

Colorado River Water Users Association –WYOMING
Tape #5
ALAN HARRIS (TAPE #1)
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
December 10, 2009

ah – Alan Harris

ps - interviewer Pam Stevenson, Agave Productions, Inc

bs - videographer Bill Stevenson

ps We'll start off to identify on the tape, that, uh, we're doing this oral history interview for the Colorado River Water Users Association. And, today is Thursday, December the 10th, of 2009. We're here in Las Vegas at the conference. And I'm Pam Stevenson doing the interview, and the camera operator is Bill Stevenson. And I'd like for you to give me your full name.

ah My, my given name is Alan W. Harris.

ps What's the W for?

ah Wayne.

ps Obviously you don't use that. Okay. I always like to start with some general background about who you are. (ah – Okay.) Can you tell me when and where you were born.

ah I was born in Minot, North Dakota. In 1951.

ps Want to give us a date?

ah October 29th. (laughs)

ps So, you grew up in Minot. What kind of a community was Minot when you were growing up there?

ah I, I really...uh...I really didn't grow up in any community. Uh. I, uh, I moved around a great deal. And I wasn't in Minot very long at all. I just happened to have been born then.

ps Okay. Why did your family move around?

ah My dad was a, uh, construction worker. A mechanic. Uh. On heavy equipment. And a welder. And, uh, most of it, uh, was either highway construction jobs, or, uh, or coal mines. And, uh, and, we just moved to wherever the job was. And so, we, we, uh, we moved a lot.

By the time I finished high school, I'd been to 22 schools.

ps Goodness. So where were some of the places where you...

ah Most of them were in Wyoming. I lived all over the state of Wyoming. Uh. A little in Montana.

And I had a, a marvelous, wonderful education. It was, uh, varied, eclectic. Uh. I, I think I...Folks will say, wow, how did you even get through school? And I go, I think I got a better education than most. And it worked out very well.

ps Certainly got an education on meeting new people. (laughs)

ah You do. You, you, you, you learn a lot of those new skills because you're in that arena all the time. I never did more than three schools a year. (laughs)

ps Were they mostly small communities?

ah Well, in Wyoming, they're all small communities. Uh. Even what we think of as the big ones are small communities. So, yeah. They were.

Never more than 25,000. Uh. But, sometimes much, much smaller. Uh. Communities of only a handful. Literally. Six or seven or eight people.

And, uh, my brothers...I have three younger brothers. Uh. All of them went to a, uh...at one point. To a, uh, a two-room country school. I was in high school by that time, so I went to the big city of Laramie. And, uh...25-mile commute to, to school. Very interesting way to, to, uh, to grow up.

ps Very unique. So, so you were always like the new boy in town.

ah Always the new kid. Yeah. Sometimes that's fun. Uh. And, and sometimes there's some stress to that.

ps So, were you the oldest?

ah I was. I was the oldest. Um. With, uh, with three younger brothers.

My parents settled down a little later. Uh. So, they didn't move quite as much. Uh. Especially my younger brother. But, we all had a good taste of being, uh, gypsies or vagabonds or whatever you want to call us? (laughs)

ps So, as, as you were growing up, did you have any thoughts of what you wanted to do when you grew up? All those travels, you must have seen a lot of different things.

ah You know, I, I, uh, (clears throat) I knew two things. One for sure, and, uh, and, and one was just a, a thought.

One is, uh, I knew I had to get, uh, I had to get a college degree. Uh. Education had, uh, been good for me. And I, I really felt I needed to, to do that. And I would have been the first in the family to, to have done that, and it was important.

And the second one...uh...is I thought I wanted to be an attorney.

ps What made you think that?

ah I really enjoyed it. I, I, I was a debater. Uh. I, I enjoyed oral arguments. I enjoyed research. And it just seemed like a, uh, a natural path to, to make a career of that

ps So, you must have been a good student.

ah I was a good students, and I think my parents had a lot to do with that. Uh. They made it a priority. And, uh, I think the influence there was, was.... really made the difference.

All of my, uh, family....in terms of, of my brothers....all did well academically. And all have....all my brothers have been very successful.

ps You say your parents hadn't gone to college. So, what made them make education important for you?

ah I think it's because they hadn't. I think they thought there might be a better life for, for their, for their kids. Uh. And so they pursued it. Neither one of them had, had, uh, had finished college.

I think both of them had a little after high school training, but, uh, but nothing extensive.

ps So, you said your dad settled down later. What made him change his career?

ah Pardon me.

ps Your dad...you said your family settled down....

ah There was a theory of how you did things in those days. Either you, you left your family in one location, and Dad took off every week and went to the job wherever it was, and came home on weekends.

And then, and Dad said, no. The family goes with me. Uh. And I see how you can argue both sides of that. I'm, I'm thankful that we did things that we did.

And then things changed in the industry and, and, uh, he was, he was positioned in a headquarters kind of an environment, where instead of the mechanics going to the equipment, the equipment was brought to, to the mechanics. And so, it kind of settled down then.

They've been in the same spot now for....30 years. (laughs)

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ps Where is that?

ah Sheridan, Wyoming. Yeah.

ps My father was in construction. He did it the other way.

ah Did it the other way. So, you know what I'm talking about.

ps (can't understand at first) ...during the week and came home on the weekends. (laughs)

ah You know exactly what I'm talking about.

ps Yeah. Interesting. Um. So, as you...where did you finally graduate from high school?

ah From Sheridan. Yeah. I, I, I finished the last couple of years in Sheridan.

ps And where did you decide to go to college?

ah I went to the University of Wyoming. Um. And, uh, spent four years there. And, uh...marvelous school. Uh. Wonderful education there. Uh. Gave me the tools to, uh, to be competitive, and, and, uh, I can't say enough about it. (laughs)

ps What did you major in?

ah I majored in accounting.

ps Good practical skill. (laughs)

ah Actually, uh, I started out in, uh, in a dual major of political science and economics. And, after my freshman year, I, uh, wasn't sure how I was going to make a living, uh, doing that. I was very pragmatic. And, uh, so I, I visited, uh...that summer I visited several attorney, uh, firms.

And, uh, I said what, what should I do to prepare for law school? And, uh, they said, well, if you intend on practicing in Wyoming, get a degree in accounting.

So, I went back my sophomore year and changed my major and that's where I went.

ps So, did you like accounting?

ah I did. I enjoyed it. Uh. And, uh, and stayed with it quite awhile, I guess. Well, not really a long time.

I stayed with the curriculum. And, I still play with it.

ps So, when did you...you, you graduated then. When did you graduate?

ah I, I finished, I finished up in Laramie in 1973.

ps That was during the Vietnam War period.

ah It was.

ps Were you eligible for the draft?

ah I went through the, uh, I went through the first lottery. Um. I remember that night very well. Uh. That's when they, uh...all the deferments were, were taken away. And, uh, if your number was up, your number was up. And, I remember, we all sat around the radio that night as they drew numbers. Uh. To see what, what number you were going to have.

It was a life-changing evening for, for students.

If you had a high number it was, uh, a change in your career immediately. (laughs) Uh. And, and I was prepared for that. I'd already decided that, uh, if, if I had a number that came up early in the lottery, that, that, uh, school would be on the back burner for a while, and then I'd be enlisting. If it turned out I had a number that appeared would never be called, and so, I stayed in school.

ps You were lucky then.

ah I really was. I really was. Those were tough times.

Those were the days of, uh, marching on campus. And, and, even in Laramie, even in Wyoming, we had marches on campus. And we had confrontations and we had riot police. And we had demonstrations. And, and, the (can't understand word) And, I was in journalism. It was an interesting time to be covering some of those kinds of events as a very young journalist.

ps So, as an accounting major, how were you in journalism?

ah I, uh, I began, uh, in high school in, uh, in Sheridan, uh, in doing a, a small radio show. And, I continued that through college. Uh. That's how I worked myself through college.

I did, uh, road construction in my father's footsteps in the summer, and, and played the radio game during school. And, uh...so, by the time I finished school I had four or five years of radio experience.

ps So, and what was your first job when you graduated?

ah I went to work for Arth...this doesn't sound so good today. (laughs)

I went to work for Arthur Anderson and Company in Denver. (laughs) And that was a wonderful accounting firm. Wonderful. One of the Big Eight. Uh. Terrible to see what happened to that firm in later years, but that's where I went.

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ps So, tell me. What was that first job like? Did you move to Denver? That must have been a big change.

ah It was big. It was, it was really big. I'd never been to a place that big. Um. And, it, it was good. It was good.

