

Colorado River Board of
California
Oral History Project

Myron Holburt

2002 - 2003

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This is December 18th, 2002. We are talking to Myron Holburt. *(As a noted exception, related to the other oral history that is on file at the Colorado River Board, Myron Holburt provided an extensive written history to the board approximately three years ago.*

It's well over 100 pages and deals with the period of time when he worked primarily with the Colorado River Board in California. He did not talk about his career with Metropolitan Water District following the Colorado River Board. The point of this introduction is to let any future researchers know that in Myron's case, that original history done three years ago is included in this package but it is not a component of this videotape or transcript because that history was not videotaped. It was only transcribed from an audiotape. So Myron's package, if you will, is a little different from anyone else's.)

So Myron, thank you very much for joining this project, on behalf of the Colorado River Board and the Colorado River Association. I think what I'd like to do is more or less turn this over to you and have you start. To a certain extent we can do it chronologically. If you happen to go somewhere else we can come back to some other project that may have started in the interim.

Where I'd like you to start is to talk a little bit about your first job where issues

regarding the Colorado River were important. When that was, how you got there, what did you do and what did other people do at that job, again with respect to the Colorado River.

Myron Holburt

Well, actually my first job was with the Bureau of Reclamation for three months and then as a junior engineer in October 1947 I joined the Colorado River Board and stayed with them for some three and a half years. I later went to the consulting firm of Leeds Hill and Jewett for 14 years. Dal Cole was the chief engineer for a number of years. He and I maintained a relationship and he always wanted me to come back to the Colorado River Board. Then he contacted me in 1965 and told me that he planned to retire in two and a half years and he would like to see me as the next chief engineer/executive director of the Colorado River Board.

At the time I was a junior partner with the firm but they had moved the headquarters, which had been in L.A. since 1906. The head of the firm moved the headquarters to San Francisco for personal reasons. I thought that was a bad move, although another partner and I continued to run the L.A. office. I accepted the position of assistant chief engineer (at CRB) and left the firm in August 1964. My first day on the

job was to fly to Washington because the hearings were starting on what later became the Colorado River Basin Project Act.

So my first day on the job consisted of two weeks in Washington at the hearings. Dal Cole felt it was important for me to get on top of what was happening and to meet all the players, the representatives of the other six Colorado River Basin states, as well as the key Federal officials. So that was an unusual start of a job, just to get on a plane, fly to Washington and attend the hearings. Those hearings lasted a long time. Bob Will (in the summer of 1966) suggested that I move to Washington for the summer and use his offices, because I was flying to Washington once every couple of week for several days at a time.

So we moved. I moved my whole family there and we spent most of the summer in Washington. That was a big plus because I got to know many legislators on a one to one basis that I didn't know that well before. They included Craig Hosmer, Congressman from Southern California, Biz Johnson, who was later chairman of the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Interior Committee. He was from Northern California.

They always told me where they met for breakfast and where they ate. They invited me to meet with them at any point in time. Also there was Congressman John Tunney, who was on the subcommittee. There were five Californians on that subcommittee that heard the Colorado River Basin Project Bill. Ed Reinecke, who later became lieutenant governor, and Phil Burton, from Northern California. So that was the California delegation that was on the House committee.

JM

Could you give us a sense of what the negotiations were about and what was the significance of the act?

MH

Okay, basically, the act started as the Central Arizona Project Act. Arizona had won the lawsuit.

JM

This is Arizona v. California.

MH

Right, and the Bureau of Reclamation had held up any action until that lawsuit, which took some 12-14 years to be completed. Basically, it was decided in 1964, so Arizona introduced that bill, and the bill went before the Interior Affairs (committee) on the House side that was chaired by Wayne Aspinall from in Colorado.

He used this bill as a vehicle for Colorado projects. Then Wyoming, Utah and New Mexico got involved, and they had some projects that they wanted. So it became a seven states enterprise with lots of varying interests. So that was the bill that was being heard on the House side.

JM

Okay. The bill started out originally as a mechanism to get Federal funding for the Central Arizona Project. Is that accurate?

MH

Yes, that's accurate.

JM

And then over the course of negotiations, it became much larger than that.

MH

Right. And so it started in the summer of 1965. By the summer of '66, we had some agreement. Then we broke apart and it took some time to put things back together. The key issue, as far as California was concerned, was that we wanted priority over the Central Arizona Project for California's basic 4.4 million acre-feet per year water right on the Colorado.

The Supreme Court had decided on the allocation to the three states. But it did not decide how the shortages should be handled. The special master that was appointed by the Supreme Court to hear all the testimony over this 12-year period submitted his report to the Supreme Court. His recommendation was that the shortage be shared in proportion to the allocations.

So there were seven and a half million acre-feet per year to be divided on a normal basis with 4.4 million to California, 2.8 million to Arizona, 300,000 for Nevada, and we were unhappy with that shortage provision. The Supreme Court did not accept the special master's opinion on that. They instead left it up to the Secretary of the Interior at such time that he deemed necessary to make a decision on that.

JM

When you say the Supreme Court, you're now making reference to the Arizona v. California lawsuit.

MH

Right, and in terms of any litigation between states, the court of original jurisdiction is the United States Supreme Court and they always turn it over to a special master. So we said we would support the bill if we got priority over the Central Arizona Project. Initially, Arizona did not want to give California that priority. That was our key issue. Arizona wanted the project. The other states have their projects.

JM

It is correct, or correct me if I'm wrong, California originally opposed the Central Arizona Project. I don't know the extent you were engaged in water issues at that time, and then the act that you're making reference to became law eventually. California supported Arizona in its attempt to get funding. Is that fair characterization?

