

National Heritage Team of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Oral History Program
Subject/USFW Retiree: Al Trout and Larry Shanks, Bear River Refuge Restoration
Date: Tuesday, October 11, 2006
Interviewed by: John Cornely

John Cornely:

This is John Cornely, I am here today on the 11th of October of 2006, with Al Trout and Larry Shanks, and we are going to do a recording here today to talk about Bear River Refuge and actions and events that lead up to the new visitor's center out at the refuge. And so with that, I am going to start off with Al Trout and have him give some background information.

Al Trout:

I would like to begin with just a brief history, Bear River was established in 1928, and through the decades until 1983, when floor waters destroyed it, it became known as the flagship of the refuge system. It embodied much of what people like to use as an example for research and management; a lot of people that gained notoriety in the field of wildlife management got their IT forest, service and time at Bear River. And so it was with a lot of I would say troubled times that Bear River went under water in 1983 and that was because the Salt Lake rose 12 feet, and that was due to very high runoff in the area of its watershed, it has no outlet and so the only recourse is for the lake to rise. It was mothballed then because the entire infrastructure of the refuge, including the headquarters area was submerged in water, and then later on ice flows came in and anything that was above the surface of the water was sheared off. And so literally by 1989, when I showed up there was nothing above ground left standing, and that included any buildings or any kind of structures. The situation with Bear River after the flood was that it was not known what the future of the refuge would be, there was debate going on of how quickly that this great Salt Lake would go back down to its normal level, and so while there was one position in August, by the way I should mention that all staff were transferred out of the area in the mid-1980s, and then as the lake began to recede again there was approval for one position to go back to Bear River, one lone position, a refuge manager, and the duty was going to be that person was going to assess the situation and to make a proposal for what the future should be of the area. And so I applied for the job, and I'm told that there were very few applicants, there was no office, there was not equipment, anything like that, and I was told there were virtually very few applicants. I thankfully was selected by my immediate supervisor, Barney Shanks at the time, and so I arrived in Brigham City, Utah in August of 1989. I had an office that was 13 feet square, two rooms, one for storage and one with some desks and stuff that was gained from a Bureau of Reclamation Office that had recently been disbanded. And so my first day of work was without a telephone, without any other employees, and I distinctly remember opening the door and pulling a desk, there were two desks stacked on top of each other, I got one desk down, pulled a chair in front of the desk, kicked my feet up on the desk, which I don't do because mom told me to keep my feet off the furniture, since nobody was looking I put my feet on the desk, put my hands behind my desk and said, "Trout my boy, what are we going to do now?" And that was the humble beginnings of the restoration story of Bear River.

Kind of to fast forward on; I stumbled around there for a number of months, and we were hoping that an appropriation come forth for several million dollars. I was called by my boss, and by the way I bought a phone, at Fred Meyers is where I got my first government phone, plugged it on the wall and got it hooked up, and Barney Shanks called me a little while later and said that the money that they had hoped to get was not there anymore. It had been pulled, and that if there was to be any money at all for the restoration of Bear River that I would have to figure out a way to conjure up some support to get it. And so with that I had no idea how to handle volunteers, I had no idea how to go conjure up money, I was strictly a field marshal type in my previous jobs in the Dakota's and in Nebraska, and so a very much different role that I was faced with there at Bear River.

So that being 1989, I think the first main thing that happened that started to make a difference was I got out and met the mayor and the county commissioners and the congressional delegation, and they all seemed supportive. It surprised me I guess because being in the Dakota's, we got slapped around pretty hard on a daily basis and we couldn't conjure up support from most any elected official. There was much difference, although no money instantly, I did at least have support, moral support and encouragement from the locals there. What changed, a big thing, a big change moment though occurred in October when a man knocked on my door and he introduced himself as Bob Ebeling and wanted a job, and as I was trying to explain to him that I didn't have any money, he was trying to explain to me that he wanted me to volunteer for two years, and it took me three days to decide that I wanted to handle a volunteer at the time, and things changed right after that. I gave him a key to the office and I said, "Well, you're my assistant now" and so the two of us started showing up for work. And Bob was a real firecracker and it was because I think of the impetus that he had to begin to pull people, resources, and funds together for us that things really started to take shape. And our very first effort was, and thanks to Bob, we sat down and put out some immediate goals for the spring of 1990, and that our goals were to get the old management units back retaining some water. They were heavily damaged, the dikes were heavily eroded, water control structures were all inoperable, but even so, we felt that it was not beyond the realm of possibility for a large volunteer staff to at least begin to put some diverted fresh water into those marshes.

That was our goal, and it's amazing when you have an identifiable goal, how that makes a difference in getting people organized. Well, within a month or so, we had fifty volunteers showing up at the refuge using their own equipment, their own vehicles, and we really had a spark going. And we did, in fact we were able to get water impounded by that spring. That's a whole other story, it probably would take me another two hours or so to describe the details that I think are kind of interesting in that. But I think for this time, suffice to say, that we began operation of the refuge in the spring of 1990. And the other important factor was that the old tour route, the 12-month tour route, was open entirely by volunteer restoration and on July 4, 1990, Congressman Jim Hansen came to the refuge and we opened the tour route with his ceremony. And at that time, he saw the number of volunteers and what had gone on there, he came to me and said, "I'm going to

try to help and I'll get you some money from Washington." And I would like to say right now on record that Jim Hansen was good for his word, and to this day he has remained a personal friend as well as a professional friend, a friend of the refuge totally. No matter what else is said about the man for his conservation ethics, which by some folks would be very discouraging, I would have to say he never ever told the refuge once and always went to bat for us for those numbers of years. So a very much different picture that I have of Jim Hansen's conservation efforts and what may be on the record or what groups may say about him.

