that nobody in Colorado is going to die of thirst as long as there is water in Colorado. We'll just have to see if there's not a way of doing it, to mitigate the water that we'd leave and be sure that everybody is served equally well you know. That's part of the job.
- Q. Do you spend more of your time worrying about the water in Colorado and distributing among the Colorado people or do you also worry about other states wanting your water?
- A. Yeah that is part of the process. As you all know, the Colorado River is a big river that a lot of people depend on for their water supply. So yeah we do worry about that also. We're involved in several things as far as the river is concerned.
- Q. What do you see as the biggest issues right now?
- A. I think the biggest issues are the demand that California and Arizona and Nevada are putting on the water. They're growing real fast and they're demanding and needing more water all of the time. So I think that is one of the big things. I think the other thing is the drought that we seem to be going

through over the last several years, that the amount of water that we've been getting as far as snowfall in the mountains seem to be not as much as it has been in the past. I don't know if that's a trend or just a dry cycle we're going through. That's our big concern is the amount of water we're out. Because almost all of Colorado is short of water this year and we should have enough water to go out of the country and down the river. So yeah, it is changing.

Q. And a lot of those have become legal issues too and court cases.

A. Legal is a big thing anymore. We are involved with a lot of the lawsuits and all of the stuff. It's not just only Colorado. It's Kansas and Nebraska and the south Platt and the Arkansas River and all that. There are big issues as far as water being delivered to the other states and everybody getting their share. There are a lot of things going on like that.

Q. I was reading about another issue having to do with the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

A. Speaking of the Black Canyon that is a big concern and that's because here about three years ago, we negotiated a deal with, the Colorado Water Conservation negotiated a deal with the Bureau of Reclamation and the people that are supplying the water for the Endangered Species water right down in the Black Canyon. We thought we had a deal worked out that would be workable for everybody that's involved. There were several environmental associations that got involved and sued the government that they didn't do their job well and didn't demand as much water as they thought they needed. So that's been in court now for three years and so far, we haven't had a settlement over that to know where it's going to go but that was a water right for the endangered species. And then they had at the same time was a flushing flow amount of water that

would go down through the Gunnison Gorge and would wash out the debris and the trees and stuff and keep it natural like it has been all the time up to then. They claim since we put the dam in, the canyon has changed because there is more growth in it and more stuff that's not natural then they wanted to be worked out. These flushing flows have added up to a large amount of water and on the shoulder edges of that, by the shoulders I mean starting earlier in the spring and going to a peak and then coming back down to another shoulder amount of water, it used up a lot of water that is in the Gunnison River that would just have to flow down the river. So that made us very nervous about how much water would be left to irrigate with so neither one of those cases have been settled at this point. We feel that's a big part and a big worry for our future until that's all settled not knowing what it is. They're just doing an Environmental Impact Statements deal now on the Aspinall Dam system after the re-operation of Aspinall. That's a worry to us too because we don't know how much water that's going to demand and going to change the flow of water that comes out of the reservoirs to where how our water will get supplied to us. It is a big worry, all the things that are going on legally. We've all heard about the possibility of a call being put on the Colorado River so that we have to supply as much water as Arizona, California, and Nevada are entitled to. That's a big worry to us all these legal issues that are out there that are really unknown at this time.

Q. When you say providing as much water as they're entitled to, why is that an issue now that wasn't an issue before?

A. Up to this point, we've been able to have excess water go down into the lower basins and now Lake Powell and Lake Mead are at a lower level than what they've been for several years, a lot of years. And so there is a worry in the Lower Basin states that we won't have enough water to supply what they're entitled to as far as the Seven State agreements concerned on the Colorado River. That is a process that we are worried about.

Q. Just because there is less water in the whole system.

A. Yes.

Q. That's Mother Nature who controls that.

A. That's right. Our snowfall has not been as great the last several years so the run off is not as good. Consequently, Lake Powell and Lake Mead are lower and lower in elevation.