MH

Once we finally arrived at an agreement, then we did that. I came up with the language that Arizona finally agreed with. Basically it gave us the priority over them and it gave the Secretary of the Interior of the United States the obligation to provide a supplemental water supply for the Colorado River equal to the amount of the Mexican Water Treaty.

And that was the thing that allowed Arizona to go back to their people and say that, well, we are giving California this priority in the event of shortages but we're going to have some kind of future project that would bring more water into the river. Of course, that never happened or hasn't happened to date.

But that was the way we finally solved the deadlock.

JM

The language that you helped negotiate and indeed wrote, or partially wrote, maintains to this day, is that . . .

MH

That's right. That was in the legislation.

JM

After you finished that, to the extent that something that large can be finished, you obviously went back to California from Washington D.C.

MH

Yes.

JM

What was the next item on the plate of the Colorado River Board after that issue was resolved.

MH

Well, one of the provisions of the act provided that there be a development of principles on how to operate the reservoirs, starting with the upper basin reservoirs, primarily Glen Canyon Dam and the lower basin reservoirs. To simplify it, the upper basin states and Arizona would like to keep the water levels as high as possible.

The upper basin states wanted to be able to have sufficient water at all times to meet their obligation to the lower basin states without suffering any shortages. But the other aspect of it is they depended on the power from Glen Canyon Dam. So they didn't want to get it so high that there would be a lot of spill from Glen Canyon.

JM

Okay, and I'm sorry, you said they. Who are you referring to?

MH

I'm talking about the four upper basin states of New Mexico, Wyoming, Colorado and Utah. Arizona is the first state to receive shortages if the basic apportionment to the Lower Basin states (is less than 7.5 million acre-feet). The shortages would be for the Central Arizona Project. They also would like to see the reservoirs generally be on the high side. For California, we would like to see it somewhat lower so there are infrequent spills and so there are fewer shortages for us. So those are the broad parameters of what we were dealing with the other basin states. I think most people credit me with changing California's approach to the other states.

Instead of being one of opposition, we tried to work out issues with them. See, we had opposed the construction of Glen Canyon Dam and the Upper Basin states never forgot that.

JM

We, California?

MH

California, under the leadership of Mike Ely who was the special counsel for the Attorney General in the lawsuit in Arizona v. California and was legal consultant to the Colorado River Board testified before Congress for the Board and opposed the construction of Glen Canyon Dam.

JM

Okay, so we're negotiating the salvation of the reservoir.

MH

That's right. So this was a major issue and we went into it, on an honest basis, to negotiate an agreement between the seven basin states and the Bureau of Reclamation on how to operate the major Colorado River Basin reservoirs. And one change, I think, I got it so that the other states agreed that we, Colorado River Board of California, would provide a draft. The Bureau of Reclamation had already provided a draft.

Normally, the other states relied upon the Bureau to handle this sort of thing, provide the draft, and the other states would work from that. In this case, they accepted our draft to be the working paper to go from. And that had been my philosophy ever since I got there that on any issue I could, I would like our staff to do the work.

The other states were small, for the most part and their water agencies had responsibilities for the entire state. Our staff was focused on the Colorado River and we had a competent staff that could do the work. Not that the other basin states and the Bureau would accept it totally, but that was the basis of the discussions.

JM

Okay, and the, we'll call them Reservoir Operating Criteria for lack of a better phrase, as they developed and were finalized, was California ultimately satisfied with the resolution?

MH

Yes. We were satisfied and the scheme called for a review every five years, recognizing that there would be changes and then there would be meetings at that time. They would discuss whether or not to make any changes or stay with the current agreement.

JM

I should have asked this before, I'll ask it now. When you began working for the Colorado River Board and you described your first couple of months as you're back in D.C., had you had experience with Colorado River issues prior to that, within your private consulting (business)? Or was the Colorado River more or less new to you as a water source, as a point of discussion among basin states? I mean how much of that were you aware of when you took the job?

MH

Well, I spent my first three years as a junior engineer and later assistant engineer with Colorado River Board. So I had basic experience going back then. Then I was 14 years with a consulting firm, Leeds Hill and Alan Jewett.

JM

But after that 14 -year interim period, I don't know what you were working on as a private consultant. When you got back to the board, after that 14- year period, was it kind of like riding a bicycle and, you know, everything was sort of the same or had things changed significantly?

MH

No, there were a lot of changes. I had a lot of the basic information in my head, but there were a lot of changes and I had to catch up. A number of things happened, particularly the lawsuit. I made myself familiar with what had generally gone on in the lawsuit, and other things that happened during that period.

JM

Who would you say were the primary players on behalf of California, unless your research also told you who they were with

regard to Arizona? I think someone reviewing this manuscript or this videotape, 20 or 30 years from now, would be interested in your thoughts about it, and we don't have to go into detail about the people but who were the people? Researchers might want to take a look at that?

MH

Well, from the California side Wes Steiner who was the deputy director of the Department of Water Resources when Bill Warne was the director of the department. They were there when I started at the Colorado River Board in 1965. Then there was Don Maugham who had the assistant chief engineer job that I took. He had left to join the Department of Water Resources when they formed a new western states section under Wes Steiner. So when California met, generally there would be Don Maugham, Wes Steiner and myself, and then Mike Ely, as the consultant and attorney retained by the board, would be there.

Then there would be the attorneys that are assigned by the California Attorney General to the Colorado River Board. Initially, that was Burt Gindler and Dave Stanton, later Carl Boronkay, and others like Jane Goichman and finally Doug Noble who outlasted everybody. Well, that was generally the California contingent.

Then representatives from the major California agencies, Metropolitan Water District, Coachella Valley Water District, Imperial Irrigation District and Palo Verde Irrigation District would have their representatives. But by and large, they relied on me to represent them. That was the function of the Colorado River Board, to represent the agencies and to represent the state of California on Colorado River issues.