So we are in 1990 now, continuing with the story, we got the refuge going, all with volunteer labor. By August of 1990, I picked up an assistant, **Carl Caldis**, I also in the last spring of 1990, get **Terry Fisher** in as admin-assistant, so I've got two employees now and a whole bunch of volunteers, I'm riding high, things are going good, and a lot of morale, a lot of good things going. The most important thing though that was accomplished in the early '90s was that I had to sit down, I'm not a person who does plans by nature, I hate paperwork but I was forced to write an environmental assessment for the restoration and the future plans of the refuge, and that document, as it turned out, was the thing that served us so well in gaining support from Congress and from a broad variety of folks, conservation groups and local people, because we did have a written plan. So I hated doing that but it was the best thing that I was ever forced to do, and from that then we came with a three-step plan. Step number one was to restore the old infrastructure, the old border infrastructure of the original refuge; fifty miles of dikes, fifty water control structures, and 43,000 acres of wetlands. We wanted to get those back to the pre-1983 operation. Now to say a little bit there, previous to 1983, there were some major problems that had been identified with the old system, which was designed in 1928, although it was an excellent system, it had some flaws and we intended on biologically doing some work there to re-plan a better system. But step number one was to redo the old system, step number two was to then enhance the old system, we called that enhancement, and that was going to be after we had designed it fifty new miles of dikes, fifty new water control structures. And so we were able with this plan then to identify over thirty management units rather than the five large units that had been there prior. And this was just basically going to help us be more efficient with production of habitat with the Bear River water. And then the next step was to expand the refuge, which we got permission to do, I should say not permission but we got all of the approvals to do that over a number of years, and the refuge was then approved for a 40,000 acre expansion, which was no small feat in a state that as conservative as Utah is, but we had the right connections with Bob Valentine, who knew the governor, who signed the expansion agreement just by word of mouth with Bob telling the governor it was a good idea. And so the last step after the restoration, enhancement, and the expansion of Bear River then was the public use improvement of it as the last step. And that's what we are going to talk about today, and that involved replacing the old, destroyed education center, which by the way was completed in 1983, dedicated in 1983, and destroyed in 1983, all the same year.

And so we had a vision early on then by 1991, when the environmental assessment was signed for restoration and enhancement of the refuge, this is what I'm getting, this is tying

all of this together; we had a document, the Restoration and Expansion of Bear River Refuge, and our approved direction then was to complete all those wildlife improvements on the water management system, to increase the size of the refuge up to 40,000 acres with the combination of fee and easement purchases, and then finally then to replace the headquarters education center. And that's where we are picking up on with this discussion, because by the mid-90s, we had fairly well been into completing all of the wildlife and water management major infrastructure things that we needed to do and we hadn't addressed yet building a new replacement visitor's center. And so I was assigned a new, due to some regional office reorganization, Larry Shanks, who is across the table from me today, was assigned as my supervisor in 1995, as I recall, and that is when things started to really come together for the visitor's center because Larry became a champion for the refuge and the kind of a supervisor in the regional office that always felt like that his main job was supporting the field. And I met him at a meeting where the region met in Keystone in 1995, November of 1995, and we met our new supervisors at that time, Larry took us off on his own and wanted to hear from each of us. And at that time then I showed Larry our signed environmental assessment along with our plan to finish the water management stuff and to build a first class education center, wildlife education center headquarters complex, and the story picks up at that point. So Larry, I've talked completely now and maybe it's good for you to start now with your viewpoint of how things went.

Larry Shanks:

I did take over supervision of Bear River in 1995, with a number of other facilities in the state of Utah as part of that reorganization that was going on. I always in my entire career had been in ecological services and research in the past, but always, even in Washington, D.C., knew that if you wanted to get something done for the critters it just got done in the field, and so even in the regional office or Washington office, I always looked at getting money to the field and making the job for them easier. If you had a whole lot of paper, try and cut as much of it off in the RO (regional office) as you could, and let the field do good things for Fish and Wildlife. And I really was kind of a; I don't listen to a lot of whining, I don't need whining, you know let's do something positive or don't do it, and if it's a little to get over the mountain, let's go, but whining doesn't get you there. And so I really enjoyed working with Al Trout and his crew because it was kind of a can do, let's go make it happen chemistry, and I knew that my job was to find bucks and they could make it happen, and so that really kind of evolved with my management style and their staffing capabilities and let's make it go, including the volunteers.

Al Trout:

So I think from our very first association together we decided we were going to try to make something happen with the center and it kind of went along. I think at the very beginning, and jump in here Larry if I'm getting head of myself, but as we talked more about when it would be appropriate to start working on the center and to initiate that whole big process, and we knew it was going to be a big process, I knew it was, but I would like to say right now, I had no idea that it was going to be as big and long as it did turn out. And maybe sort of in a jesting kind of way I would have to say I'm not sure I would do it if I knew how much time and effort it was going to take to finish up. But all

kidding aside, we began sort of laying some ideas down and sort of throwing the idea out of getting work started on the center. Larry called me one day and told me to put a briefing statement together for Washington, and that I should put down the costs and the program that it would take to get a visitor's center built there. By the way, we had in the early '90s, when we did our original EA for the restoration of the refuge, which I just spoke about, we also did a concept plan for a new visitor's center, and we also looked at about five or six different sites, possible sites that it could go on, so we did have that background work that had just sort of been on the shelf now for about three or four years by the time Larry showed up, we hadn't picked up with it because we had been up to our eyeballs in just doing habitat work. Well let's just back off, we had a 14 million dollar proposal that we put on paper and I sent that onto Larry and then Larry you looked at it, and I guess looking at you now on how did that sort of like domino effect?