Q. So it's more of a matter of the run off and the snowfall, not the fact that the Colorado is using more water and it just doesn't get . . .

A. No. Colorado is still not using their full entitlement to the contract yet. We want to be sure that it's kept available to us as we develop more and more uses. We want to be sure that is kept whole. Right now it's just more of a supply of water than the water we are using.

Q. You mentioned the issue with Black Canyon, why has that suddenly come up? I mean that canyon has been getting less water ever since those dams were built and that's been along time ago.

A. Yeah I believe if I remember the dates, and I maybe wrong on those, but I think it was in 1932 when the Black Canyon was formed as a park I guess. There was an U.S. government water right reserved for that park at that time. They never acted on that water right until about five years ago. They filed a water right for

that canyon and that's when things started to change and not knowing what was happening in the canyon.

Q. And that's when it became a National Park. Suddenly someone cared about it?

A. Well, I don't think it was that. I just think this had been on the books for a long time and actually this water right was filed the last day of President Clinton's reign. And I think the environmental world just put more pressure on it and they thought this was the time to do it while the political arena would be acceptable of it. So it just was one of those political things that involved the rest of the world you know.

Q. I know there were a lot of monuments and parks and things created by Babbitt.

A. At the same time, that is part of it, right.

Q. Utah is not too happy with some of theirs.

A. Yeah, I think they've caused some trouble.

Q. You mentioned that you were surprised when you were appointed to the Colorado Conservation Board but you've served three terms now?

A. I've been appointed three times, yes. I'm in my third term, yes.

Q. Are there term limits? Can you served twenty-five years?

A. I guess. Some of the fellows that were on the Board have served as many as twenty-one years. There's really not term limits. In Gunnison Valley in the Gunnison River system, we've kind of got an agreement that really you can serve on the Board as long as you want to. There are really three areas of the Gunnison Valley system. There is the Uncompahgre Valley that we're in now. There's the Upper Gunnison and then the North work of the Gunnison. So we kind of take turns of having the representatives from one place or the other. So probably when my term is up, it'll go to Gunnison. That's just the way; we just had a gentleman's agreement over all these years that worked.

Q. Now I think that you served as president of that Board for awhile?

A. I was the chairman of it for one year, yes.

Q. It does sound like you've spent a lot of time and effort . . .

A. I've been involved in water a lot, yes I have.

Q. I also heard that you were named "The Farmer of the Year" by Coors?

A. I was named "Environmental Farmer of the Year" by Coors Brewing Company here several years ago for water conservation and wildlife conservation and these kinds of things that I've done on my farm.

Q. What sort of things have you done that made you stand out?

A. I don't know. I guess being involved with water as much as I am in every aspect is probably what got the attention. We build dams and stuff in the little draw that we've got out there for wildlife. We started that with fish but we kind of got so many, the waste water comes into that area so . . . fish was not successful but we've got all kinds of animals deers and every kind of wild animal that you might think of in that little area. Improving the ditches and moving the system of water on the ground that we farm is stuff that we've done over the years.

Q. That's a national award.

A. It was really a several states award. Coors Brewery is involved in Idaho and Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. I believe in a number of states so it was an award for all of them, competing with all those people in all those states.

Q. It's quite an honor.

A. It really was. I was surprised too. I did not expect it at all. I think there were four of us nominated from the different states. Then we went to Denver and they told us who got it and I was really shocked. I guess I was speechless as a matter of fact.

Q. So you didn't know until . . .

A. No, no. I had no idea. Not until it was announced, no.

Q. It was a surprise.

A. It was a big surprise. It was a big surprise and it was a great honor to do that.

Q. What do you get a trophy?

A. They gave us all kinds of belt buckles and things like that. They did give us a thousand dollars as an incentive for other people to do this. It was an honor. I appreciated the recognition I guess more than anything else.