JM

It's probably worth noting for the record that Wes Steiner did not stay in California after this was over.

MH

That's right. What had happened is that Ronald Reagan was elected governor and Pat Brown was defeated. Then Bill Gianelli became the director of Water Resources and he demoted Wes Steiner so he was no longer involved on the California side, just Don Maugham was involved. So Wes then took a position as executive director of the Arizona Water Commission, which later became the Arizona Department of Water Resources and he headed that. He was a key player for Arizona once he was there. Then you had the key players from the other states: Don Paff representing Nevada; and you had Felix Sparks representing Colorado; Steve Reynolds representing New Mexico; Floyd Bishop representing Wyoming and there's Dan Lawrence in Utah. Then you have Ival Goslin who was the executive director of the Upper Colorado River Commission. So those were the people involved.

JM

Okay. Well let's try and stay somewhat chronological here then and move on to your next challenge at the Colorado River Board. After Arizona v. California is resolved the act is in place so Arizona can build the Central Arizona Project. The reservoir operation issue is more or less taken care of. In sequence, what was next?

MH

Well, I think the next thing was the salinity issue. The Colorado River salt content is higher than a lot of people would like for different purposes, although it's basically a good quality supply. But as you have more

use in the upper basin you would get your higher saline water delivered to the lower basin. This could cost all the California users money in lots of different ways.

So that issue started by virtue of the Mexican Water Treaty. The treaty between the United States and Mexico divided the waters of the Colorado. Basically that was decided in the 1944 treaty between the United States and Mexico, where Mexico was given the right to a million and a half acre-feet a year, which is twice as much as they ever used before Hoover Dam was constructed. One of the provisions in the construction of Hoover Dam was that no foreign country should gain any benefit by virtue of the construction of the dam. As a practical matter, Mexico did gain a significant benefit because the water was regulated and this allowed them to expand their irrigation.

The next event that happened was a project in the lower Colorado River basin called the Welton Mohawk Project in Arizona, and they were at the very lower end of the river. This project was constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation. The project had very salty water – groundwater -- that was at a very high level in the lands that were farmed in that area.

JM

This is highly saline ground water that you're talking about there?

MH

Correct. Okay, so they constructed the project and the water was discharged below the last American use, the diversion point for the Imperial Irrigation District and above the Mexican diversion points. There was an immediate jump, a significant jump in the salinity of water delivered to Mexico, and that started negotiations between Mexico and United States.

There's a unique organizational situation on that issue with respect to both countries. There is an international boundary and water commission formed by Mexico and the United States. Each country appointed commissioners who represented their state departments on that joint international boundary and water commission. One unique thing is that the commissioners had the rank of ambassadors and they had to be engineers. There are certain people like the person who's interviewing me who would say that's impossible for an engineer to be a diplomat. But anyhow, that's the law and the guy who had the job for years was Joe Freidkin. He was an engineer and he was a diplomat. He was able to last through several presidents and get reappointed each time.

JM

Could you, that's a name I'm not familiar with, Myron could you say that again just so we have it.

MH

Yeah, Joe Freidkin was his name.

JM

Thank you.

MH

Okay. So the United States, through the boundary commission, had negotiated an agreement with Mexico and was about to be signed about the time that the new Mexican president, the name I don't recall, reached the end of his term. But he did not sign that agreement, which apparently it was on his desk. For some reason, he didn't do it.

And then the new president was invited by then President Nixon in the early '70s to come and give a talk before a joint session of Congress. This is the first time in history

that a Mexican president was invited, and to the amazement of everyone, he said the major issue with the United States and Mexico was the solution of this problem in Baja California, the salinity of the Colorado River.

JM

What year would that have been?

MH

Well, I'm not sure as to the year but it would have been '69, '70, 'or 71, around that time. The State Department was stunned since they considered the immigration problems, the drug problems, foreign exchange problems and other issues would be more important to Mexico. So they were very interested in solving this problem and President Nixon appointed Herb Brownell to be the United States representative on this issue.

Herb Brownell was a New York attorney that was campaign manager for President Eisenhower and later appointed by Eisenhower, after he won the election, to be Attorney General. After Eisenhower's term was up Brownell went back to private practice. He convened a meeting of the Committee of 14. There were two representatives from each of the Colorado River basin states appointed by the governors of each state to advise on this issue. The members at the time (for California) were me and Bill Gianelli, Director of the Department Of Water Resources. The other states were represented by people I designated earlier, with someone else alongside them. We met with the Federal officials to come to some kind of U.S. position, which we did. Then it was finally agreed to by the United States and Mexico. We were very important to Brownell because the agreement could have been considered an amendment to the

original treaty, which would require ratification by the Senate.

With the 14 senators of the seven states, it wasn't going to pass unless they agreed to it because very few other senators would have been concerned. They would let these 14 senators decide whether it should be agreed to or not.

The alternative was to have the document agreed to by the two countries printed as a "minute"; that's how the boundary commission designated every one of their decisions. They were numbered and called a minute. We agreed that it should be a minute and we agreed with what was finally resolved.

JM

So a minute or a minute item is simply stated, an amendment to the treaty but a little easier to accomplish than amending the treaty itself in a more formal fashion.

MH

Right. And in essence, that's what it did but it was not called an amendment, it was called a minute. It was an action that could be taken by the boundary commission.

JM

Okay, we restarted the tape after a brief break. Myron, we were talking about the Mexico salinity issue and negotiations between the United States and Mexico over high salinity in the Colorado River water going across the border after the Welton Mohawk Project came up. And where did you want to go with that?