Larry Shanks:

I think the key thing is missing and that was Bob Valentine, and he should really be part of this discussion because he was I think on his city council when you first went there, right?

Al Trout:

County commissioner.

Larry Shanks:

County commissioner, and so you made that link with him when you first returned to Bear River, and he has been our outside advocate, private connection, political advocate, corporate connection that you and I both needed to make this happen. And so much of his within Utah corporate, political expertise, we needed that part of the puzzle, and you and I both needed that to make the whole thing really go, so Bob was very much a part of this puzzle or chemistry and fusion of energy as everything. Al and Bob had met, actually before I became supervisor, with Congressman Hansen at a cabin up in the mountains somewhere, and Bob had presented the idea of building a visitor's center at Bear River. And also, I think another thing about Congressman Hansen is that man told us, I don't know how many times, how he had grown up in Brigham City, Utah, and as a boy would go out and go hunting at Bear River Refuge with his grandfather, and those were dear, dear memories for that young man. And so he had a love for Bear River Refuge that Al said earlier his environmental background or whatever may be in debate, but as far as a love for that particular refuge, there was no doubt in anybody's mind. Anyway, Bob and Al met with Congressman Hansen, and Bob said to Jim that he wanted to build this visitor's center and Congressman Hansen kind of said, "Well, how much money is this going to be?" And he said, "Well, 14 million bucks." And Congressman Hansen said, "Well, how much can you come up with on a private sector? Can you come up with a million and a half dollars?" And Bob said, "Yes." And Congressman said, "You come up with that and I'll come up with the rest."

And so that really kind of set the stage for us to start thinking about Washington. I had been in Washington in my past, earlier in my career and had been the Budget Office Chief for Fish and Wildlife Service and so I knew how their appropriation process went.

I knew that somebody goofed up in the regional office in Region 6 with the flood because there had to have been emergency appropriation when the Great Salt Lake flooded, because the Bureau of Reclamation and BLM and everybody else was spending money all over the place and we missed the boat because there had to have been money there. But that was water under the bridge, let's look and what we're going to make to do without it. So, with that background of Bob's commitment from Congressman Hansen and the political connections that he had and then Al's efforts on the comprehensive plan and my understanding a little bit of the budget process and how you go to Washington, said, "Okay, let's put together briefing materials." When you go to Washington, D.C., if you want to brief a congressman, senator, appropriation committee, anybody in Fish and Wildlife Service that's up in the directors door, up in the department, and if you want to get your point across, you better say it in thirty minutes because if not, then their eyes glaze over and they don't know what the heck is going on. So I told Al when he put together the briefing materials, really focus on the flood part because we missed that boat, but a little bit on the history because it was a flagship refuge for the entire system, so we wanted to go back there and fix that again, and then lay out a little bit about where we were going in the future with the dike water system, water management system, and then also the visitor's, we called it visitor's center in our initial briefing and when we got to Washington we were corrected and told to call it an education center, which we changed the second year in our vocabulary.

Al put together some preliminary material and sent it to me in the regional office and I looked at it and showed it to Joe Webster. Joe Webster was my ARD at the time, and he had been in the budget shop in Washington, D.C. at the same time I was in the budget shop, he had been in the Fisheries and I was in Eco Services, so we knew each other from back then and we knew the budget process, and he thought the briefing materials were fairly good. And then we went up and showed it to Ralph and told him what we were thinking about doing, Ralph was the regional director, and he kind of looked at it as, "Gee, that's a big task." Being the regional director he knows the process back there in D.C. as well and some of the political hurdles that we would have to encounter. And so we didn't get a stop and so I called Al and said, "Go ahead and call Washington, D.C. and set up some appointments over on the Hill with the Congressional and Senatorial people and the appropriation committees, Senate and House."

Al Trout:
OMB.

Larry Shanks:
Office, Management and Budget.

Al Trout:
Then the (unclear) of Audubon.

Larry Shanks:
Right, we got all of the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and at that time what was the coalition?

Al Trout:
Oh, Care.

Larry Shanks:

Yes, Care Group. And then I don't know whether you set them up or I set up the ones in the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department, but anyway we knew we had to go start in the Service and go through the directors office and congressional liaison so that you don't go to the Hill and get shot by your congressional liaison folks, and then we went up into the department and briefed there and then went to OMB. And so we set up the meeting agenda and away we went to Washington, D.C. with Al and Bob and myself. I guess because I had been there before I cautioned Al and Bob both that when we got to the Hill, and even in Washington, D.C. within the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department, you are the party line and the President's budget is what we back. And so we presented the refuge being the flagship for system, destroyed by the flood, this is what has been so far as to get it back started and some fresh water going into the wetlands and some of the birds coming back in the spring and the expectations for the future, and then our hopes for habitat management and then our hopes for environmental education, and then we stop, and you don't talk about money, you talk about money your in trouble. And that was where Mr. Valentine was ultimately filled in the hole and did well.

John Cornely:

So this was in 1996?

Larry Shanks:

It was in '96.

Al Trout:

It was '96 and '97, we went back at least three years, is that correct?

Larry Shanks:

No, we went four. Actually, I think we went five because the first year we went within the Service, within the Department, within OMB, even on the Hill we hit roadblocks. We hit you know too much, go back and re-scope it to make it littler.

Larry Shanks:

You're not on the plan.

Larry Shanks:

Not on the plan.