It was, it was a new arena. It was a new playing field. I was a little nervous. Uh. Small town boy. Uh. University of Wyoming. Uh.

Now I'm going to, uh, be, be working with people that have been...who knows where? You know. And, students with MBAs. And graduates of Stanford and Ohio State and big schools. And, uh, I found that I was able to compete. I found that I had learned a lot. I'd had good professors. And, I was well prepared. So, it was fun. I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed the work.

ps And how long did you work there?

ah Not very long. (laughs) I was, I was there a year. Um. But, uh, I missed, I missed radio. And I, uh, had a chance to go back in, into the radio world, and that's what I did.

ps Tell me about that. How did that change come about?

ah The, uh...my employer that I had been working for while going to school kept hounding me to come back and I finally gave in. And, uh, went back and I eventually...I went back with the idea that I was going to build a property for him. Which we did. And, uh, and then he got out of the business and I stayed. And, uh, I've been there ever since.

ps So, what station was that?

ah It was an AM station in Green River. Uh. We put it on in 1976. Uh. KUGR-AM. And, uh, it was fun to build.

ps When you say build a station, what does that mean?

ah Put up a tower. Put in a transmitter. Uh. Find a studio space and build studios. Uh. And, uh, and we literally started from, from scratch. And it was fun. It was an interesting time. And I've been there every since.

ps So that was a brand new station you just...(ah – Brand new.) You'd gotten the license for that.

ah It had been a long process to get the license. Uh. In that particularly, uh, case, an unusually long time. Took 10 years. And, uh, and that was the first station in that little community. So. That was a lot of fun.

ps Did that include hiring staff?

ah Oh, yes. Yeah. Hell, we had...uh....

I arrived on April Fool's day in 1976 with just, uh, myself and, and my family. And we had to hire staff, and find people. And, it took several months, and we finally got it all put together and went on the air.

ps And, what was your role then as the Station Manager...or...?

ah I was the Station Manager. Uh. Did an on-air show. Did a talk show. Uh. Did the payroll. Um. Took out the garbage. (laughs) Did the engineering. Uh. Repaired the transmitter. (laughs) You do about everything.

It was, it was, it was one of those where you did a little of all of it. Uh. Because it's small. And you didn't have a huge staff. Or multiple departments like they have today.

ps So you were actually on the air as well as doing the behind the scenes, running the station.

ah Oh, yeah. That's the fun part. You wouldn't want to get off the air.

ps And what was your show?

ah At that time I just did an, you know, an early morning drive show. Uh. Still do. Um. And, uh, that hasn't changed much over, over the years.

There was a short period of time when I, I, uh, thought maybe I didn't need to do that anymore. And then I found out, well, that's the reason I'm in this business, so I went back to doing it again.

ps So you're used to getting up early then.

ah Yeah, I don't know if it's used to, because I can still sleep in with the best of them. (laughs) But, I've been getting up early for a long time.

ps You mentioned that you moved there with your family. Where did you acquire this family?

ah Well, in, in, in college and, and then along the way, kids came along. And, uh, to some extent, the whole family got involved in the business. My wife and I do a show together. Uh. Even today. We have a fun time.

My daughter is working in the business now. Uh. And, uh, my son's been working with me on the, uh, maintenance side. I don't climb towers as much as I used to, but, he does. (laughs)

ps So, did you meet your wife in college?

ah I did. I did. And, uh, and then, from there it...uh...how do we say? That didn't work out in the end. Uh. I have been, uh, happily remarried for 25 years. (laughs)

ps Well, that sounds like an, an exciting part of your life. So, what...you said it was 1976.

ah 76, I started. Yeah.

ps Did you add other stations to this?

ah We did. We did.

We have...there's three there now. Uh. We have...we're involved with a couple others, uh, in Wyoming, and working on some other projects. Uh. We put on a, a, a, a second signal for our little AM station that we've had all these years. So, the company has, slowly...and the operative word there is "slowly," has, has gown.

ps So, how many stations do you have total?

ah We're involved with...seven now, I guess.

ps Are you the owner of the stations? Or what is your....

ah I'm, I'm the owner of, of, uh, of five of those licenses. Uh. And, and the partnership with a couple of others.

ps What is...does your company have a name?

ah Wagon Wheel Communications. We do business as the Radio Network. (laughs)

ps (can't understand) How did you come up with that name?

ah Well, it was a time when, when, uh, the, uh, FCC relaxed the ownership rules, and we were able to expand. Prior to that, uh, AM/FMs combinations were, were common. But, when we were able to move beyond that, and we had to come up with something. And, uh...we just decided that we had a little network of stations, so that's what we called it.

ps Image of, uh, the West, I guess.

ah Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

ps Been an easy logo. (laughs)

ah Very easy.

ps So you say you're still on the air?

ah Still on the air. I, I, uh, I go in at six. Uh. I do the first hour by myself, uh, with a news person. And then, uh, another, uh...our General Manager comes in and we do the second hour together. And then my wife comes in and we do the third hour together, and I do a talk show later in the morning.

ps What is your talk show called?

ah “Let’s Talk.” Just “Let’s Talk.” (laughs) But, it’s a community, uh, service kind of thing. And, and public affairs. Meeting with community leaders. Issues. And sometimes just fun things.

ps What do you and your wife do on that show?

ah Well, we do a, a very, uh, folksy kind of, uh, hometown kind of, uh, program. We talk about what’s going on in the community, and we usually have a guest. Uh. We talk about events at schools, or who’s in town. Or... I’ll probably even tell them about this.

ps Good. And, you say...now, was your wife always in broadcasting?

ah Oh, no, she wasn’t. I, I, uh, I, I, I convinced her...I convinced her to come into the business. And then, then I convinced her to come on the air with me. Ad, and then she stole the show. She’s, uh, she’s very good.

ps In what way does she steal the show?

ah She’s so spontaneous. Uh. And, uh, not only do I never know what she’s going to say, but the audience never knows what she’s going to say. (laughs) And, and so, she has a real following. She has a big bubbly personality. And, uh, and is witty, and, uh, it works well for live radio.

ps And what is her name?

ah Faith. F-A-I-T-H.

ps Is it Harris? (ah – Yep.) I always have to check these days. (ah – Yeah.) (laughs) Just for the records, since we’re doing this for the record. (ah – For the record.) Have her name in there.

ah For the record. Yeah.

ps The...so, you are still a local...small-town....

ah We are. Um. I, I...I think we’re a, uh...what’s the word? Um. A dying breed. Uh. It’s a...some would say a mom-and-pop kind of, of operation. Uh. But, uh...I think we’re very professional. And, uh, yeah. We’re not part of a huge conglomerate or a big company. And, and, uh, so, it’s locally owned.

ps That, that is rare these days.

ah It’s rare.

In fact, I did a....I did a, uh, a program for CBS, uh, one time, called “The, The Day....A Day in the Life.” Because they wanted to follow around a small-town, dying breed broadcaster. (laughs)

ps When was that?

ah Oh, that was about...I don't know....15, 20 years ago that they came in. So, if we were a dying breed then, we're really a dying breed now. (laughs)

ps So you're affiliated with any of the networks?

ah Oh, we're affiliated just as a, you know, we're a CBS affiliate. At that time we were a Mutual affiliate, I think. I also have an affiliation with ABC.

ps You get news and things from them?

ah Yeah. Just the news. Yeah.

ps How many years....you're in Green River? How many radio stations are there there?

ah It's really a market of, of a couple of communities. Of Rock Springs and Green River. They're, they're separate, but they're the same market. And in that market, there are nine stations.

ps Are any others locally owned?

ah All of them. Very unusual market. We have two owners. They're both local. And we have a, uh, Public Radio station. And, uh...so, yeah, It's, it's a very unusual situation in today's broadcasting world.

ps It certainly is. (laughs) It takes you back.

ah Yes.

ps And I see here that you've also been involved with the, uh, the National Broadcasters Association.

ah I have. I've been....very active with, uh, with the National Association of Broadcasters.

Served on, on their Board of Directors for a number of years. In fact, I served on their Executive Board, uh, which was a wonderful experience. Except for, I spent too much time in, in Washington. Uh. So, I'm glad that's coming behind me.

ps Were there many other local owners, uh....for the Broadcasters Association?

ah You know there are, uh, a lot of, uh, small market broadcasters in the National Association. But, but, without doubt, the, uh, the big companies, the Clear Channels of, uh, of the world, are the, are the 800-pound gorillas.