Q. It's always nice to get a little cash.

A. My wife told me that was her money and we were going to put new siding on the house. That didn't last long, we had to do that.

Q. It went to good use.

A. She is a big part of the farm operation. I've got to say this, if it wasn't for her home taking care of the jobs and doing the things that she has to do, I couldn't do what I'm doing today. She takes care of all the books and all the labor and pretty much keeps us in compliance with the rules and regulations and the things that we have to do to do this. She is, I've always said more than half of the operation. She's been a big help. She really has.

Q. Sounds like farming has become really more than a business.

A. Much more than it used to be. It used to be that you could farm to make a living and that was that but that's not true today. You've got to be involved . . . even as much as I am with water, you have to be involved with a lot of other things as far

as your marketing association on where your crops goes. But also you have to have records and stuff that keeps your chemicals that you put on the ground recorded so that when they come in and check your records, you know exactly where it went. There's so much bookkeeping and stuff that goes along with farming then there used to be. But it's also a business, as you all know farming is not a very rewarding business monetarily because the cost of our input into the crops is so much now that you have to do a very good job, raise a good crop, and be efficient in order to have anything left after you get done with the crop at the end of fall. It's a lot more of a business then it used to be. If you're not a good business man and don't work hard, you're probably not going to be successful.

Q. I understand too that a lot of times you're dealing with contracts for people that you're planting things for.

A. We like to do that. If we can get the contracts on crops, it makes it more reliable as to what your income is going to be in the end. We do contracts with companies out of Idaho that we grow beans for. Also like I said, I grow for the University of North Dakota. I increase their foundation bean from the breeders stalk bean (?) to the foundation bean that they grow up there.

This area has got a unique situation. We're pretty much disease free on most everything we grow here because it's a small area and isolated. So we can grow a good quality of seed and that's why we kind of specialize in the seed business.

Q. I interviewed a younger farmer who had his degree from the University of Arizona in Agriculture and he said he thinks he should have gotten a degree in Business instead.

A. I think that is probably true because there's more and more business involved in it all the time.

Q. Looking back over the years dealing with water, what were the biggest challenges that you think you've confronted in that area?

A. I have to think about that a little. I think maybe right now we're in the most challenging time of water since I've been involved with water. It's mainly because of all the legal issues that are happening in water and the uncertainty of the future of our water rights. We feel that the water rights system in Colorado got with the priority water right system in first in time, first in right is very important to continue working the way it is. We feel it's worked the last hundred or more years and don't want to see that change. I think it's being threatened in several ways. I think right now is probably the most challenging time that I've seen in water. We've had short years in water which is challenging in other ways. We've had canal breaks and all this kind of stuff but really basically, I think right now is the most challenging time that I've seen in water.

Q. And not because of the water itself but because of the courts.

A. Because of the other things that are happening in the water system that's right.

Q. As far as managing, physically managing, getting water from here to there and where it needs to be is that . . .

A. It used to be a big job to deliver water. The Uncompahgre Valley Water Users biggest job was delivering water and seeing to it that it got to where it was supposed to be at the time it was supposed to be there. That was a challenging

job at that time. Now that seems to me as though it's a small part of our job because there is more time spent on water rights and people infringing on water rights and things that are more demanding now than delivering the water. The manager I know spends more time working on water rights and water issues than he did twenty years ago. There's just no comparison on the amount of time it's taken.

Q. You almost have to be a lawyer.

A. Probably should be that's right.

Q. Do you see any answers to that?

A. Well, no I think it's going to continue to be a problem. There are so many things they didn't read in to it. The environmental world enters into it, the population enters in to it, the location whether you are either in the east slope or the west slope is a big problem with it, and whether you are in the upper part of the Colorado River system or the lower. It's just one big picture and with all of us tied together with one thing in common and that's the need for water.

Q. You must have seen a lot of changes here just in this valley since you came here in the forties and started farming. Can you talk about how the growth has changed?