Larry Shanks:

The only real encouragement we got the first year we went is that we started in Arlington, and our very, very first appointment was with Rick Coleman, Director of Refuges, and we met in his corner office up there on the second or third floor. And I will never forget that, it was really a nice send off; he looked at our stuff, he got a big smile on his face,

and he was very glad to meet Bob Valentine, and I think that was about the first time I'd met Rick also, and he said, "Under the circumstances that this had to be new money, go for it boys." And we left there pretty high, and then as you say, we got to the rest of it and that was the last good news we got that year. But Larry was not discouraged on that. and I recall from standpoint as the refuge manager, when I would give my, and the briefing statements we had I would like to say were not just mostly like the standard briefing statements that I had seen before. I had two really good staff persons, Vickie Hirschbaeck and Karen Lindsey, and they really worked hard to put together, it was a briefing statement with grafts, photographs, all kinds of visuals, it was really almost like a slide presentation, like a Power Point, but it was very succinct to the point and something that I practiced, and I could get it through it within a designated time, but Larry told me, I think we figured I needed to do it in five minutes or six minutes, whatever it was.

Larry Shanks:

The maximum we were going to spend was thirty, and that would be out in the door and out of the door.

Al Trout:

And that was all three of us. So yeah, and I think you told me be six or seven minutes, and I would practice every word until I could go through it with them and maintain eye contact, get through it my allotted amount of time. But those were, and I still have copies of them, if I do say so myself, those were very effective, colored, very impressionable, we left copies of them. And I guess it was for me it was a wonderful experience of being there in that arena, seeing Bob doing his work and then with your experience guiding me through, and sometimes under the table giving me a tap on the leg or a look as I look across the table like time to close it or it's getting too long. So lots of coaching and I got to see two really good people at work.

Larry Shanks:

And when we encountered Loretta Beaumont the first time, she was in the House Appropriations, and Bob McInerney?

Al Trout:

Bob McInerney.

Larry Shanks:

She was in the Senate, they were both, "It's too ambitious, too big, downsize it. Not in our plan right now." But Bob was very, very persuasive and I think probably had done some previous contacts with Congressman Hansen's office and Senator Bennett's office, and they had pretty much let the appropriation staffers know that we were coming with something that they wanted them to listen to. And so they said 14 million is too much, scope it down, but they said come up with something 3, 4 or 5 million and then have the 1.5 million outside, and then we might be able to talk about it. The NGOs outside were reasonably supportive. Then we went back to our little homes and the appropriation bills passed and we didn't get anything, we flunked the first year, or missed the opportunity.

Actually what we did, we went to Washington, set up some good contacts and planted seeds. Al I think was a little bit kind of like, "Okay, we went through a whole lot of energy and whatever and we got nothing." And I said, "Be patient, be patient." Because what you do in Washington, D.C. is you start working on an appropriation facility or something, you start kicking the rock at the top of the hill and you keep chipping on it and pretty soon it's going to start wiggling and it's going to start rolling, and once it starts rolling then you can't stop it, I mean it's going all the way to the bottom of the hill. And so the second time we went, the Fish and Wildlife Service, particularly in the budget office, was still just as negative as the first time and the director's office was kind of like, "You've got a major hurdle in front of you." But they didn't say you couldn't go to the Hill. When we went up into the department, I think even the first year we had some encouraging comments from Pam Haze, she was up in the department and she had been working in the budget shop when I worked in Washington, D.C. and Joe Webster worked in D.C., and so Pam and I knew each other from back then and so there was a connect there.

Al Trout:

I thought it was helpful when she hugged you when she first saw you. I thought, "Hey, now that's a good contact!"

John Cornely:

Who was the director at this point?

Larry Shanks:

Jamie Clark was director.

Al Trout:

And we saw her, she was actually the next one, we saw Coleman first and then next on the list was Jamie so we could get her blessing. And then we went downhill, we went down the hall from there.

Larry Shanks:

And we stopped with Legislative Affairs. And the first year they said, "Well, we have to know your schedule and we will be over there and we will sit down and listen to it." Because they wanted to make sure we didn't trip over our nose and whatever. And after the second time I told them we were going to eight more places, did they want to be there all the time or did they think that we were grown up enough that they didn't need to be there because we weren't going to do a faux pas and go against the Administration's Appropriation Bill and whatever. And so after about the third or fourth meeting with the Hill then they quit following us, and then from the years thereafter they didn't bother going with us. Anyway, we went the second year I think with a little bit more fine tuning in the plan and a little bit more enthusiasm behind us. Bob had started to see some money flowing in from some of the private corporations, so the Friends Group was starting to accumulate some dollars.

Al Trout:

We had **Steve Dankers** actually initiated the first private contribution, and that was a quarter of a million dollars and that with the **Willard Echols Foundation**. So yes, on the home front as Larry said, we saw some impetus on that so it was good. We went back and could demonstrate that we had local support not only because of Bob's presence, but because we had money in the bank and we were making good on ours, and that really was maybe a magic ingredient as you were saying, and that really bolstered our credibility and our argument.

John Cornely:

When you went back the second time, had you downsized your plan or phased it or done something different? Or did you just take another shot?

Larry Shanks:

We thought about it about five minutes I think or something like that, and Bob was saying, "No, if we're going to build it, we're going to build it." It's kind of like the Field of Dreams you know, build it and they will come. He was saying, "We are going to build it." And so that was kind of, we never really, we were encouraged to think that and we did kind of look at it a little bit.