MH

Well, we resolved that issue and the next thing was legislation by the United States to authorize funds to build a desalting plant close to the U.S.-Mexico border which

would desalt the high salinity water so that Mexico could essentially get water of the same salinity or similar salinity that was delivered in the United States to Imperial Irrigation District. And that required Federal legislation and appropriation of funds. Alongside all of this, there was a concern, as I mentioned earlier, of salinity delivered to California. So I wrote a report on that issue, which I distributed to the various other states and the United States that described salinity control projects to be constructed primarily in the upper basin so as to get better water quality to users in the lower basin states.

JM

For the sake of definition, and again correct me if I'm wrong, a salinity control project will prevent saline water from entering the Colorado River while a desalter would remove the saline nature of the water, that's the difference between the two?

MH

Right. And on salinity control, we were looking at projects in the upper basin that would line canals that cross very salty areas in the upper basin states, take salty springs and divert them away from the river. A number of different projects could accomplish this purpose.

So we saw the fact that the United States needed a bill for the Mexican treaty as a way to get the United States to be involved in salinity control for the Colorado River basin in the United States. We started after my report came out, amending a Federal appropriations bill to give the Bureau of Reclamation money to start studying projects of this nature.

JM

Do you remember the title of that report and approximately what year it would have been published?

MH

No, again, it would be in the early '70s. I don't remember the precise date.

JM

And the publisher would have been?

MH

The report? It was a Colorado River Board of California report. Then we got the money that the bureau never asked for, but they accepted it and they left it to the regional directors of the upper and lower Colorado River basin to commence the studies. Later on, they provided one person in Denver to handle that, Mike Clinton.

He was appointed to that job to coordinate the activities of the salinity control projects. But our legislative problem was that the United States was not interested. The Federal government was not interested in the salinity control project for the entire basin. But they wanted to get through a bill that would carry out the salinity control agreement between the two countries. So the bill that they introduced just covered that. We introduced a bill – when I say we, the seven states that had the works for Mexico as Title One and the salinity control project for the United States as Title Two. I called up Biz Johnson, who was chairman of the subcommittee, as I mentioned earlier, on the House Interior Committee. I asked him what committee would the bill be sent to. He said, well, the way it's written as you've written the bill, it would go to my committee. He said, I'll tell you

what I'll do. I'll call up a Congressman from New Jersey who is chairman of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee. He said, he and I are good friends and I'll ask him if he would let it come to our committee rather than his committee and that's what happened. So with the hearings before the Interior Committee, we were able to get the bill passed by the Congress in 1974.

JM

And that bill essentially provided the funding mechanism for salinity control?

MH

That's right. And with that bill, it became a much higher priority with that act being passed. It became a much higher priority for the Bureau of Reclamation and they started moving on investigating the projects in detail and later the funding of those projects.

JM

Would you like to talk a little bit about what came to be known as the Yuma Desalter? You made reference to it earlier, and of course, desalting water is an alternative to not allowing the salted water in the first place. The desalter was built, and it exists today. It hasn't been used much and has been the subject of some scorn among many people. And other people think it's quite an appropriate project. Were you involved in any way in the discussions leading to its construction and, or operation?

MH

To some degree, this was the decision that came out of Brownell's final report. Brownell took the position that he was not going to propose anything that would hamper any United States existing project. If you looked at it from a strictly financial point of view, it would have been much less expensive to just close down the Welton

Mohawk Project. Buy out the project and just discontinue it. It would have been a lot cheaper than a desalting plant. But he made this commitment and the Welton Mohawk people depended upon that and nothing else was proposed. And they went ahead and built it.

JM

Okay. I think we can then move ahead a little bit. A little bit further, I want to remember that you joined Metropolitan Water District. I'm just trying to time frame here and we'll go back. But you joined Metropolitan in the late '80s? I've forgotten.

MH

1984.

JM

Okay, so the early '80s. So let's, if we can then, let's see if there's anything significant going on at the Colorado River Board in your last several years there. So we're talking about roughly '78 to '84. After this the saline issue had been more or less resolved. What other issues were present during those six years '78 to '84? Anything worth covering or was it more routine?

MH

Well, there was the renegotiation of the Hoover Power Contracts. This original agreement that was made in the '30s, was a 50-year agreement. That agreement provided that the power from Hoover Dam would be split between the three basin states in some fashion.

JM

The three lower basin states.

MH

Lower basin states. And that provided the entire cost of the dam be repaid with interest

to the United States. The funds would come almost solely from the power contractors. You had two state agencies that handled it for Nevada and Arizona.

In California, you had the Department of Water and Power for the City of Los Angeles, and Southern California Edison Company, a private company as the primary ones. Then there were six smaller cities in California that also received power allocations. So when the renegotiations came up, each of the two other states were represented by their power authorities. In California, there wasn't any single power authority. There was a California Energy Commission and some other entity. But the California power contractors didn't want them to represent them. They wanted to represent themselves, so they asked me to be the state representative and be the spokesman for these agencies. We would meet periodically and develop positions and go to those meetings and present them. And then I also used that as an opportunity to get the small part of the new power rate to be used as funds for the salinity control projects. The power utilities agreed reluctantly, but they finally agreed. It was a quarter of a mill or some such amount. So that was my interest plus I was being their spokesman.

JM

For the purpose of the tape, I'm going to just define a quarter of a mill, because some people might think you meant a quarter of a million. A mill being one tenth of a cent, and a quarter mill being 25 percent of one tenth of one cent, so we're not talking about a major chunk of money here.

MH

Right. It ended up being a lot, enough, a good sum but in terms of cost to the utilities, it was a minor part. These were very difficult meetings and attracted a lot of

interest from outside the participants. Barbara Boxer, who was then a congresswoman for Northern California, introduced the bill without even discussing it with any of us. That would have priced the new contracts to be at market value with no recognition of the California entities who in the 1930s, during the Depression, paid for energy they could not use on their projections that it would be needed in the future. Then there was also new construction included in a new bill. Also a change in operation was that the Hoover Power Plant, which had been operated jointly by Southern California Edison and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, was changed to be operated under the new agreement by the Bureau of Reclamation.