A. There has been a tremendous change in the valley since we moved here. When we first moved here, you almost knew everybody. You'd go to town and almost knew everybody. Now when you go to town if you see someone you know, you feel lucky. Most everything was agriculture, the neighbors were agriculturists.

Agriculture was the major supporting factor in the Montrose, Delta, and Olathe area; all of us were the same way. But it is changing; now there are other things that are coming in, subdivisions. I guess we've done such a good job farming here and took such good care of our water that we've made a pretty valley out of this over the years. People have found it and now they want to live here. It's kind of a unique area because we have skiing very close to it without traveling very many miles. We have good fishing. We have lakes. We have a lot of things that people in other areas want to move here for so they found us and there are a lot of people here.

Q. Do you get much snow here?

A. We don't have a lot of snow in the valley. Last year was probably the softest winter we've ever had which was way too soft. It's still bothering us with our ground being so dry. Normally we don't have a lot of snow. Our climate is a mild climate. We don't have very many days that get above ninety-five degrees in temperature and we don't have very many times that we get below zero. So it is unique that it's that way. As far as snow, we do get snow but it's not a heavy snow. A foot or fourteen inches is probably a large snow for us anymore. It doesn't stay a long time. It is a mild winter and people like to be here.

Q. Where are the people coming from?

A. I guess I don't understand it. They're coming from everywhere. It seems like every time they have an earthquake in California some will come or if they're having problems in Denver more come. They're people just coming from all over the country and it seems like that is true with every town you talk to. They're having trouble in whatever state you go. There are just more and more people

that want to live there. I guess there is an influx of people from other countries. It's just an ongoing thing as far as people.

Q. Does that really change the community like the leadership of a community? Are the newcomers getting involved in the politics?

A. Yes, there are a lot of newcomers coming in and some of them do get involved in politics. I think the biggest thing that the newcomers want to do when they get here is they found the valley so they would like to shut the door and keep everybody else out. They want it to stay just like it is. There are some of us that would've liked to keep it that way forty years ago but it didn't. I'm sure that it's going to change.

Q. When you're talking about keeping the water for the farmers and for this area, who do you see as the people on your side, your supporters?

A. I think that anybody that knows anything about water realizes that it has to be made available in order to continue keeping the nice things we have in this valley, to stay here, and keep things producing the way it is now. I think we've got a lot of people that understand water. I don't feel really threatened as far as any one particular part of it. I just think it's a threat from every direction as the demand increases. I think we have a lot of support as far as our senators and congressmen are concerned. I don't feel a threat in that way. I feel that it's just a demand from the need.

Q. Who are the people threatening it then?

A. I think it's a combination of everybody. Like I said before, I think because the lower states need more water, the eastern slope needs more water. I think that is where our threat is coming from. I know the western slope is concerned about the need for water in the western slope. I think myself is just as concerned about the water that might go down the rivers to supply the water and the needs for the lower basin.

Q. What about the environmentalists?

A. Environmentalists put a bigger demand on the water all of the time. They seem not to realize that we are all environmentalists or we wouldn't be farmers. You have to be an environmentalist or you're not a farmer. So we're all concerned about the rivers and the endangered species and all that stuff and keeping them functional and in good shape. The environmental world and the recreational world is getting to be a bigger section of the people. They are a threat as far as putting demands on water and wanting to have a bigger say in what goes on as far as water rights are concerned.

Q. What do you see as sort of your role in finding solutions to the challenges of water that you've seen?

A. I think that varies in a lot of ways from the domestic water to the irrigation water into the state water so I have a lot of roles. I don't know if you can cover them all or not. Our goal as far as the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users is to protect the water rights we have. See if we can keep our ditches and system in shape to deliver that water so we're dependable and it's there all the time when the growers need it. I think as far as the domestic water, we have to see that there is a good quality of water available at the amount so you can continue delivering water to the houses. I think bigger than that, I think the state water supply thing

is more of a demand as far as being able to protect the amount of water that the state of Colorado is entitled to and to have the water available for all the other states. We are the western states and we are involved in the Seven States Agreement to where water is just as important to each state as it is the state of Colorado. It's a whole different thing when you come to the water of the Seven States.