Al Trout:

We looked at it (unclear) is there anything major we can lop of this, this huge money sump that could save us money, and we put a lot of thought in on this and the answer to that was no. We had spent virtually I don't how many (unclear) looking at this plan. Maybe a couple of things I should say here, and that's a good question, I think number one is that this whole story of Bear River and the restoration and building the education center, it is a premier story of local partnerships, this is what local partnerships and local support at its optimum, at its pinnacle, does for any kind of government effort. Without them this would have been a big nothing, and with them we got virtually all that they had dreamed of, and I say they because this was a corporate dream. This literally was not our idea that we said, "You come in, we'll use, we'll ride you until you are lathered up good and then we'll put you back into the stall, and we are going to keep going with our program." We designed this as a program integrated with their dreams and their aspirations vocally as well, so it was a shared vision with their full partnership and their full effort behind it. And I think that surprised, I know it surprised even me, I had never done this kind of thing before, I think it surprised me, and I know for sure it surprised a lot of other people up and down the administration and folks from the outside looking in that so much can get done starting at zero, and it is all because of that. And the other thing I'd like say is that in regards to the center itself and the amount of work it took to come up with the concept and the work with the planning, Vickie Hirschbaeck, well she became Vickie Hirshbaeck, she was Vickie Roy when this began, had lost a husband in 1991 I believe it was or 1990, she was in a state of grief for about five years, and during that period of time she poured untold hours, she was single, obviously single without Kevin but no children either, she poured her entire life into this project. And so if I needed to know where nail number 757 was in the roof, she could tell me. And much of the design of the educational part of it, much of the floor plan was all thought through by

her because she would spend untold hours and then come back with a proposal to me on a regular basis so we could mold that. So when we looked at the plan and said what could we change? There wasn't much that we could do because so much had been thought through, and because it was a building that was designed for function and function drove the design of this building, it was done correctly from the ground up. So here we go, we're in the second year now, and we've been told to shrink it down. We went back, huddled up, and the Friends would not hear of us shrinking it down, and so we went back to Congress in the second year, and I think we had a 9.9 million dollar proposal eventually, is that right?

Larry Shanks:

It was 9.9 million of the 1.5 million, so it came up right at 11 million dollars.

Al Trout:

And plus the fact that you had pulled out some of the cost of the site development into T money, T21 money.

Larry Shanks:

T21 passed.

Al Trout:

And so that, actually unbeknownst to some of Congress, was actually folded in as part of the cost of this facility but it didn't really show up because that was done separately and we actually got a parking lot there. I am telling on myself, we actually showed it as a parking lot because we went out with some telephone poles, laid them on the ground and mowed some grass in-between, and that was the parking lot, it became a parking lot in one year. And then this entire T21 upgrade, which was big time, then was basically done as part of the...

Larry Shanks:

Yes, and part of the 14 million included upgrading the auto tour route, and I got that into the five year plan for the T21 so that as the T21 dollars would come to Region 6, then that Bear River auto tour route and parking lot became a high priority as far as my area was concerned.

John Cornely:

Explain real briefly what T21 was.

Larry Shanks:

T21 was a Department of Transportation Bill that passed the Congress each year, and the states would come up with matching dollars and the Federal Highway folks would match whatever the states matched. And lo and behold, we found out that the Forest Service had been using, going to the Department of Transportation and they were getting part of the transportation funds to upgrade and grade their roads, and we thought, "Son of a gun, the Forest Service can do, we ought to be able to do it too." And so Washington did go to Department of Transportation and said, "If you could do it for the Forest Service, how

about Fish and Wildlife Service?" And they said it was based on existing roads and it had to be opened to the public, certain criteria, and so if those criteria were met by Fish and Wildlife Service road then they qualified for T21 funding.

Al Trout:

And we got the lion's share of one year I believe of service funding for that just for our project because it was a pretty good size.

Larry Shanks:

It was like \$750,000 I think.

Al Trout:

And so that added it to it. So basically Larry was looking for pots of money in various places where we could get everything added together to come up with the basic plan and not have to re-massage lots of work that had been done. And we had to do some of that anyway kind of down the road but by this time now we were into major planning, I mean I should say into major development of the constructions plans, they were starting to draw those up I believe.

Larry Shanks:

But that was after we got, after a year or two we got 1.5 million dollars appropriated for the facility and \$500,000 dollars to work on the water control structures, so we got about 2 million dollars in year two. Al tried to explain a little bit earlier when Bear River was originally built they built five huge water control impoundments, I mean so when you put the water in at the top its going to the bottom and so the water was deep at one end and dry at the other, and he knew that to use water in the future coming down to Bear River we are at the end of the pipe and just allocated so much, and we would get the spring runoff and then everybody else gets whatever they want.

John Cornely:

As I recall you had one inlet and one outlet, so everything was flow through the whole unit.

Larry Shanks:

Yes, right. So it made it difficult for habitat management, and so part of the construction money was going to subdividing those huge impoundments into smaller manageable units, which made it better for wildlife management or habitat management but also more efficient use of the water. When you want to get rid of carp you just don't water that impoundment that year and let it go dry and they turn into rice crispies.

Al Trout:

And bypass because we had five bypass canals as well as a bunch of new smaller units, so you got us \$500,000 or 500,000 was appropriated for continuing that work and 1.5 million then in the bank for the center, and that was when we were able to go out to **(unclear & Grigg)** who was the **(unclear)** under contract with Region 6 to begin actual

construction plans. And so that was when the engineers were hired and the architects and we began to put together the actual bricks and mortar.

Larry Shanks:

And then year three I think was probably a big year, we hit 2 or 3 million dollars for the education center.

Al Trout:

And by now everybody knows us when we come in, they say, "Hi, how are you doing this year?" "What happened?" "Where are you at?"

Larry Shanks:

Right. The budget chief that had been in Fish and Wildlife Service going, "Ain't going to happen, ain't going to happen, ain't going to happen" left the service and went to OMB (Office of Management and Budget), and we went to OMB and did our visit to the person over there, it wasn't Mr. **(Sakutchey)**.