As to my own involvement, I came to one meeting and presented a position that had been agreed to by the power agencies in California in an earlier meeting. Then Norm Nichols, who represented the L.A. Department of Water and Power and was, at that time I think, assistant chief electrical engineer, attended the meeting and agreed upon it.

He then got up and took issue with what I said and came up with an entirely different proposal. Afterwards, I went to him, I said, I thought we had agreed on a position. He said, yeah. I said, well why did you do this without even telling me this. He said, "I changed my mind." So at that point, I told the group that I would no longer represent them.

They had better just represent their own positions as best they could. So that ended my involvement in that particular enterprise.

JM

I should point out that Barbara Boxer, who is from California's Bay Area at the time of

this interview, is one of California's two United States Senators.

Did you not get involved in the Hoover Power negotiations when you moved over to MWD, from MWD's standpoint or was it done by that time?

MH

No, it wasn't done but Carl Boronkay, MWD's general manager, had been heavily involved in it. Also there were others, so there was really no need for me to get involved in it.

JM

Okay. Why do you think, now you and Carl went way back, and again for the record, you have been good friends for several decades that I know of. But aside from that relationship, why do you think that Carl recruited you to move from the Colorado River Board to Metropolitan Water District in 1984? Was there something specific on his mind that he was concerned about? Or was he just looking for quality people at that time and had a great deal of confidence in you?

MH

I think the latter. He came to me and said, when he was applying, before he took the job and he was a still a general counsel, he told me he was going to apply to be general manager and if he got the job, he would need help. He would like me to come in as assistant general manager, and he then recommended that I apply for the job myself.

JM

You mean the general manager job?

MH

Yeah, the general manager job. He said that most of the board members knew me but some didn't know me. He felt that if I

applied for the position then I'd have the opportunity, assuming I got to the final group that would be interviewed, to meet some of the board members and them to see me.

Because the way it worked, it was a nationwide search and attracted a lot of applicants. Carl said they never had hired a general manager from outside, and he doubted that I'd get any place but he felt it would be useful at this point to do that. I did get to be one of the six finalists. Then Carl was selected. We had a conversation in which he said, you know you've been your own boss for 16 years. He said, you come here I'll be your boss. He says, I don't think that's ever going to be a problem and that we'd generally work as partners. He said, the way I look at it, if you and I have an issue, we'll discuss it until one of us convinces the other. But in the event of a major disagreement, he said, I (Boronkay) will make the final decision.

I want to be sure that you feel okay with that, he said. I said, yeah, that doesn't bother me at all. I then said, jokingly, to avoid any such probability happening, always take my advice. We had a terrific relationship. It worked out just like he said

I think he was right in having me come there and apply for it. Although the general manager recommends the appointment of an assistant general manager, it has to be approved by the entire board.

JM

So you were at the Metropolitan Water District from 1984 until, uh, help me.

MH

1990.

JM

1990, so you were there for six years. What were the major projects or public policy

issues that you worked on while you were at MWD, Metropolitan Water District?

MH

A major one was the negotiations with Imperial Irrigation District.

JM

This was on a transfer of water?

MH

No, not a transfer. It would have been conservation projects being constructed in Imperial Valley that would save water. MWD would pay for the conservation projects and get the benefit of any water saved.

JM

That would have followed the successful Elmore suit against IID. Then ultimately, the State Water Resources Control Board convinced the Imperial Irrigation District that they were wasting that water. I mean that's a real Reader's Digest version of that whole event. But, isn't that what prompted Imperial to open up those conversations and, and talk to MWD?

MH

Yeah, that's essentially it. They were under considerable pressure, being accused of wasting water. Hearings were actually held before the State Water Resources Control Board on this issue. So we started negotiating with Imperial and they had a committee that consisted of two of their five board members, their general manager and their general counsel.

Initially it was Carl and I that were involved in this issue. Later, Bob Schempp became involved. It took us a year to obtain an agreement for 100,000 acre-feet per year,

which would cost about \$10 million a year. That was the essence of the agreement that we arrived at.

Imperial invited me to their board meeting where they were going to approve it. We knew that we had the two board members who were part of the negotiating team who favored the agreement, and we knew we had one other board member that was in favor of it. We knew the other two might, most likely would be opposed.

We sat there, or I sat there, and it came down to two, and finally to the member who was one of the two members of the negotiating team and he voted no. Then later I went up to see him. I said, what happened? He was a man of about 72 at that time.

He got calls from several farmers in his district that were opposed to it, and he was going to run for re-election next time and he felt that he had to vote against it to be assured of his re-election.

JM

Who are we talking about? Which one?

MH

I can't remember his name, blocked it out. So that ended that part of it and then nothing happened for some time. Then at that point San Diego County Water Authority started to try negotiations with Imperial. Our top management was against San Diego attempting to obtain the water solely for themselves to the detriment of all other agencies. We went down to the San Diego County Water Authority and talked to their board members about how this was not the right thing to do.

Under pressure they finally backed off.

Then we entered into another negotiating session with Imperial and this agreement was more specific in that we identified

specific projects to be built. We estimated the cost of each of these projects, estimated the amount of water that would be saved by each of them, and ended up with an agreement for approximately the same amount of water, 100,000 acre-feet a year, enough to serve half a million households at that time.

JM

Who was the general manager at Imperial at this time?

MH

Well, the earlier time was, I think, Bob Carter. Second time around, it was, boy I've forgotten his name.

JM

Was it Chuck Shreves?