And, uh, and I, I will say that, uh, despite the rap that that company takes, uh, those were just some good old boys from Texas that were going in a direction no one had gone before, and had no idea what was going to happen when they got down that road. But they were really some good people. Trying to do a good thing. But, they became the poster child for everything that's wrong with this industry.

ps So, as a, as a small local station, you still make a living doing that?

ah Oh, yes. That's all we do.

I say that I, I really haven't figured out what I want to be when I grow up. Um. I'm a CPA by education. I'm a broadcaster by vocation. Uh. I'm a firefighter by, uh, public, uh, contribution. And, uh, I was fortuitous to get involved with water, and I'm here by emotion.

ps And, as a broadcaster, you're also a journalist it sounds like.

ah I spent time as a, a journalist. Uh. As a news director, and a sports director. And, uh, I don't think I've ever lost sight of the fact that there's a journalistic requirement in the broadcast profession.

ps So, you're also involved with the Wyoming Association of Broadcasters.

ah Yes. Uh. I say we because we as a station. I'm a past president. My wife's a past president. My General Manager is a past president. Uh. We remain very active. So, not only at the national level, but at the state level, where we're quite involved with the industry.

And, when you're a small market, I think you need to. That's how you can stay abreast of what's happening. I, I think it's too easy to get, uh, locked in your own small world. And, and, uh, since we have no huge corporation funneling us with information, we have to go out and make sure we're staying abreast of what's happening.

ps And, in Wyoming, are there still a lot of locally owned stations?

ah Not as many. Uh. We've seen consolidation, uh, especially in the larger communities of Casper and Cheyenne. Uh. So, a lot of corporate owned facilities here.

Once you leave Casper, Cheyenne, Laramie, then you're seeing, uh, more local owners or at least smaller companies.

ps So, that includes television and radio?

ah Exactly. The television stations have started out, you know, as, as, as local stations. We don't have a lot of television stations. Most of our television comes from outside the state. But, those stations have been purchased by larger TV companies.

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ps I didn't realize that most...so, where does your ra...your television come from?

ah It, it depends on where you live in the state. Uh. The, the, uh, the television either comes from Salt Lake, Rapids City, Billings, Montana, or Denver. And, depending on what part of the state, that's, that's the television that you get.

ps So, the local stations would be pretty small.

ah They are small, and it's been difficult to establish a sense of community. Uh. And, they, and they try very hard.

But, because of cable and satellite, um, they're on the same stage, uh, with Denver. And, so, it's difficult for them to compete.

ps Now, as far as the radio station...and you're still locally owned out here. Have you had any tempting offers?

ah You know, I, I, I guess through the years, there may have been a tempting offer. Uh. Or two. Uh. But nothing that really, uh, peaked my interest.

I have been doing for 35 years, or more, a job that is incredibly fun. And, I'm still having a ball. And that's why I'm still doing it. Uh. And I think I'm very fortunate to still be able to get up in the morning and be excited about going to work because I have a fun, fun job.

ps And, how would that change if you were to sell the station?

ah Ah! (laughter) I don't know. I really don't know.

You know, if, if there was a reason to quit, I guess I'd quit. I, I tell...uh...I tell all my employees, uh, stay here as long as you're having fun. And when you're not having fun anymore, uh, then you need to move on. Cause I'm going to stay here as long as I'm having fun, and then I'm going to leave. But, I'm still having fun.

ps So, do you see it continuing for, say, another generation? It seems a lot of the stations I'm familiar with, have been sold when the owners were fairly elderly and decided that they couldn't do it anymore. So they sold.

ah I don't see a, a lot of generational movement, uh, in, in the business. And I think you're right. Uh. Most owners liquidate at some point. And I don't often see where, uh, a family continues, uh, the business. And maybe it's because you're so wrapped up in the business, your kids are sick of it. I don't know. (laughs)

ps Well, you say your kids are working in it.

ah Well, they, they, uh...my daughter is, is there. Uh,. She kind of followed her dad's footsteps. And, uh, my son helps out. But, I'm not sure either one of them are going to say, this is the life for them. (laughs)

ps Because it does sound like it is sort of all-consuming of your life in some ways.

ah But, it is. Uh. But, it's okay.

There are so many different things I get to do. And every day is so different. Uh. And, and in a small town, it's, uh, it's still an important part of what's going on. And, you, you stay engaged. And, and, and you're active, and it makes you feel younger than maybe you really are.

ps Do you think that the, the bigger cities that have lost locally owned stations are missing something?

ah Oh, they're missing, they're missing everything. They took all the fun out of it. All the fun is gone.

There's not a lot of fun...this will be terms a lot of people may not understand.

But, there's not a lot of fun in voice tracking, (breaths in) and playing a satellite, uh, program. I mean the fun is live radio. The fun is the spontaneity and, and the daily involvement. And actually being a part of the engagement of the community. And entertaining and information. And, a lot of that has been taken out.

ps You think that big cities those are missing something by not having a sense of community because they don't have that local....

ah You know some...and I have to say that, in, in some big cities, they certainly have done a lot, uh, to continue that.

I, I'm listening to some of the stations in Las Vegas where we are today, and, and there are some stations here that are, are very automated, and, and are just going through the motions. Uh. But, they're low budget, and I understand how that works.

Then there are some stations that obviously are doing very well here. They have, uh, promotional budgets. And, and, and, they've, they've engaged talent. And, and they're entertaining. And, they're still having fun, and you can hear it when you listen to them.

ps They're still letting the community know what's happening locally.

ah Oh, yeah. Yeah. (laughs) And they're out in the community. I mean, they're....

They're at some place for Monday Night Football. And they're doing give-aways. And, and, they're doing the Pen-A-Palooza over at Sam Boyd Stadium. And, And they're broadcasting from a tent all day long. And talking to their... And that's the fun of this business. And, there are still stations doing that.

ps You don't think that's going to go away.

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ah I hope not.

ps Well, we actually came here to talk about water, so I think we need to talk a little bit...I'd rather talk about...(laughter) We can do both. Tell me how you first got involved with Colorado River water issues in Wyoming.

ah It was either a stroke of luck, very good luck or very bad luck. I'm not sure which.

They, they, they, they tell me I got involved because I was concerned about water rates. And that I was concerned about it, uh, because of the community. And, uh, and, uh, that was my first putting my toe in the water, so to speak.

And then it moved on into a, uh...

We, we had a private water system, uh, owned by a power company, that wanted out of the water business. And I was appointed to a board to, to look at, uh, at purchasing that system, uh, and making it a municipal water system.

And, um, the day after they did that, they put me on the board to run that water system. And so, I've been involved with water ever since.

ps And, when was that?

ah 1988.

ps More than 20 years.

ah Yes. And, uh, that's when we, uh, also got involved with this organization and, uh, we've been involved with it ever since, too.

ps Well, what does that entail to take municipal water...

ah We, we, we had a, a, a system owned by Pacific Power and Light. They wanted out of the water business. They had divested from some other communities throughout, uh, the Northwest.

And, uh, we formed a Joint Powers Board, uh, because the system served more than one community. And, uh, that Board was then given the authority to, uh, purchase the system, and then continue to run and expand and improve, uh, that system.

And, uh, it serves, I don't know, 40, 50,000 people.

ps Where did they get the money to purchase it?

ah It was a huge bond that we paid off. Which was really nice to get done. (laughs) But it was, it was...yeah, it was, it was a bond issue that paid for it.

And, and it's been a very interesting dynamic. Uh. Two communities and a county government coming together to form another entity, that would, uh, manage, uh, and operate a water system for basically the benefit of, of, of all three.

So, there was political issues, and there were engineering issues. And, uh, and all those things came into play. Uh. And I probably was not the best politician.

ps So that, the system already existed, the infrastructure of the system.

ah It existed. It needed a lot of, uh, improvements. Uh. And expansion. Uh. But, the basic system was in place.

ps And, what is the source of the water?

ah The Green River. The largest tributary of the Colorado.

ps So, it's all surface water.

ah All in the stream. Flow of the Green River. That's, that's our source of water.

ps And, how, how much water do you provide? How wide is....how big an area do you serve?

ah Area-wise, it's....I think it's a large area, for that number of people.

The, the river runs through Green River. Uh. So, that's where the plant, uh, treatment facilities, are located. Uh. But, the major consumer, uh, is the city of Rock Springs, which is 15 miles away, so we have a pipeline, uh, that, that takes a bunch of water, uh, 15 miles from where we are.