Al Trout:

Mike Hickey was the..

Larry Shanks:

But we reached Mike Hickey and then as we were walking out we saw Sakutchey in his office over at OMB and said, "Oh hi, how are you doing?" By the way we are year number three and we've got such and such in the bank." And he's going like okay.

Al Trout:

Like, "Wow!"

Larry Shanks:

So we went I think the first year we struck out and then we went four more times before I retired where we received appropriation bills each year that we went, and we prepared a new briefing package each year, again focusing on thirty minutes. So many people in the field of the Fish and Wildlife Service, if you have never gone to the Hill, if you've never gone to Washington and briefed the muckety mucks and whatever, they don't get training, they don't get an orientation on how do you do it. I was very fortunate, when I was in Washington, D.C. I got taken by the hand and taught how to run the tunnels, and so you really need to keep your points very brief and concise and if you have accomplished something, say you've accomplished and this what I'm doing in year two, three, four so that they know that you are making progress on the dollars that they gave you. And so each year we would change the briefing package to point out what we had accomplished to date and yet where our little road was going to the end. And so I think that also helped add to our success besides Congressman Hansen's support and Senator Bennett's support; Congressman Hansen was very high in the Appropriation Committee I think.

Al Trout:
Chairman.

Larry Shanks:

Chairman, and Senator Bennett was high on the Senate side on Appropriation Committee, that helped immensely, and so those things and the Friends local support and the corporate money coming up with the 1.5 million bucks that they said that they could pull off, and that's a big hunk of money for a Friends Group to say, "Yeah, we can come up with that" and make it happen. I think it was, you have a few things in your thirty or forty year career where you are in the right place at the right time, and there's just some wonderful, fantastic people chemistry, can do, different strengths adding to compliment each other, and we were fortunate in that particular time, we had a good political environment and the chemistry was there and the interest was there, and the good lord made it happen and we were blessed with a facility. I was very, very privileged to go last May to Brigham City, and had been trying to keep track of it a little bit in my retirement on how things were progressing. I think my last trip to Bear River before I left to tell Al, he said that he was going to stick with it until it got built and I told him, "Just be sure that Murphy doesn't get you." Because one time in my career I was put in charge of building the Fish and Wildlife Service facility for the World Fair in New Orleans and they said, "Okay, here's the space, make it happen." And I think I broke every rule in the book. We did make it happen, but I knew Murphy and you'd try and think of everything and here you go down the road and Murphy's Law will come up and just bite you, and so don't get frustrated by it and that was what I was trying to tell Al, "Don't let Murphy get you while I'm gone."

John Cornely:

So when you retired, how much of the funding that you needed was in the bank so to speak, and what happened?

Larry Shanks:

We were short one more appropriation.

John Cornely:

So you had come a long ways.

Al Trout:

Essentially yes, we had come a long ways and then when he left we had the final 1.8 to accommodate, and that was kind of in the mill at the time that you left even as I recall. It is a number of fiscal years back, so correct me if I'm wrong here, but then we went to that last appropriation then in your absence and that was very, very difficult for me. And I would like to say that when Larry left that chemistry, we lost, we lost a huge amount because as we talked about the chemistry being right is everything was lined up to make this happen. It was just like the lord was going before us, you know every time we needed something the door was opened, and then we said, "What was this doorway?" Walk into it and boom, it's just where we needed to be. And we just went ahead and things were just lined up with the people that showed up, whether you show up with the

skills that needed to show up, and we got where we needed to be. And then Larry retired and there was much more blood letting on the last 1.8 million, and it was a difficult one, we got it. And I would have to say that there are some people, it's no secret in the Region and maybe elsewhere that had hard feelings over that, I think a lot of it was we had gone so far ahead around the normal system, and we did need cooperation within the Service, and Larry was running that interference for Bear River when he was there. When he left, that role was not picked up and so then I was the one that it fell back on, and things were broke and I couldn't fix from the field and so yes, the last appropriation was very much, very harder, a lot more flack I was catching from people that thought we had too much money, too big of a facility, you know whatever, and then by that time the budget had started to go downhill. We weren't operating with a budget, we can hardly remember now but there were budget surpluses back then, remember those years? And it's hard to think now with the huge deficits of budgets shrinking, people looking where are they going to get the next dollar, who are they going to have fire. In the meanwhile, we hadn't started construction yet and we had a pretty good war chest of money that people were looking at going, "Well here is money representing a healthy budget now, boy we'd like to get to that, we have a tough budget now, we can't get to it. You worked around us and now you need our help, you ain't going to get it." And that's sort of the feeling, not with everybody, we still had champions and I'd like to mention Ralph, who was always supportive and in fact at the end he came out on his own nickel after he stepped down, he came on his own nickel to see the facility; we had a wonderful day together. **Sherry Featherman**, and I could name numerous others, Rick Coleman always stayed very much behind. And I'm not going to name names of folks that I had trouble with or cross words, I don't think that gets us anywhere. But just to say, we had a number of champions that stayed with us but we did lose Larry as somebody that could run aerial support for me. We got through it but not without a few bumps and bruised as you would expect on a project that size.

John Cornely:

Okay. Let's talk a little about construction, let's go back first and I know that the site you talked a little bit earlier, a lot of work went into the site and I'd like you talk about that a little bit and why such a good site and from both a wildlife standpoint and an opportunity standpoint to do environmental education.