MH

Chuck Shreves, that's right. Yeah, Chuck Shreves. John Carter was the attorney. And John Benson was one of the (IID) board members on the committee. The other board member, I believe, was Lloyd Allen who is still on the Imperial board today.

JM

Was Don Cox on the board at that time?

MH

I think the second time around he was, but he was not on the negotiating committee. So we finally did get an agreement with Imperial and then it took another year to negotiate agreements with Coachella Water District and Palo Verde Irrigation District. Since they, along with Imperial and Metropolitan, are the four agencies that have the contracts with the Federal government.

So we had to get their concurrence, and we had to give up some rights to Coachella under certain conditions. We settled without anything specific for Palo Verde.

JM

For anyone interested in learning about how the water flows from agency to agency, starting with the ag agencies, would you refer a researcher to the Six Agency Agreement or other documentation they might take a look at so that they understand the priority system from Palo Verde to Imperial to Coachella and what not?

MH

Yeah, it would be in the contracts that the Secretary of the Interior signed with the four agencies that I just mentioned.

JM

Okay, would it also be located, though, within what has come to be known as the six-agency agreement or no? Am I giving you a bad direction here?

MH

No, you'd have to look at the contracts.

JM

Okay. All right. Again just for historical note, this tape is being made at the end of December 2002 at a very time when Imperial Irrigation District has been negotiating with the San Diego County Water Authority and Metropolitan and Coachella over yet another transfer. A different transfer than what you're talking about. They have, in fact, as of this date, reached an impasse that has become quite newsworthy and is worth any researcher's attention to look into that. While I'm on that subject, Myron, any thoughts on the current state of negotiations between and among those agencies? You've read the newspaper articles and you certainly have a sense of what's going on. What are your thoughts about the impasse?

MH

It's deja vu all over again. I read it, and it was supposed to be three to two and one member voted against it who was supposed to be for it. Of course, in this case, it's an agreement between San Diego County Water Authority and Imperial, not between Metropolitan and Imperial. For some reason, Metropolitan apparently allowed San Diego to negotiate for this water rather than pursuing it themselves.

JM

Were you involved in the negotiations with Palo Verde Irrigation District in a pilot program several years ago? Metropolitan, went in for just a one year period, I believe it was a program? I don't recall whether you were involved in that or not.

MH

Well, I was involved in starting the work and then up to that we talked to their board of directors and we assigned several members of our staff to interview every farmer in Palo Verde Valley and talk to them about how they felt about the program. Then we also talked to the Palo Verde (Blythe) city officials, what they thought about the program. We started to develop a program that would be fallowing. Included in that program would be money that would be given to the city to compensate them in some fashion for any loss of income during any fallowing program.

JM

These are the third party impacts.

MH

Yeah, that would involve that. Basically, it did all the groundwork, although at that time we didn't feel we needed a fallowing program quite yet but that was accomplished after I left.

JM

Okay. What else during your tenure at Metropolitan, with regard to the Colorado River comes to mind?

MH

Well, I think what we discussed with respect to the Colorado River, essentially was involved in the issues we just talked about.

JM

Okay. Well, let's spend a little bit of time, then just seeing if we can get on tape recollections that you might have about some of the significant people, yourself included, that you had to deal with in Colorado River issues over the years. Maybe you can give us a real quick snapshot of what kind of people they were to deal with and how influential they were or were not. I'll just start with one name. I'll pick Mike Ely, who you dealt with.

MH

Well, as I mentioned earlier, Mike was the lead attorney in California v. Arizona. He maintained, I think probably to his dying day in his early 90's, that California won the lawsuit. He and his assistant lost the lawsuit, no matter what he said.

JM

I guess where I'm trying to go, Myron, is how were these people to work with? I mean are we talking about people that some might define as the giants in the water biz or the Colorado River? I have heard some people describe, especially Mike Ely, in that fashion. Is that, not right?

MH

Well, I think everybody had a lot of problems on the California side working with Mike Ely. Ray Matthew was the first chief engineer, then Dale Cole and then later

myself. Mike was not well liked in Congress. All the congressmen didn't like him because he simply never wanted to negotiate. He always stuck to whatever his decision was, and he wouldn't compromise.

I had a lot of problems with him. One example after I was appointed chief engineer, I got a call from Morris Udall, who was Arizona's congressman, along with John Rhodes of Arizona. Rhodes was the minority leader for the Republicans in Congress and was one of the two key Arizona officials involved in the Colorado River Basin Project Act.

Udall told me not to bring anybody with me, and I went to see him. We discussed some of the issues and when I came back I told Mike that I saw Udall. He said how could you go without me? I said, that's my decision, whether I have you or not. You're an adviser.

If I want you, I'll ask you. If I don't, I won't, and I walked out and went down to get on the bus to the airport. While I was waiting there he came down and he said we've got to get along, let's be friends and all that. But I had bad experiences with him. On one occasion I went to Washington and I set up appointments with the Assistant Secretary of the Interior and Reclamation, and invited Mike to those meetings. At the first meeting, he starts off talking about a Nevada client that he had -- on our time, my time there. He did some other thing I won't go into with each one. I came back and well I think earlier I recommended that the Six Agency Committee not use him as a consultant, they didn't need him. Everyone agreed except L.A. Water and Power.

I met with their general manager and general counsel. They had him on a separate retainer and they did not want to see him go. I explained the problems I had which were a lot more than I just described above. I

remember this very clearly, Ed Farrall who was the general counsel for Water and Power, said Myron, you got to recognize he's an old man.

He was in his early 70s at this time and was active until he was in his 90s. He said, you've got to make allowances for that. Well, Ely was not an old man. He was a very active man in his 70s. But after this experience in Washington I came back and I told the Six Agency Committee that they could pay him if they wanted to but I was not going to use him anymore. At that point, L.A. Water and Power went along with it and the committee discontinued their agreement with him.