So, it doesn't compare to some of the systems in the West. (hear lot of squeaking in background) But, for 50,000 people that's a lot of pipe.

ps So, how many people does it serve?

ah About 45, 50-thousand. Uh. And, uh, one in, industrial player. Uh. But, for the most part, it's the municipal use that, that we're looking at.

ps You say there was a lot of politics involved. What were the big issues?

ah Well, I think the issues, and, and some of these issues are the same issues that everyone has to deal with when you have more than one entity involved. And then you have the potential for turf battles. And, and everybody, everybody assumes that somebody else is out to, to gore your ox. And that you're going to do the same to them. Uh. And there's a.....

For whatever reasons, over the years, certain levels of distrust come into play. And, and, many times over issues that aren't even water related. Uh. Just a competition between communities, And, and, uh...those kind of amenities.

When I served on the committee to see whether we should purchase the system, I remember we distinctly came to the conclusion, yes. But, we deliberately said, that is a political decision now. And that's out of our hands.

And so, these different entities had to come together. Uh. They did not.

I don't think they did what was really the best in terms of the way to buy the system. In fact, I didn't recommend it. But, it was probably the way it had to be done politically. And that is, everybody had to have their finger in the pie. Everybody had to have their representative on the board. And we ended up with actually three, at least three, water systems.

And it's unfortunate. It would have been better if we could have done something like they did here in Southern Nevada. And everybody could have come to the table and said, we all have the same interests. We're going to throw it all together, and we'll just have one system. But, we didn't end up with one system.

We have a system that provides the water, and then we have two systems that distribute the water. But, politics has its way. (laughter)

ps And being the accountant in you, looking at....

ah It didn't make sense financially. It doesn't make sense operational. Uh. Operationally. Uh.. It provides cover for everybody who wants to blame somebody else. (laughs)

ps It does seem like those communities are relatively small. That they could have worked together.

ah Oh...they'd been competing for a long time. (laughs) And this was just one more....and, and, it really was.

It, it would have been a much better system if they could have come together, and put the whole thing under one umbrella. Uh. With, with, uh, one rate setter. Uh. One policy maker. Uh. But, I, I knew the politics would have to be satisfied.

So, we still pay for that. Maybe some day we can consolidate that, but it hasn't happened yet.

ps It's still set up the way it started.

ah Still there.

ps After 20 years.

CRWUA – Wyoming
Alan Harris Oral History

ah Still there.

ps So, you say you served on the board.

ah On that water board? I'm thinking eleven, twelve years on that board.

ps Is that the Upper Green River Joint Powers Board?

ah That's a, uh, another board that I recently was appointed to.

ps They've got all these notes here.

ah Sure. (ps – I was wondering what the difference was.)

That's the Joint Powers Board, but that's a joint, uh, board between three counties. And, here we're looking at the resources of the Upper Green River. The other was a joint venture between two cities and, and the local county. And, and that was for the operation and, and...the purchase and the operation of the system.

ps I've got a bunch of...GRRSSW?

ah Green River, Rock Springs, Sweetwater County.

ps Sweetwater County. Okay.

ah Everybody has to have their alphabet soup.

ps That's a real alphabet soup. (laughs) And so, that was the one that formed the water...

ah Correct.

ps And, you've served on that for many years it looks like. Off and on.

ah I think about 12. Um. And, and really that's most of my water involvement, is there.

And, I've really enjoyed that. Uh. It's a, it's a different.... It's different.

Prior to this, all I knew about water is when I opened the tap, it had to be there. And, and then I thought I learned a lot about water, cause I figured out it ran downhill. (laughter) And then I found out it really doesn't. Uh. That it follows money. Uh. And, I'm still learning all the ramifications of that. Uh. So, it's been an interesting tutorial.

ps I was going to ask you, what you knew about water when you first got involved?

ah That, that's about all I knew.

I, I think, um, I think I brought to the table, um, a financial background. I, I think the people who appointed me saw me as an involved member of the community. Uh. And that I had, had had an interest in, uh, what was good for the community.

I think they thought that, that maybe I had some management experience. Uh. And I'm guessing that's why they asked me to serve on the board. I, I knew nothing about pipelines, uh, water lines, treatment. I knew nothing about any of that.

ps I'm sure you have people that did know about on the board, too.

ah We did. And, I...no. I'll back that up. We didn't.

I think we had one person who, who had a real good handle of, of that.

But, I'm not sure any of the rest of us did. And, uh....

I remember, in one of my early board meetings, I...because we had a, a pretty large construction project ahead of us. We were going to immediately put a lot of pipe in the ground. Replace old, and expand the system, an the previous system.

I said, we need to hire somebody who knows what to do here. Because I don't know. And, I could go out and stand on the side of a ditch and I still wouldn't know if it was being done right. And so we did.

We, we hired Ben Bracken on a one-year contract. And he's still on a one-year contract, and 20 years later, he's still there. And, uh, he's our General Manager, if you will. And, uh, thank goodness he's there.

ps What was his background?

ah He had a background in land development. And, and, uh, an engineering background. And, uh, he was available. He was going to be our construction manager. He was going to be our eyes to make sure we got what we paid for. And, that evolved into actually being the Chief Executive Officer for, for our, our system.

I look back now and I go, oh, I'm glad we did that.

ps Explain to me sort of, how is that, uh...I mean, the municipal water system run? The board oversees a staff, then....

ah I would say it's like most government, uh, operations. You have a policy board, and then you have staff that implement. Uh. And you have the same problems with any small government operation.

Micro management potential. (laughs) And possibilities. Uh. But, basically we, we work with the General Manager and, and set policy, and then, and then he handles the staff and operation of, of the facility.

It's an...it's a very typical government operation with the board. We are not elected however, we are appointed. So we still have to be cognizant of the people who have made the appointments. And that's the governing agencies of the other governments. The city...both cities and the county.

ps Who appointed you?

ah The city of Green River appointed me. A mayoral, uh, appointment. Two or three different mayors over (someone coughing in background) that period of time.

And then as soon as they appoint you, you end up being at odds with them. I mean water might as well be gasoline. I don't know why it doesn't burn. It, it ignites everything. You know.

ps But, as the owner of the radio stations in the community, I guess that makes you a community leader. And, that would be a reason they would....

ah Oh, I think if you're doing your job as a broadcaster, you have to step up and offer your services, and be involved and be engaged. And, if you're engaged, I think it's like any other organization. Uh.. There are people trying to get you more engaged.

If you look like you're a volunteer, then someone's going to volunteer you.

ps So, what is the greatest thing you think you learned about water from your time serving on those boards?

ah That's an interesting question.

I understand why we fight over it. Uh. But, I, I don't think that's really what I've learned.

I, I think what I've learned is...there's a way to deal with the conflicts, where everybody can get what they want, if everyone is willing to find that.

I think too many times we find ourselves running off to the courts, or someone who will make a decision, and then one of us become a winner and the other one becomes a loser. And, I....

I think there was a time I, I probably thought that was the way to get some things done. I'm right, I'm going to show you, and I'm going to win, and you're going to.... I think I've learned that that probably isn't the best way to do this.

ps Like you say, most people, what they know about water, is, you turn the tap and it comes on. But, you've learned it's more complicated than that.

ah More complicated. And, you know, we have our own water issues. Uh. We're, we're on a different time frame, I think, uh, than the rest of the, the....or, I should say.... most of

the Basin. We still have a surplus. We still have more water than we can use. Uh. I think we have to learn from what's happened. Especially in the Lower Basin.

And, I think we need to learn that, let's not wait until we don't have a surplus to figure out what we're going to do. Let's not wait until we have a shortage to figure out how we're going to handle that. Uh. Let's not wait until it's a conflict, uh. Let's, let's learn from those who have come before us. We're the end of the...

We're the tail of this dog. (laughs) And, and, uh, what a window of opportunity. I hope we can grab that window.

ps It's interesting you describe it as the tail. I sort of think of it as the head...the headwaters.

ah And I thought about that when I said that. Because it is the head of, of the basin.

But, in terms...everything in the basin has worked backwards. Because it's...and maybe that's how it always works. Whoever's at the end of the hose is the first one who runs out of water. (can't understand) always true.

But, you know, the development in the Southern Basin was, in the Lower Basin, was much more rapid. Uh. And, and so, the strain was there.

We're going to develop slower. But, we will develop. We have, and we have an opportunity to continue, but we have to make sure our resources are, are well-managed and taken care of. Lots of challenges.

ps And, do you see your community growing like some of the Southern, uh...(can't hear)

ah I see, in the long range, tremendous growth. Uh. For different reasons.

