



## **WILLIAM J. "JOE" LIEBHAUSER, SR/WA**

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### **What is the primary mission of the Bureau of Reclamation?**

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) was established in 1902, within the Department of the Interior. Its primary mission is the development, management, and delivery of water and power in the 17 western states. With its local partners and contractors, it operates over 600 dams and thousands of miles of canals, pipelines and related facilities.

Reclamation is not a 'land management' agency in the same sense that the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Forest Service and similar agencies are. Our land and right of way programs are predominantly designed to support and help us accomplish our primary mission. We acquire land needed for Federal Reclamation projects, manage that land while the project is operational and dispose of lands that are no longer needed for Reclamation projects. As a result, our approach to land and right of way work is, in many ways, akin to that of a large utility.

### **How is Reclamation structured?**

The Commissioner of Reclamation in Washington, DC is Robert W. Johnson. Reclamation is organized into five regions, each under a regional director, based on watershed boundaries. Each region also has local area and project offices as needed to facilitate project management.

Because each Reclamation project is unique, there is considerable diversity among the regions. We work hard to keep our processes as consistent as possible, but because every Reclamation project must obtain separate Congressional authorization, our customers may see some unavoidable differences from region to region due to the uniqueness of each project. We are currently involved in an ambitious internal program called "Managing for Excellence," which involves listening to our customers and modifying business practices to be as consistent and efficient as possible.

From the right of way perspective, each region designates a Regional Realty Officer, who takes the lead role in overall coordination of the land and right of way work in that region. We also have a Senior Realty Specialist in the Commissioner's office, who interfaces with other agencies at the national level and coordinates closely with the regions. Because of the regional differences I mentioned, the Regional Realty Officers and the Senior Realty Specialist work very closely to collaborate on policy issues and complex technical problems.

### **What are some of the challenges you're facing?**

Like many organizations, we are facing the challenges associated with an aging technical workforce. Also, since Reclamation currently has only a few new large projects involving land acquisition underway, our in-house land acquisition and management 'on-the-job-training' opportunities are declining. Because our land and right

of way staff is relatively small, Reclamation-wide, we also have challenges in offering adequate training for our realty professionals.

We are currently in discussions with the International Right of Way Association to develop a partnering agreement, which would ideally provide some additional tools for training and “head-hunting” for technical expertise.

### What programs are you currently focused on?

In the land and right of way area, we just completed a multi-year audit process that reconciled 100 years of land records against 100 years of financial records. This process, though it was tough, brought us in line with private industry standards for accountability of land assets. We are now embarking on a similar process for buildings and structures, including dams, canals, buildings and such.

Another priority program involves the transfer of title of certain Reclamation projects to local operating entities, such as local water districts, where and when it is appropriate. This program is intended to allow Reclamation to move smaller projects serving local areas out of Federal ownership and into the hands of the local stakeholders they serve.



Spillways at Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River in Washington. Grand Coulee was designed so that after passing through the power plants at peak hours, water can be pumped back up into the reservoir during non-peak hours for use at the next peaking period.



Reclamation played a major role in agricultural development in the arid western states. This small farmer is anticipating water deliveries from the Boise Project, near Caldwell, Idaho.

We also have a growing workload in acquisition and management of land and water for environmental mitigation, which is legally required to offset impacts of some of our project facilities or operations. These acquisitions generally involve threatened or endangered plant or animal species. We also support activities related to increased security at our facilities.

Our potential right of way use authorization applicants may also be interested to know that we have been working to release a revised regulation, 43 CFR 429, which is the Federal regulation governing how we process and determine fees and charges for use of Reclamation land, facilities and waterbodies. We hope the draft of this new rule will be released for public review later this summer or in the fall.

### How are projects prioritized and approved?

Priorities for new Reclamation projects are determined by Congress and the current Administration, based on funding and other criteria.

For right of way use authorizations from outside entities requesting use of Reclamation lands, we work closely with customers and our partners to accommodate their scheduling needs as best we can. Although we make every attempt to accommodate requests, the use must be compatible with the primary Reclamation project use of the land. Use requests that could negatively impact project operations, maintenance, safety or security cannot be authorized.

# “Both private industry and Federal agencies will benefit when professionals can more easily ‘cross pollinate’...”

## What are some of your immediate goals?

We are working to develop specialized, Reclamation-unique training and documentation to ensure that corporate knowledge is not lost through staff retirements. Also, we realize that we have only scratched the surface on applying geographic information system technology to our work, and we are working on several initiatives in that area.



Generators in the Nevada power plant at Hoover Dam. Another similar powerplant is on the Arizona side. Hoover Dam's powerplants generate over 3 billion kilowatthours of electricity annually.

## How is funding allocated among the various programs?

Some project funding is specifically determined by Congress. For discretionary program funds, a small group of senior managers, called the Budget Review Committee, is formed each year to develop the program priorities for the budget cycle three years out. With guidance from Congress, the Administration and our customers, priorities are established and funding choices are made.

For our use authorization applicants, we generally require full reimbursement of all costs of processing right of way applications.

## Which programs directly affect/benefit the right of way professional?

Reclamation has always been supportive of work assignments, or ‘details’ to other Reclamation offices and special projects to broaden experience. We support continuing education and offer several programs where professionals can pursue certifications or degrees and receive assistance from Reclamation. Internally, we have become very active in developing leadership development programs for staff who are seeking to move into supervisory or management positions.

I can't help but add what I personally consider to be a huge benefit for our professional staff. We have the opportunity to be a small part of the management and protection of projects like Hoover Dam, Grand Coulee Dam, Glen Canyon Dam, Shasta Dam, the Central Valley Project, Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Project, All American Canal and hundreds more. These dams, power plants and water delivery systems supply millions of people with water and power and irrigate vast areas of farm land in the West. Reclamation is truly an outfit worth working for.



Aerial view of Hoover Dam and Lake Mead on the Colorado River in Arizona and Nevada, near Las Vegas.

### Do you partner with other federal, state or local agencies?

We foster and support partnerships wherever they make sense. In fact, a significant part of Reclamation's lands are managed by other agencies through partnership agreements, including the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the Forest Service and other Federal agencies.

We have also placed an emphasis on developing our recreation sites through partnerships with state and local agencies, such as state and county parks departments, or if appropriate, private concessionaires. Our goal, overall, is to limit direct management of recreation facilities whenever practical, and allow other entities with recreation as a primary mission focus manage these facilities.

### Where is the greatest demand for training?

We seem to have fewer job applicants who have solid experience in field work associated with right of way and lands. Basic skills such as map reading, interpreting plan-and-profile drawings or land surveys, identifying basic soil types and vegetation, and similar skills will require additional on-the-job training within the agency.

Advanced reading and writing skills are sometimes an issue. Because of the unique nature of many of our projects, Reclamation really specialists need to be able to perform a high level of essentially 'paralegal' work, including reading and interpreting statutes and writing unique, full-form land contracts that deal with site-specific project legislation and issues.

### How can IRWA and right of way professionals help you achieve your goals?

As I mentioned, Reclamation and IRWA are currently discussing a partnering agreement that could help us in the training and recruitment area. Hopefully, over time, agencies like Reclamation can evolve more of their processes and become more consistent with industry-wide methods. This would enable the pool of available professionals to be broader, and it would ensure the use of contract consultants would become easier. Both private industry and Federal agencies will benefit when professionals can more easily 'cross pollinate' and move among agency/industry lines with less difficulty. 🎯



Typical canal diversion structure with remote gauging and metering system installed.