JM

Okay. Well, let's see if a couple of other names have any meaning. How about Lowell Weeks?

MH

Well, Lowell was a very active participant in Colorado River issues and he's a guy who had a lot of good ideas and was a very good spokesman for his agency. I liked him. We got along well.

JM

His agency was?

MH

Coachella Valley Water District.

JM

How about Virgil Jones?

MH

Virgil was outstanding. He was a layman, farmer, but he's one of these individuals that is capable of grasping the essence of any situation and making good decisions. He's the perfect board member.

JM

You mentioned Mike Clinton earlier working out of Denver on the salinity issue, but Mike also was general manager at Imperial Irrigation District. Did you have any dealings with him when he held that position?

MH

No but earlier than that, after I retired, I became a consultant to the firm of Bookman-Edmonston. Mike was vice-president of the firm at that time, and I worked with him on a couple projects.

JM

His dad, of course, again for the historical record, his father Frank Clinton was general manager at Metropolitan Water District in its earlier days. Would have been in the early 1950s, is that right?

MH

Well, I met his father when he was general manager and when I was with the consulting firm of Leeds Hill and Jewett. I was a consultant to the Kern County Water Agency negotiating the contract for the State Water Project. To get our contract the way we wanted, we had to negotiate with Metropolitan Water District because they signed the first contract and we needed some changes that were needed for an agricultural agency. That's when I met his father.

JM

Okay. Tom Levy? Did you work with Tom at all when he was general manager of Coachella following Lowell?

MH

Tom was another outstanding person. Coachella really picked good general managers.

JM

One of the people that worked for you became commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation, a fellow by the name of Dennis Underwood. How did that work for you? What I mean by that, I guess is, at one point Dennis worked for you. If I have the sequencing correct you joined Metropolitan Water District and Dennis moved up into your position at the Colorado River Board. Is that correct, do I have that right?

MH

Eventually. But the first person who followed me was my assistant Vern Valentine and he had the job for I think, a year and a half. Then Dennis was appointed.

JM

Okay. Then Dennis went from that job with the Colorado River Board to commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation.

MH

Yes.

JM

Did you have occasion to work with him, when you were at MWD and he was at the bureau.

MH

Right. I met with him a couple of times when he had that position.

JM

How would you describe working with Dennis? He was now joining Metropolitan Water District as vice president in charge of Colorado River issues.

MH

Well, Dennis was excellent. I appointed him to be executive secretary. The previous executive secretary was not an engineer. He

handled the non-engineering work of the board. Dennis was recommended to me by Ernie Webber who was part of the board staff and had previously been with the Department of Water Resources and said that Dennis was a very outstanding person.

I interviewed him and felt it would be a bonus. I'd get someone who could handle the non-engineering matters, as well as being involved in engineering matters. Dennis was a work-aholic. He was an outstanding employee.

JM

Were there other commissioners with whom you worked that stand out in your mind in one way or the other?

MH

Yes. Of course, there was Floyd Dominy who had the job for years. I forget the name of his successors but I was involved in dealing with all the commissioners at the Bureau of Reclamation, more so with the district regional directors, the upper Colorado River region and the lower Colorado River region of the Bureau of Reclamation.

JM

Okay. Before we leave the subject of people, is there anyone else that comes to your mind, uh, that you worked with who, um, was significant in setting the course regarding the Colorado River?

MH

Well, I worked very closely with Wes Steiner when he was in California and also when he was with Arizona. We cooperated very well. We felt we had different responsibilities. Then the upper basin states, people that I mentioned earlier, they were outstanding too-Steve Reynolds from New Mexico and Larry Sparks from Colorado.

Larry was the general in charge of the National Guard for the state of Colorado. He was a colonel and fought with General Patton's army all through Germany in World War II. Ival Gosling was the executive director for the Upper Colorado River Commission was someone I worked with for many years that was outstanding.

JM

If you look back on your career on the Colorado River or dealing with Colorado River issues, is there one moment, maybe it's a moment we've already talked about, but I want to highlight it if it's there. Is there one moment or one thing or one project that stands out in your mind as being truly significant in terms of how the river's operated today?

MH

Well, I think it would go back to October 1968 when I shook President Johnson's hand in the White House and he signed the Colorado River Basin Project Act. One interesting item was that he brought Ladybird with him to speak to 70, 80 people, senators, congressmen, state representatives, and the head officials of the Department of the Interior. The President said he thinks, when he was a United States Senator for no more than few minutes, that Senators from Arizona and California approached him to give their version of each state's rights and to get his support then. So he remembered that very well and he was outstanding, really charismatic, which I never saw on television.

But seeing him personally and when you shook his hand, he looked down on me because of his size you could see how he got the reputation of being very effective with the other United States senators when he was majority leader and getting them to say yes.

JM

With an appreciation for the fact that you probably did not have time to get into an extended conversation with the President of the United States, the fact is that he was from Texas and Texas shares some of the same United States/Mexico issues that California and the other basin states share with Mexico. Was he aware of that or did that ever come up? I would have thought that would be a hot issue in Texas, which is his state. I'm just curious as to whether he was aware of that.

MH

Well, as you said, you don't have time to talk about anything (with him) but Texas did have an impact, a strong impact on the 1944 treaty between the United States and Mexico. At that time Senator Tom Connelly, from Texas, was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He was interested in getting a Treaty for the Rio Grande.

He got it so that the treaty included the Rio Grande as well as the Tijuana River, which was thrown in and the Colorado. An essence of it was that, I believe Mexico got less of the Rio Grande and more of the Colorado than they deserved. That's kind of a general summation.