I see a, a lot of folks interested in escaping the rat race. The high stress. The high taxes. The hustle bustle life. For a more simpler, uh, greener, cleaner, uh, down-to-earth kind of thing. Uh. Those advantages, I think, uh, will end up with some significant development in the long term.

ps Why do you think that, uh, Wyoming and the communities there haven't grown yet? Like Denver or Salt Lake. Phoenix.

ah You know, we, we have a lot of reasons, I think, for that. Uh. We're are a colony kind of a state. We export.

We're where the raw material is located. Uh. Those never become the smelters or the power plants or what have you. Uh. We, we provide the materials. And, and the extraction business, I don't think, is a business that requires a lot of people anymore.

We don't have the, uh, (lot of background noise) sunny...sunshine...of Arizona and Southern California, so weather's a factor.

It's a harsh climate. Uh. It's a hard place to live and a hard place to make a living. Uh. But, if you can figure out how to make a living, it's a great place. And, uh, I think some of that is, is, is what we're going to see happening.

It'll never be huge. No. But we need the opportunity, uh, to continue to grow. And that means we have to have a, a, a source of water.

ps Do you think that you could...(can't understand) say tourism, or... You know, in the winter, you've got the skiing, and in the summer, you've got all the other beauties.

ah And there's a lot of that that goes on. There really is. And those kinds of things continue to grow. Uh. And I think, uh, they'll continue to grow in the future. We just need to make sure that we have the opportunity. And, and, it really boils down to your water supply.

Wyoming is...I think Wyoming is unique in, in that we're the headwaters for like four different basins. And it just splits us apart.

We have, we have not one water basin to work with. We have to work with four. And different rules and different regulations. And different ways that things are done.

And, and, on one hand you think, wow, what a lucky state. They have four headwaters. Well, no. It tears us apart.

Because each part has their own water. And they don't want to share. And they don't want to give up what they have. And what somebody doesn't have, they're looking to who does.

And, so, on a smaller scale, we have the same problem that the entire basin had. But, we haven't figured out how to solve it yet. Because we really haven't had a huge problem yet. But, if we could step up, and....

We now have the inner-state pacts in place. Not only the original Compact, but the Seven State Agreement that we just managed to put together.

We need an intra-state contract. And we need a four basin agreement within the state of Wyoming that would not only let us plan what we do with the surplus, but would set into motion what happens if we have a seriously drawn-out drought and we all have to deal with shortages.

ps Okay. We need to get a new tape.

ah Okay.

Colorado River Water Users Association –WYOMING
Tape #6
Alan Harris (TAPE #2)
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
December 10, 2009

ps Let me say this is Tape Two with Alan Harris. You were mentioning about needing intra-state....is anybody working on doing that?

ah I don't think so.

Until there's economic impact, it, it doesn't seem like, uh, things move very fast. And, and it's too bad that, that we have to wait until we feel the pain before we can really come together and accomplish something.

I, I, I look at the communities in, in....and I think every community has an economic development program. I don't know of a community who doesn't have some kind of an economic...

The only ones that work are the communities that have felt some pain. Because then everybody has to sit down at the table and help each other. Up until that point, everybody sits at the table looking after themselves.

Now, whether we can move forward with this before we feel the pain, I, I don't know. But, I look at what some very smart people did with the Seven States. And how they were able to provide for the future growth. For even those...like Wyoming, that were going to grow slowly. And think we can do that, uh, on a state level.

When I take a look at what, what, uh, what the folks in Southern Arizonaor....Southern Nevada with, with their water district. Where they were able to come together and say, we're going to give up our rights, uh, and give them to this new entity because we all have the same goals and the same needs, and the same challenges. And, and, and...make that work.

There's some models there that we can use.

We have probably the biggest surplus of water in Wyoming. That little corner that's in this basin on the Colorado River. And, you go to the eastern side of Wyoming and they are already having problems with not enough water.

So, they look to us. We want your water. We look to them and say, no, you can't have our water. That's our kid's future.

I think we need to get to where we understand if it's good for the state, it's good for us. And for the state to understand, if it's good for us, that is, those of us in the Colorado

Basin portion of Wyoming, then it's good for the state. And, I hope we don't have to experience pain to get to that.

ps But, you don't see it happening right now?

ah I don't see it. I'm not going to say it's not happening. I don't see it. I see a lot of chest pounding. I see a lot of my...uh....over my dead body.

In Wyoming we call it trans-basin water diversion. That's the word we use. And, and that's been rumbled around in the 20 years I've been involved. And, it's always been, over my dead body. Um. And, I think there's some realities there that need to come into play.

And, and I, I wouldn't be so...what's the word I'm looking? Uh. Nirvana. Except for, I saw it work in Southern Nevada. And maybe we've got to get Pat to come to Wyoming. I don't know. Uh. I, I know she was a great catalyst in all of that.

ps I was going to say...they credit her and maybe one or two people, but, you know, you need a key person, it seems like.

ah Well, she was...not that I know her by any means well. But, but, she was tough and soft. And, and, I think it was a great combination. I used to just think she was just tough. Uh. But, but, I'm convinced tough and soft.

She, she was tough enough to bring people to the table, and soft enough to understand that it wasn't one-sided. That, uh, there was a way, if everyone wanted to, there was a way to find a solution. And if it helped you, then it was going to help me. And if it helps me, I can help you.

We're not, I don't think we're there yet. I just don't think we're there.

ps You think you need more of a crises for that?

ah I hope not. But I know crises is what builds a lot of coalitions. Uh. But, maybe we can just look at the models that are around us.

And, if we get the right people in the right place, uh, so that we don't see it as takers and givers. And we don't see it as winners and losers.

If, if the people in the capitol city understand that if Green River and Rock Springs develop in the future, that's good for them. And if the state understands that if we're healthy, that makes the state healthy. And if we, in our basin, understand (someone sneezing in background) if the state is healthy, that helps us. And we can get over the idea that what you get, I lose, I think we have a, a window of opportunity is why, I, I said before.

I think there is a window of opportunity here. And someday, someone will look back and say, we grabbed the ring and made it work, or we let the opportunity slip away. (laughs)

ps You need a crystal ball to know which way.

ah I don't.

ps Well, looking, looking back a little bit, on some history of Wyoming...I've got these sort of generic questions that we ask everybody from every state.

ah Well, give me the answers.

ps Well, Wyoming's answers are different than Nevada's. Or Arizona's. Or Colorado's.

ah It's a lot easier for me if I know the answers before you ask the questions.

ps I don't know the answers, (can't understand), but, as you look back, what projects or legal development do you think prepared Wyoming to become what it is today? In relation to water.

ah Well, the Compact, uh, was such a guarantee for Wyoming. Because even then...of course, I can look back and say, gee, everybody could have seen that in those days, but I guess you need to give those folks credit for vision. But I think even then they could see that places like Southern California were probably going to grow and have huge demands....mmm...much faster than we were in Wyoming.

So, the idea that there was a portion of that river set aside for our future. What a huge, huge document. What a huge concept. What wisdom.

ps Although, some people have said, Nevada didn't...they didn't foresee Nevada growing.

ah Even with the wisdom of those people, I don't think anybody saw what was going to happen in Nevada. I don't think Nevada saw...I don't think Las Vegas saw what was going to happen in Las Vegas.

ps It was sort of a little Mormon community at that time. (laughs)

ah And, really, when you look back on it, what was...what, what could possibly be here that would be the catalyst for what we have here today? I, you know, it was...I don't think it was foreseeable. (laughs)

ps As you're looking at the water history of Wyoming, uh, what parts do you think you've played in that?

ah I don't know...I'm not sure I've played a part in that.

There were some very, very smart people that did a lot to write water law. Wyoming water law is, is, uh, modeled in many places. Uh. At the law school there is really known for her expertise in, in that area. Uh. I think there was a lot of work done there.

ps Do you think that...about Wyoming water law that's different than others in the West?

ah I'm not a lawyer. Uh. But, I think a lot of those concepts were developed and used. And have gone through the court systems. And, all I know is that they tell me that there were great legal minds on water. Were, were there.