Q. They each have their own unique . . .

A. They do. The demand is growing in every state to where I don't know what's going to happen in the future. And I mean a long ways in the future when maybe there's not enough water to go around. I know the rationing and the amount of water that's going to be available may be a real problem.

Q. I would imagine when you go to the state meetings though, do you sometimes get a different perspective? You have to get out of looking at just your Montrose area.

A. Definitely so. You have to put on a different cap when you get there. You can't work on a state-wide organization without considering the whole state. That is your job so you have to worry about the state and be concerned about your own basin at the same time. It is different, yeah.

Q. Looking back at all the different things that you've been involved in what accomplishment are you proudest of in relation to Colorado water issues?

A. I don't know. That's a hard thing to say. The whole aspect of being involved with water, continuing it to being available to the systems and I mean by that the

systems of the state of Colorado. I don't know. That's a hard thing to say as to what I'm the most proud of. I'm probably the most proud of the fact that I've had the time and availability to be able to serve on it and hope I've done a good job. That's probably what I am the most proud of.

Q. Do you look and see sometimes that other people that don't get as actively involved? How do you tell those people?

A. I wish there were more people that would become more involved. I think we would get a better read as to what everybody's concerns are. It seems as though, especially the agriculture people, are so involved with their own lives that now they are reluctant to be involved with a job that takes a lot of time. It is hard to get agriculture people involved.

Q. It's pretty important that somebody do it.

A. When they realize that, they want the other guy to do it. I think that's the way it works. It's hard to get people involved.

Q. Is it harder today than it was twenty or thirty years ago?

A. I think it is harder, yeah. First of all, there are fewer agricultural people and most of them that are involved in ag are very busy. They're probably bigger operations and more demanding of their time. So it is harder. The time it takes is a lot greater than it used to be. I think on the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Board every meeting was over by noon or before and now sometimes we drag over into the afternoon. I know that on the Water Conservation Board it's

probably taken twice as much time as it did seven or eight years ago. So it's more involved.

Q. Looking back are there any things that you would've done differently?

A. I suppose we could all say yeah that there's some things that we wished didn't happen. I can talk about a few that I wished we were a little bit more active on. I don't think that they are that major. The Taylor Park right-of-way, I think we should have been a little bit more active on it locally as far as the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users is concerned. I think the Black Canyon water rights. We were probably not as actively involved as we could be but maybe we could've been more assertive. There are some things that I feel that we could've done maybe a better job at or wished we could've done a better job at.

Q. Black Canyon what would've you done differently on that one?

A. I think that if we could have made people more aware. I think the Black Canyon is a great place now. People come from miles to see it. I don't think that they are that demanding that it look what it did a hundred years ago. I think progress has happened. I think the canyon is in great shape. To take it back a hundred years when the floods used to go down through there and wash everything out, I don't think that is really progress today. I think there are better uses for our water then just running it down the creeks to flush out new growth really.

Q. A river runs through there though. Don't you get to use that water that comes through?

A. No when it runs down Canyon, it's really almost lost for the use in Colorado. It travels out of Colorado very quickly after that.

Q. I suppose it would be harder to build a new reservoir or something for it but I hear that there's not going to be anymore dams.

A. I think it would be very hard to build a reservoir in this atmosphere with all the environmental concerns and all the things that are happening. It would probably take longer to build it then it has for us to develop the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users in a hundred years.

Q. So you don't foresee any huge big water project coming up?

A. No I don't. There might be some off channel small reservoirs built in the not to distant future. I think it's going to be really difficult to construct any large on-stream reservoirs.

Q. What's been the biggest surprise for you looking back over the years of water in Colorado and the uses you wouldn't have thought of fifty years ago?