JM

I'll give you one more opportunity, just in case you've thought of anyone, and if you didn't, that's fine. I'm not trying to pull names out of the hat here that don't have any particular significance to you. But before I move on, is there anyone else in your career that we should have talked about?

MH

Yeah, we should have talked about Don Maugham. I mentioned earlier that I took his place on the Colorado River Board. He

went on to have an outstanding career. He first worked for, as I mentioned earlier, on this Western Water Planning Unit of the Department of Water Resources. Then he was appointed to a federal position on the United States Water Commission.

I forget the exact name of it. Then he came back to California and was appointed by the governor to be on the State Water Resource Control Board and later became chairman. He was a paraplegic, and was confined to a wheelchair. But you would never know it. I mean he would do everything. He would require help but nothing would have stopped him from participating in everything. He was just an outstanding individual, as well as very capable water resources expert.

He was principal in charge. He had the spot that I took over when I joined the Colorado River Board. You never knew him in a wheelchair. You never knew Don Maugham? You would have remembered him if you saw him. He was chairman of the State Water Resources Control Board. Maybe that was before you would have been there.

He was appointed, let's see, Reagan was governor.

JM

Myron, I think maybe I'll just throw out a few names here and you can just give us a sentence or two on them and their importance on the river. Ray Rummonds?

MH

Well, Ray Rummonds was chairman of the Colorado River Board. Through my entire career, some 19 years with the board, he was just always very helpful, very supportive and an excellent guy.

JM

Ray represented Coachella Valley Water District. (How about) Carl Bevins?

MH

Yeah, Carl was the Imperial representative and was a very active and important person. Then we had Joe Jensen for the Metropolitan Water District and you know he was heavily involved in water resource activities.

JM

You had a couple of people that worked for you at the Colorado River Board, Ernie and Verne, who certainly made contributions.

MH

That's right. They both did. Ernie Weber did all the technical work for the salinity control program, and there's Ron Hightower who did a lot of work as a supervising engineer. We also had an outstanding technical engineer named Merle Tostrud who as not particularly interested in promotion.

JM

I think you already talked a little bit about Verne Valentine, who followed you as executive in charge.

MH

Yeah, well one of my first things that I did upon becoming Chief Engineer was to hire him to take over my spot as assistant chief engineer. I worked with him through my entire career at the Colorado River Board. Very bright guy and caught on very quickly to anything that we were involved in.

JM

After you moved over to Metropolitan Water District, what do you think your influence was with regard to MWD staff at that time?

MH

Well, I did quite a bit of reorganization in my primary responsibilities of water supply, State Water Project, the Colorado River planning and water quality issues. I created some new sections. I created a Colorado River section so that we could have one section that just focused primarily on the Colorado River.

Bob Schempp was head of that and Jan Matusak was outstanding for the work he did. He was hired from the Department of Water Resources, then came over to Metropolitan slightly before I got there. Wiley Horne, I promoted him to director of planning activities. I had gotten Tim Quinn to join the board and that was interesting.

JM

You said board.

MH

I'm sorry, Metropolitan Water District. He was an economist at Rand Corporation. Metropolitan's representative (on the board), who at the time worked at Cal Tech, met with Carl and me. He told me about Tim Quinn; that I should talk to him, and he could recommend an economist because the one that we had recently resigned.

I said, well, what about him? He said, you'll never get him to leave Rand. He's on this track to being a very important person at Rand.

So I took Tim to lunch and talked to him and asked him about joining Metropolitan. I told him that he could stay at Rand and write reports and research reports that will gather dust on someone's desk, or could join Metropolitan and be really involved in important, practical matters at Metropolitan where he would be heavily involved in providing a water supply for Southern

California. It took me two or three lunches to convince him. He later claims I never took him to lunch after he joined. I don't think he's right but that was one of his statements. There were a number of others that I recruited for Metropolitan that rose to high positions at Metropolitan, or later managed water districts in Southern California.

JM

I think we'll draw this to a close. If something comes to your mind in the next few minutes, please just say it. But I will close it with one final question and that is if you were talking directly to someone who is doing research on the Colorado River and it's the year 2040 or 2050 or some time in the future, what publications or books or authors, if any, would you suggest they take a look at?

I mean, at this moment in time, there been any number of books written about water issues in the West. There are probably also reports and other things that you may be familiar with. What comes to your mind that is in the way of published material that someone might want to take a look at?

MH

Well I guess one of the first things that come to mind is a professor at UCLA who recently died, Norris Hundley, history professor. He and I wrote a report for a water atlas that was put out by the state of California during the Jerry Brown administration.

JM

Is that the document that Bill Kahrl edited?

MH

That's right.

MH

He (Hundley) did a lot of research on the Mexican Water Treaty and other Colorado River issues. He wrote quite extensively.

JM

His material would be contained with the UCLA water archives, is that a fair assumption?

MH

Yes.

JM

Okay.

MH

Offhand I can't think of any particular articles. I wrote a lot of articles. One was published on salinity in the New Mexico Law Review. Most of the others were presented in chapters of various books that I can't think of the name. I think you just have to look up the Colorado River and you follow it through. But don't avoid reading the basic documents.

JM

The basic documents being the treaty . . .

MH

The Boulder Canyon Project Act, the 1922 compact between the seven states, the Upper Colorado River Basin Compact, hearings relative in the '65, '68 Colorado River Basin Project Act and the 1972-73 Salinity Control Act. All those have information and testimony and material that was submitted in connection with those hearings.

The lawsuit itself in Arizona v. California, the courts final decision, and other aspects of that issue.

JM

Okay. Perfect, unless there's anything else that you want to make sure that we get

down? We'll call that the end of the interview.

MH

Well, thank you very much.

JM

Thank you.