My, my work has been primarily, of course, with this little water system. And involvement with, with the Colorado River Water Users Association. No, I'm, I'm a very small player.

ps And, you talked a little bit about...you were there for the formation of the water system, which is (ah – Hmm, hm.) a beginning. What is the name of that water system? Just to get it on the record here.

ah That's that Green River, Rock Springs, Sweetwater County Joint Powers Water Board. You ought to see what the logo on the head, uh, that letterhead looks like. (laughs)

ps And that is the name of the...water company.

ah That's...yeah.

ps Going back...you've sort of answered this. But, what was the greatest, uh, the obstacles and problems that you had to confront in forming that?

ah Well, there was the political problem that we talked about in times, in terms of how it was actually going to be formed. And that went through some different things. I did not get involved with that.

Again, the recommendation we gave was one system, but politically we knew that that probably wasn't going to fly. Unfortunately. Missed that window.

Right after we purchased it.... I guess I can talk about that.

We really thought that, uh, we didn't get a fair deal.

ps In what way?

ah That some operational costs had been...less than candid about the descriptions and the amounts.

And, uh, there was a very interesting battle with the previous owners. Uh. And, uh, in the course of them making us whole (?), it was a, a very interesting process. And, it never became very public, but it was a big event. Uh. I have, uh....I learned a lot from that, and I have a lot of fond memories of, of that procedure.

And then, even there, there was a time when we had a city manager, a city administrator, uh, that decided he was going to take over the water system. And, uh, I got in a very public, nasty, ugly battle, uh, with him.

All-consuming battle. And I learned from that that I, I never want to do that again.
(laughs)

ps So, was that more of the politics involved?

ah The politics became, uh, a reality once I was appointed to the Board. Um. And I was not a good politician.

ps So, did this become a personal battle between you and this city...

ah It escalated to that. Uh. I was the Chairman of the Board. He was the City Administrator. Uh. (hear squeaking background noise) I hate to admit it, but it did become personal. It became very vicious. Very ugly.

I don't regret it.

ps What as the basis of this disagreement?

ah The, the thought that, that he was going to take over the system. Oh, he was an egomaniac. Just an incredibly, uh, bizarre character. Uh. And I...I went to fight for the system. I went to fight for the community. I went to fight for what was right, as far as I was concerned. I don't regret it. Uh. But, I don't ever want to do it again. (laughs)

ps So he wasn't able to take over the system.

ah No.

ps So, you won.

ah Yes. Uh. And in this case, it was okay to have winners and losers. It was okay.

That sounds like a contradiction from what I said a moment ago, but we weren't fighting over water, we were fighting over power. And, he didn't, he shouldn't have had that power, he shouldn't have abused that power, he didn't need that power. And, and, it wasn't a matter of taking it. It was stopping it. And it got stopped. And that was right.

ps So, by his, his city would have been dominate over the others.

ah Over everything. Everything. Ruled by intimidation.

ps Sounds like an interesting time.

ah Very interesting. I kept all the clippings, just to remind me I never want to do it again.

ps So, that was your position as Chairman of the Board.

ah Yeah.

ps You say, you tried not to....were not (can't understand) involved in politics.

ah I ended up resigning from the board, to deflect what he was doing. Uh. And then it became personal.

Yeah, I, I ended up resigning from the board to take the board and the water, uh, system out of the battle. And, it worked. Because then he focused on me.

ps So, what did he have against you?

ah I guess he didn't intimidate me.

ps Was he someone you'd known before?

ah No, no. He, he'd been hired by the city to come in to be the City Administrator.

ps I was thinking, in a small community, everybody would know everybody.

ah No, he was, uh....the city was looking for an administrator, and this was the person they hired. And, they got a little more than...

ps So he was new to the community?

ah ...little more than he bargained for. Little more than any of us bargained for. (laughs)

ps Well, I was going to ask you how you found solutions to the issues that you've confronted.

ah He's gone.

ps But you had to leave the board, too.

ah I did. Um. Didn't want to. Uh. But, it was purely political. I had to do it. Politically I had to deflect his criticism away from the board.

ps So, in, in those...the issues that you confronted, who were your allies in, uh, working with you?

ah There were, uh, Board members Uh. That were my allies. Friends. Um. Some folks within the city. Um. And an attorney.

ps An attorney that you had hired, or just someone you knew?

ah No, it was, uh, it was just another, a, a person who was interested in what was happening in the community.

ps Were there other opponents, or just one person?

ah Basically, he was a one-man wrecking ball. Uh. I don't think he had a lot.... He, he wasn't a consensus build....he wasn't a builder of much. Uh. He was, uh...I think the word they like to use today is, a control freak.

And, and so, it wasn't just this particular thing. He, he liked having control over just about everything in the city.

ps Is he still there?

ah No.

It seems like it took a long time, but it wasn't long after that he was gone.

ps And, you eventually re-joined the board?

ah I did. Um. A subsequent mayor re-appointed me, and I went back on the board. Uh. And, served another couple of terms. And, uh, great work. Enjoyed it.

ps Other than that, that one issue with that one person, what were some of the major issues that this water board dealt with?

ah Well, we had the expansion and, and, and, and the reconstruction of the system which was, uh, which was a huge deal.

And then, we went through, uh, a situation where we, we had to build a new treatment plant.

ps Was that something you planned on?

ah No. No, it was contaminated.

ps Tell me about that.

ah Well, railroad town. And, uh, sometimes things leak in the ground. (laughs) But we found some contamination. Our plant was close to the railroad yards. And we had to build a new one. And, no, we didn't anticipate that.

ps Built it further from the railroad yard?

ah Yeah, a little further. (laughs) Had to find some ground. (laughs)

ps Must have been a pretty serious (can't understand word)...

ah It was, a, it was a, it was a break when I wasn't on the board. So, I viewed that from outside. Uh. But that board had a very interesting, a very interesting time, uh, in, in going through that process.

ps What happens when the water's contaminated? It is the sole water supply.

ah Oh, it wasn't the water. It was the ground in the area. And, uh, we were not using groundwater, but, but the plant was in an area that had contaminated soil. And, uh, so we had to move the plant.

ps So, did the water that comes from the river, did it go over that soil to get there?

ah No. And the river...uh...course, you know, all the quality controls were there. So, it wasn't like the water was contaminated. It was the area around the plant that we had some....

ps It must have been a concern that it could be.

ah Oh, oh, yeah. Yeah.

ps Well, looking back at the 20-some years that you spent with water issues, uh, is there any one accomplishment related to water that you're proudest of?

ah I'm, I'm not sure.

There have been a lot of people, um, good people involved. Uh. I remember back to our first board. I, I thought we had a great team.

And, it's a lot of fun when you have a board that works as a team. Not, not, not a board that rubber-stamps or goes along with one person, but a board that really works as a team. Everybody brings something to the table, and when someone has something they don't agree with, they say so. And sometimes they make their point stick, and sometimes they don't. That's a good board. That's a fun board. And we had a good board. In real challenging times.

We'd never run a water system before. And, and, uh, we were doing our best to set the rates so we had money left at the end of the year. Trying to figure out how we could improve the system and replace the pipe. And to built a new pipeline.

None of us had built a 15-mile pipeline before, 30 inches in diameter, or whatever. To us, that's a big pipe.

So, I think it was, it was just getting the job done.

ps Are there any things that you would have done differently?

ah I think I'm guilty of, uh, of some turf battles in the past that maybe I wouldn't want to do again. At least verbalizing some things about turf.

I think I've learned some things, in, in watching how other people have handled their problems. So, there were some people that, uh, might be surprised what I, I've said today.

ps How have you seen, or, have you seen, the, the western water issues change during the time you've been involved?

ah Well, the one thing that hasn't changed, going all the way back to John Wesley Powell, is there's not enough water here. So that hasn't changed.

I remember early, at least early for me, with the Colorado River Water Users Association. Uh. There were veiled, and sometimes not-so-veiled, threats, uh, from some liberal corners concerning water shortages.

I can remember some members of Congress from California being fairly clear that, uh, we have the people, we have the votes, we have the money, we will have your water. I'm not hearing that.

What I'm, what I'm hearing now, uh...I think has been a pretty big change. I think there are still people out there, but we're getting things done, uh, without going to court. Without destroying the Compact. Without flexing, uh, undue muscle. Uh. I, I think that's the biggest change I've seen.

ps And that's within the Water Users Association, or generally in the whole politics within the states?

ah I see it at the....I see it with this association. Um. And I'm hopeful that that attitude is spreading. Uh. There's still plenty of, of the other. But, most of it is emotional and not factual.

Water is very emotional. Especially if you don't have it. (laughs)

But there are ways to make this, this work. Conservation. Environment. Uh. Sharing for the good. Getting over the winner-loser mentality. Yeah.

ps Do you think that the economic issues that we're facing...in California and Nevada, Arizona, now, have changed their issues with water?

ah As an outsider looking in, I would say it's only complicated for them. Uh. And, they're going to continue to be, uh, financial issues.