Al Trout:

The original site of the headquarters was put out 14 miles west of what is now the interstate, back then there was no interstate, but it was in the middle of the Delta, a beautiful, beautiful location, I would like to have actually been out there prior to the flood, the manager had a great second story office overlooking the **best river** marshes, a wonderful place. The only problem is the floods and buildings were destroyed when they get flooded and the ice chops them off. Over the course of the 1990s, we purchased 10,000 acres of new habitat for the refuge; we expanded by 10,000 acres, which was a wonderful story in itself. The very first parcel of land we picked up was 1200 acres sold to the refuge by Wynne Nicholls, and by the way his family still is a personal friend and I see his daughter Nedra every once in awhile, she gives me a big hug, loves the building, says her daddy would have just been so proud of that whole thing. His land abutted a

mile north and south, abutted I-15; it was a mile wide and actually a mile and a half deep, section and a half, and anyway that was really high quality grasslands, well above the flood plain of the refuge, in site of over 30,000 cars a day that would pass it on I-15. Very accessible to the local communities and also as the habitat there, it was basically grassland with playa lakes and also a couple of freshwater little creeks that run in through it, a very dynamic piece of ground. And as we gained control it and began grassland management on it there of resting treatments, it became a very beautiful place. And so we looked at about five locations that were closer to Brigham City there and closer to being able to be more accessible by our school children, and by the way the whole view of this center was to connect with the public schools, it wasn't just to be another "come and look museum" kind of thing and now we saw it now believe. This was to be a bridge to, the refuge, a bridge to the wild world from the average school classroom or the average work a day life that folks have, so we needed to be within reach of the school district. And we evaluated five sites in and around there and this actually came up for a number of reasons, a lot of them engineering reasons, why it had firm enough soils and so on and so forth. Our utilities were expensive and we needed to be, a couple of sites fell out because it would have been triple or quadruple the cost to get utilities out as far as (tape ends).... Why we came up with that site, and still it took a great degree of modification to the site to actually build up the footprint where the building is, and the foundation itself is nearly a million dollars just in itself because it is a fully compensated basement, meaning that it act likes a concrete boat underneath and will actually, in case of an earthquake, actually has a light enough footprint it will float without sinking. So that's a little bit about the site and why that was selected.

Larry Shanks:

I think two or three other things that were part of this chemistry or part of this happening; Al mentioned Vickie Roy or Vickie Hirshbaeck becoming very, very much involved with not only the habitat management of the refuge but also in the design of the facility, but we also had one of the best maintenance crews that you could go out and buy anywhere. I would hire them to build anything you wanted to build anywhere in the country, and they could make it happen, they were building dikes and water control structures. **Rich Iwanski**, in fact I was fortunate to write him up as the Maintenance Person of the Year and got that award for him; he saved us thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars, actually designed a water control structure himself and took it to some engineering firms, if we had gone to the Regional Office of Engineering it was cost us \$150,000 a structure, and I think Rich designed the thing and we ended up building it for what \$12,000? I think something like that.

Al Trout:

Yeah, if you totaled with all the staff time and equipment cost, \$15,000.00 in the ground and ready to roll.

Larry Shanks:

He and his staff would pour the water control structures in the building in town during the winter time and carried the pieces out to the refuge, and then in the spring when they could start getting out on the ground and put the structures in place, they had taken them

out and put them together in pieces like Lego blocks and in the ground they went and away they went to the next one. So they did a phenomenal job of moving dirt and building water control structures way below government budget and way below anything that we could have done if we had contracted them out.

Al Trout:

It sounds like an exaggeration, but literally on the water control structures, for example the whistler structure and the whistler three-way, they built for 5% of engineering estimates, very incredible. And part of it, I think to say kind of the recap of what Larry said, part of it was Rich's idea to go with pre-cast concrete parts that could be assembled together in the field with just moderate-sized equipment rather than pouring in places, which they did in the 1930s, where they had to dewater, put cofferdams in, be afraid of salt intrusion and all of that. So yeah, a WG bunch of guys, a WG workforce crew that was second to none and really had the get the job done attitude. It was a real plus for us because Congress saw that when they came out.

Larry Shanks:

Right.

Al Trout:

And then they couldn't believe how much we got done with the money, so when we asked for more, or excuse me, when our Friends asked for more for us the comments we got were like, "I've never seen Federal Appropriations go so far." And that was really good for this man to hear when we went to Washington. And we would have congressional people tell us, "We've heard and our people have seen what you guys have done with the money out there and we can't believe all you get done and you bet ya', we'll support more of the same."

Larry Shanks:

And we also had another piece of the puzzle that you don't really see it that much but Bob Green was a retired regional hydrologist, came back to Bear River, I don't know four or five years in consecutive order.

Al Trout:

More like ten.

Larry Shanks:

Okay, but he went back through all of Bear River's historical records and pulled together and organized and validated all of the water rights for the refuge and brought those up to snuff, got them in a tight little package, made sure that the water master for the state of Utah recognized all of the water rights. And particularly in the west, those Refuges that have been blessed with that kind of organization and certification of their water rights, they are going to find that that will pay millions and millions and millions in the future that we can't even guess how much, because water is going to become a very valuable commodity.

Al Trout:

We probably should get another conversation with Cheryl Willis, Bob Green, and myself on water rights; that is a whole, Larry touching on it there, that is a whole story in itself, and suffice to say that when the state required the Fish and Wildlife Service to file water on Bear River back in the early '90s, we filed a Federal Reserve Water Right, which really blew things up. But over the course of many years and with Bob Green's work, working very closely with Cheryl in the regional office, I can't say enough good about both of those folks, working in tandem with each other, Bear River's right was more than doubled. Basically, Bear River's water right is 10 acre feet per acre bottom line; the standard duty for irrigation water in our area is 4 acre feet per acre. So that is the result that those people made for the refuge.