A. Probably one of the biggest things that I see and that's the demand, the large demand that recreational interstream flows are putting on the rivers to have water run down the stream just for somebody to float on. We've always had the idea that, the water users, the water is there and as long as you want to ride it, we won't charge you. But now they want a water right so the water is there and they can demand the water whether it ain't there or not. I think that is the biggest surprise that I had.

Q. Do you think they have the same claim on it that farmers and cities have?

A. At this point in time, they're water right is just the same as any other water right in the state. They can . . . it's first in right, first in priority. They can put a call on the river and demand the water the same as anybody else. I don't have a problem with them having the water right, it's the amount of water that they think they have to have in order to enjoy it. When you get into a thousand or fifteen hundred second feet of water just to ride a kayak down, I think there are better uses of water than that.

Q. What about the use of urban versus agriculture? Has that been a surprise to you how much . . .

A. I guess it surprised me as to how much water had to be developed for urban uses. I suppose forty, fifty years ago, we never dreamed of Montrose or Denver as far as that goes to being as populated as it is today. I'm sure that has been a big surprise to all of us. It has put a big strain on the water and the way water is used.

Q. Not to mention Arizona and Nevada . . .

A. Yeah, not even talking about them that's right.

Q. They're wanting more water too.

A. Especially Las Vegas, it's growing so fast that it's unreal how much water they are going to need and how much they're demanding now.

Q. They don't have the rights to very much.

A. No, if I remember right it's only three hundred acre feet of water.

Q. Sounds right. Three hundred thousand?

A. Yeah, three hundred thousand acre feet of water.

Q. What do you think are the most critical issues? With just Colorado water resources today, what are the issues that are the most critical?

A. I guess one of the things that worry me the most and that's what the endangered species are going to do to the water and the use of water in the future. I think that's probably the most critical thing I my mind right now.

Q. What about the salinity issue?

A. The salinity is an issue that is a problem but in a lot of ways, you can handle that by piping the ditches and do some things that men can do. But as far as the environmental world is concerned, I don't think there is ever enough water. They want more in regards to how much it is.

Q. Do you think those challenges are going change for the state? How do you see the future challenges?

A. I think the future challenge is going to be the demand for the environmental world and the demand for domestic water. I think those are the two things in greatest demand right now.

Q. Do you think the whole water issues facing the whole Southwest region, how does that impact Colorado?

A. Same thing. I think population has got a big affect on what's going to happen to the water and the needs. I know that California and Arizona and Utah and Nevada are all growing very rapidly. So yeah, the demand for water is getting to be more all the time.

Q. Do you think the Colorado system is going to be able to provide for all those people?

A. I don't know. There are a lot of people that drink out of that. It all depends on the amount of snowfall and the water that runs out of the mountains. That's the whole answer to it.

Q. There are a lot of rivers draining into it that all have their own problems and issues.

A. There are more and more demands all the way up and down the stream. I think the difference in the types of winters and the amount of snowfall we're having is the big thing right now. It's just a trend, a cycle that we're going through now that will probably change in the future but who knows. They talk about global warming and I don't know whether this is it or if this is just a fluke you know.

Q. What advice do you have for the people that are operating the Colorado River Resources today, the local ones or the statewide people?

A. I think the Colorado River is going to have to be managed as a statewide project in order to do that. But I think the people that are involved as far as working on the settlements and stuff that we have, I think we have a lot of people that are very good at it. They are very knowledgeable. I think they'll be able to work out a system so probably all of the states will be able to survive to everybody's benefit. We've got a lot of good people that are involved and working on that now and I've got a lot of faith in them.

Q. I think I've covered the questions that I had for you. Is there anything that you thought I was going to ask and didn't or I should have?

A. No, not really I guess. I guess I didn't know what to expect. No, I don't think so. It's just the never ending need and fight over water I guess what this is all about.

- - - End of Interview - - -