And some of those are legitimate, and some of those are artificial. I'll get myself in trouble here.

Things like, uh, the Endangered Species Act, which is very costly. Very costly. Um. That's a right bill. Right reasons. I think it was meant to do the right thing.

I think it's been abused by people with hidden agendas, or other agendas.

I liken it to a gun. In the hands of the wrong people, it does bad things. And I think, some people use a gun for the wrong reason, I think some people have, have used that for the wrong reason.

We have, uh, a group that we, we all refer to as environmentalists. I, I, I think, I think we in the water business are environmentalists.

We're very concerned about the quality of our environment. We're very concerned about the water that we deliver and the quality of that water. We're concerned about the ecosystem that we live in.

But, we have some environmentalists that are now what I call preservationists. And, under the cover of, of the environment are trying, not only to conserve, but now they're trying to preserve.

I think once man decided that they could do that, play God, if you will, they really, they really showed how ignorant we are, and how egotistical we are.

I can't understand why anybody can decide that the way things are today, after however many billions of years this earth has been here, that the way we are today is the way it should be forever.

If we had done that 100 years ago, I wouldn't be here talking to you. It would have taken me three or four weeks just to get here. (laughs) And, and so, I, I think those things are, are all part of the, the financial cost.

We're going to have development. At least we need to have development. We need to have water infra-structure. I think we can do it, and be environmentally sound, but it doesn't mean we have to preserve the world today forever. I don't think God ever intended that.

ps Good thought. (laughs) Well, I think we are saying, because of the economy, that the growth that we were seeing in Southern Nevada and Arizona has come to a halt. (laughs) It may be going backwards.

ah And, and, uh, and it's a cycle thing. This, too, will end. (laughs)

ps Might need that break give some people an opportunity to re-assess.

ah I think that's a good point.

I, I think it gives us an opportunity to step back and, and take a breathe. Uh. And, and say, okay, the, the train has slowed. Uh. Where are we? Where were we? Where are we going? Uh. And, is there a better way?

And, I, I keep hearing there's another, better way. (laughs)

ps Do you know what that better way is?

ah I, I can't tell you I know that better way. But, I'm going to reiterate what I've said earlier. And, that is....

I, I, I think we've seen some models of that. Uh. I think we just need to share that with more people. We've, we've, we've seen the cooperation of the Upper and Lower Basin. We've seen the Lower Basin take the threat of the call off the table. With the agreement, if you will. Uh. I guess some would say that threat's still there, but a lot has been done to mitigate that.

We, we have seen, uh, cooperation between Nevada and Arizona. We've seen California step up to the plate, and, and, be aggressive in terms of their water consumption. We've, we've, of seen some trans basin diversions that have worked for the benefit of both sides. We've seen movement from one state to the other. The...diversions in one state for the benefit of another. We've seen those. We've seen these things work.

And, I think that's the better way. We just have to get better at doing it. Especially in Wyoming.

ps What, what has been the greatest surprise for you regarding water in Wyoming?

ah I was, uh....well, it really wasn't a surprise.

I'm, I'm, uh, I'm not sure there's been a big surprise. The water, water moves so slow. Uh. They told me that early. That things along the Colorado move slowly. It seems like when they move, they move in spurts. But then a long time before anything moves.

I think you see a lot of things coming, but, I, I can't think of anything that's really shocked me, as I sit here, with a huge surprise.

I guess I don't know.

ps Well, what....what issues or problems relating to Colo....to Wyoming's water resources do you think are most critical today?

ah Well, I think it's very critical that we are able to insure our future, knowing that we're going to have to give. Uh. The reality is, if you have a surplus of water, and somebody is short, something's going to happen.

It may be conservation on the one hand, and there may be mitigation there. But, if you have a surplus of water, I think you need to expect that some of that is going to come into play.

ps Interesting. Because you're the only state I've heard even talk about a surplus of water. Uh. Do you see the surplus that you have going to other areas of Wyoming or going to the other states on the Colorado River system?

ah I think the, the, the concern there is...the real issue there...is, it will be going to other places in Wyoming. Um. Way down the road that may change. But, I think that's what we're looking at today.

The Compacts are still in place. Uh. I don't see any real threat on the horizon, uh, to that agreement. Uh. It'll be the water that moves within the state.

ps So, if Wyoming needs that water, and uses that water, within the state, then you wouldn't have a surplus. What...the other Colorado States (can't hear)...Wyoming is using their water.

ah Well, and that's a, you know, beneficial use, and once you've used the water, I guess there's not much question about that. You know, the problem is, of course, right now, we have water that we're not using. So, some would argue that it's better to use it there than not use it at all.

But, I think somehow you have to say well, what happens...in 10 years? What happens in 20 years? Does this preclude the future of this area? Uh. By putting that to use now.

I'd like there to be some water for my kids to use.

ps Well, other, other places, they're talking about augmentation and developing new water supplies. Do you see Wyoming also looking at doing that?

ah I think we need to, uh...in fact, that's one of the things we're working on. We're looking at, at, at smaller, uh, but, uh, useful storage opportunities in the Upper Green River Basin. Uh. There are a lot of hurdles there.

How to pay for it. Environmental. Endangered Species. All of those kinds of things would come into play. And, it makes it very difficult to develop those kinds of things.

But, because of the drought, even though we have a surplus, because of the drought, we, we know that we need to manage water better. And, we know that upstream from where we have storage facilities, we have problems.

ps What sort of problems?

ah Well, once the water goes by and you have no way to retain it, it's gone. And, when you have a drought there's nothing there to protect you. Uh. So, we're talking the areas above where we currently have storage. Like Fontenelle or Flaming Gorge.

Once you catch it in the bathtub, you can use it. And you can use it again and again and again. But, for those people above the bathtub, uh, they, they're pretty vulnerable.

If they have too much water, they have too much water. And, if they don't have enough, they don't have enough.

ps So, do you can see for the future, Wyoming building more storage facilities?

ah I would hope so. And don't tell me how. Or, don't ask me how.

But, I think if we work at it, I think we'll find a way. We're not...I don't think we're talking about a huge, massive project like we've had in the past. Uh. Or the magnitude of a Flaming Gorge. Or even a Fontenelle. Uh. But, I think we're talking about smaller scale storage, uh, above those facilities.

The irrigators can't afford to pay for it. Uh. So that's, that's not a...that's just a fact. That's not a reason not to go ahead. I just...you know that's one of the facts going in, and it's a problem you have to work around.

So, if you find enough people, we're going to win. I think you find a way to get it done.

ps My next question is, what do you anticipate will be Wyoming's future in water challenges?

ah I think...they're internal. Within the state. And the state has four basins. It's not a bonanza, it's not an asset. It's, it's divisive.

It divides this state. It pits Wyoming resident against Wyoming resident, if you will. And I think we have to work through that. Uh. I think we have to figure out, uh, how...if it's good for us, it's good for everyone. And if it's good for everyone, it's going to be good for us, too.

ps What advice would you have for the people dealing with the Colorado River water issues today?

ah I don't know if I'm in a position to offer advice.

ps And, you are still dealing with it. Some people I ask that question are retired from it. So, I guess you'll be giving advice to yourself.

ah I, I think you have to, uh, fight strong. But, my, my, my advice, I guess, if I was to be...I don't feel comfortable giving advice to these folks.

Be kind. It, it's, it's a fundamental requirement for all of us. Uh. And not just us, but animals and plants and everything. Be Kind.

And, I, I think we can accomplish a lot if we aren't beating each other up.

I think you can be strong and, and, and, not have to go there.

ps Some people say we've seen the end of the big water projects. Do you think that's true, and if so, what do you think spelled the end of that?

ah If you define big water projects as being dams, I would tend to agree. But, I think there are some other big water projects. And, I certainly don't have a, uh, clear crystal ball here. It's foggy.

I think there might be some huge plants to de-salt the water. I...and I would call that a big water project. I think there, there might be some underground storage. I don't know that. Could be a big water project.

There are pipelines on the drawing boards right now that would be huge projects. So, I think there will still be big water projects. I think most of the time, when we say that word, we're thinking of dams, and I think those projects are....i wouldn't expect to see many of those. (laughs)

ps In Arizona, the Central Arizona Project was a pipeline basically. Four hundred miles.

ah Yep.

ps What about....the Appropriation Doctrine that is....western water's been built on. First in time, first in right. Do you think that will survive the new demands that the drought and the population growth?

ah I think it will. Now, that's different than saying is it good? Is it correct? Is it right? But, if the question is, do I think it will, I think it will.

It's in place. It's going to stay in place. It's a given. We have to live with it.

ps You, you've mentioned several times the 1922 Colorado River Compact. Do you think that Wyoming would ever advocate to re-open that.

ah No. No. (laughs) That has....we, we talked about it earlier. Uh. No. (laughs)

ps Okay. It's been pretty unanimous...almost everybody I've interviewed. Even Nevada. (laughs)

ah And I'm not surprised. Even though at....I'm sure there was, maybe there still is, a feeling that they got short-changed in all that. I, I have sensed that they don't want to re-open it either.

ps And, over the years we've seen the different, uh, groups coming into, uh, the whole Appropriations Doctrine. Of...the Native Americans, the recreational users of water, and you mentioned the environmental groups. Do you see that as continuing to, uh, impact the appropriations? Or do you see anything...is there another group coming up?

ah I don't know. Uh. Very well. Could be. Don't ask me who.

But, uh, water is taking on a greater importance, not a lesser importance.

I think, I think this association needs to be careful however. Uh. And, how they respond to these groups. Um. I think this association set a, uh, a poor precedent already that may come back to haunt them. Uh. And I won't have unanimous agreement on this.

But, I see this association as a group of water users. And the framework for this organization is represented by the Seven States. And each one of those states within the, uh, boundary, has water users.

This association decided to give a group of water users a seat at the table. The Indians. I, I think that was a mistake.

I think it may have opened the door to any other water users wanting a seat at the table. Maybe all the municipalities in the basin would like a seat at the table. Maybe they....environmentalists....would like a seat at the table. Maybe all the ag users would like a seat at the table.

ps I thought they already have a seat at the table through their states. Or do you see them wanting that separately?

ah Well, I think they opened up that opportunity when...I think the Indians had a seat at the table through their states. We're all water users within our states. And the states are the ones that sat at the tables.

But now we've opened the door to more than states. We opened the door to a group of users.

And I don't know who else would come forward as a group of users. Maybe boaters and water skiers. Maybe wildlife activists.

ps You've been involved with this water users group since 1990, you told me?

ah I think so. That's close. That's very close.

ps Talk a little bit about how you've been involved and what this membership of this group has meant to you.

ah Well, uh....

In terms of the water users in the, in the basin, we're, we're very small. (laughs) And, and Wyoming's, uh, involvement in the association, compared to other states, has been very small. So, a lot of it has been a learning process for me.

And, it's been intriguing to see the other systems, irrigation systems, that just...I marvel at.

Water systems in Arizona and California that I just, just...for me are mind-boggling. Uh. Aqueducts and water conveyances. And... It's been a wonderful, wonderful education.

ps Do you feel that you've contributed something to that also?

ah I, I would, uh, I would tell you, I, I've contributed nothing to those things I just talked about, because I don't know anything about that.

Hopefully I've contributed something to the operation of the association. Hopefully I've contributed something to, uh, that, that on-going, uh, entity if you will. Uh. But, I've gotten back much, much more than I've, I've given. And I know that. And, I'm very thankful for that.

ps As a broadcaster it seems you would bring in a different perspective than many of the people that are part of this association.

ah I think I do. Uh. And, and...there was a time when I thought that, uh, that probably was unhealthy, but...the, the longer I was here I decided that was a healthy perspective. It was another, another thought process.

Everybody brings something to the table. I think everyone on that board has experiences outside of water that they bring to the table. Uh. Other associations that they work with. Their experiences they've had. Other organizations that they've been involved with. And just the knowledge that they have based on their life experiences.

ps You've been very involved with the National Association of Broadcasters and things, so you've seen how other big organizations work.

ah And that was, that was fun. Uh. I mean, we, we have this convention here every year with the water association. And, the National Association of Broadcasters, we have our convention here every year, too. Uh. And, and it's been interesting to see the dynamics of a convention of a thousand people and a convention of 100,000. (laughs)

ps We take up a lot more space. (laughter) But, your perspective as a...I guess it kind of goes back and forth to, what you've learned about water, do you bring back to your community as a broadcaster, to help educate through your broadcasting and your programs.

ah I think that's a responsibility I have because of, of my profession. I think there's an educational responsibility. Uh. And I think that's part of what we try to do.

We have a couple of pipeline proposals. From Flaming Gorge. Green River. Uh. And already they have sparked tremendous emotion. And, uh, a lot of sword rattling and, and, and threatening comments and public hearings. And...not bodily threats. But...you know the kinds of divisive things I'm talking about.

I think we have a responsibility to make sure we're talking facts.

In this case, the proposals, uh, have not been to take Wyoming's water to Colorado. It's to take Colorado's water to Colorado. We're just going to take it from a point in

Wyoming. And, that's confusion there. I think I have a responsibility to try to educate that difference.

ps You certainly have the....with your radio stations, you have the megaphone. Gives you some advantage.

ah Yeah. And we need, we need to do that.

ps Do you do that?

ah Yeah.

ps You do shows about water?

ah We had a, uh, a public hearing. Hosted by the, uh, Bureau of Reclamation. Did not go well. It was not run well at all. Those folks did a very poor job.

I approached them afterwards and asked them to be on my show the next day. I asked them three times.

ps What did they say?

ah No.

I did it without them. (laughs)

ps Too bad that they wouldn't....

ah Really, it is. Uh. I...it, it would have been much better if they could have been there. But, for whatever reason, had every excuse not to. That doesn't work.

It doesn't foster the things that we've been talking about this morning. It's, it's divisive. Uh. It doesn't build anything.

ps What was their reason for not going on the show?

ah It wasn't a friendly public hearing. I think they were just ready to leave town and go someplace else. (laughs)

ps They didn't see you as a friendly interviewer, who was knowledgeable about the issue?

ah You know, I, I don't know how they saw me. Uh. But they were from a metro area, so I'm going to guess they probably saw me more as a big city broadcaster, than a small-town communicator.

ps What was the issue that was so divisive? That they were there for?

ah This proposed pipeline to take the water to Colorado (laughs)

ps I know another thing about education that we've...I've heard a lot of people talk about, is that they need to do more in the schools and with the younger people to make them understand about...that you don't just turn on the tap. But, how the water got to that tap. And particularly, I know, in the drought areas of Nevada and Arizona, they're trying to do more education on that level. Do you see that happening in Wyoming?

ah I do and I can't take any credit for that.

One of our Board members, Don Hartley, uh, on the Upper Green River Basin, uh, Board, has spearheaded that, and has been successful in getting them to, uh, in talking to the teachers. And it is an important part. Uh. And we are seeing more of that. And I think the more we understand...and, thank goodness, the kids understand it a lot quicker than we do as adults.

But those were seeds that we're going to sow now, and I think we're going to get some, some good harvest from that in the future.

I mean, when I was a kid, it was important to know where milk came from. Uh. Not just the carton. I think now it's important we know how, how water works.

ps You could also do some of that with your radio shows.

ah Exactly. Uh. And we talk about, uh....

I think we need to talk about, uh, downstream users. And we need to talk about what we put in the water, not just how we get the water out, but what we put in the water. I think all that connects with young people.

ps I think I've gone through the questions that I have here. Is there anything you wanted to add that I didn't ask you.

ah I don't believe so. We've covered a, a, a lot of coastline. Whatever the proper pun might be I, I don't think so. Thank you.

ps I do have one more question, if I have time I like to ask. What advice do you have for young people today that are trying to decide what they want to do with their lives?

ah Wow.

I, uh...I've had the opportunity to, to, to actually share this with young people on a number of occasions, in different addresses. So, I'll give you the Cliff Note version.

You don't know what you know. You don't know where you're going. And there's no such thing as luck. So, leave the doors open, learn to learn and be sure it's something you like.

ps Very concise and very wise.

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bs (can't understand)

ah I can stretch it into 30. (laughs)

ps Another 30 seconds. (laughter) Your, your career has taken a lot of twists and turns you didn't imagine as a young man.

ah Pardon me.

ps Your career took a lot of twists that you hadn't imagined as a young man. When you studied accounting.

ah But there were some clues early on. Uh. My mom tells me I used to play radio when I was a little kid.in the bedroom.

Ps I guess (bs talks over her)...

H So, maybe it was just self full-filling. I don't know.

ps Okay. Very good.