But we were talking, and we probably should go back to a little more on construction of the center itself in talking about when we actually started moving dirt and putting bricks and mortar together. Quite an ordeal I guess from the very beginning, and I would like to say that once again, from my viewpoint, the lord worked things out, because we had so many critical things that could have happened to stop that but we had somebody step in at the eleventh hour with the exact skills we needed to save the day, and that began right away when it went to contracting. The building we were afraid that it was going to go to an **ADA** contractor, and those folks are really used to ripping your pockets off, they're good at that. And I can go on record, I don't mind saying that you play total defense, the government does, when you let a contract out and that contract notice to proceed is nothing but a key to the Federal Treasury to a construction firm that is savvy to how you can bilk the government. And I have been unfortunately on the receiving end of a couple of those earlier on where we'd gotten bilked, and I won't go into those now, but we had gotten hurt really bad on some smaller projects, so I knew how the game was played and I was shaking in my boots and to good cause because we came very, very close to having to award this to an **ADA** contractor and our budget, now looking back on it, our budget absolutely would have not withstood the kinds of claims they would have made for us. We also right at the time the project was in CJS, we had assigned to it a man that turned out to be a champion for refuge, John Peters. And I can't say enough good about what he did single handedly to keep this out of court when he took over at the helm, it was falling apart internally and he was given responsibility, and he was a man that had over twenty years of experience doing this exact kind of a thing. Well he took the reigns, a total different atmosphere between the contractor and us and the relationship we had with the architect. Now remember, the architect designs it to the point where he doesn't like to put anymore detail than absolutely necessary to get his plans approved because he wants the contractor then to design all the little small details during construction that he didn't design because that puts more of the onus on the contractor. The contractor, anytime he has to design something blames the architect for not designing it enough, and they both come back to us for more money, and that's the frustration in the whole thing. It's a triangle and all the time the architect is deflecting any responsibility, the contractor is deflecting any obligation to design anything, and they both come back to us for money. When we say, "Hold it, if the contractor is telling us it needs more design then we go to the architect and say that was inadequate." He just says, "Fine, for another x-number of dollars, I'll work on that." And we are saying, "We thought we bought the plan already."

It doesn't work that way. Anyway, to make a long story short, that's the kind of buck passing that happens every single day on the job, and we had a sort of a saying that, "What is going to be today's crisis?"

The other champion in this was Steve Hicks; Steve was my deputy during this time, still is in fact the acting, right now as of October 11, the acting manager. But he was also heaven sent in this because Steve was extremely good with construction methods, he was extremely good also with reading plans and the other part of it, he was extremely good with the computer work, which became very important as we went through on this, and I'll explain in a minute. And also, the thing was Steve has a very strong personality, he didn't take guff from either the architect or the contractors, and mainly they couldn't snow him because he would look them right in the eye and let them know that they were out to lunch, and that was really good because we negotiated every day out there over something. We wound up a lot of times having to solve problems that the architect supposedly couldn't solve, the contractor out there in the trenches doing the work had problems. Steve could do research a lot of times on the internet for supplies or for a particular exact kind of thing we needed, and would find the source for it at a price that was acceptable, and basically did a lot of the work that he shouldn't had to do but kept things moving. And yeah, a very difficult thing but when it was all said and done, I guess to kind of wrap it up, we had over two hundred and some requests for information, which is basically the contractors way of saying, "I can't do it this way, tell me how to proceed." And you normally have to then pay extra money for that. And then they also on top of that had requests for, the RFIs, request for information, it was nothing but a request for a proposal, RFPs, and the RFP was our key to the Federal Treasury because basically you went to them and said, "We need to have you change the brackets on these beams because what was drawn in the plan or not drawn in the plan doesn't work." And they would come back and say, "Fine, we can do that for \$20,000." And you could go to nobody else; they are our soul source by that time because they are out there on the job. We had a bunch of those. All said and done, because of John Peters in there with Steve Hicks keeping these guys on the straight and narrow, and John knowing when to push and when to let up, when to give a little bit here. It's an art, it's not a science, you get out there on the job and you've got frustrations running high, there's times you have to push, there's time you have to back off. Well, going through all of that, we got through it with actually less than a standard amount of change orders and we actually, our money for contingency, our contingency money, actually we had money left over. The contractor didn't know that, otherwise he would have been out there, but we actually came out at the end. I would like to say that one of the things that wrapped up at the very end was John Peters, out of his own checkbook, wrote a check and had us buy and put up a flagpole, that was his own money because that was not in the budget, we were so close, and John wanted a flag up there. And so he came in and donated that to the Friends, and he said this is for a flagpole, so we went out and had a flagpole erected.

And so all the way through construction, the right people showed up at the right time. As it so happened, it did stay out of court; the court was threatened almost weekly through there. And we had a building that we could be proud of at the end and we all celebrated

then during that ribbon cutting in March and then in April. It was actually April 23rd is when you came out for the grand opening.

Larry Shanks:

Well I think also on the very last year of the appropriations, Congressman Hansen had stepped down and had given up his seat in the Utah Congress and had been replaced by...

John Cornely:

Rob Bishop.

Larry Shanks:

Yeah, Mr. Bishop; and so that last year when we needed that last little bit of appropriation Congressman Hansen wasn't in Washington, D.C. in the right place, but he didn't forget the phone numbers and the phones to Washington worked very effectively. So Rob Bishop got the call from Jim and he knew what to do, and so he pulled the right buttons to make sure that that last bit of appropriation got done.

John Cornely:

To wrap up here, from the first shovel of dirt to the end of construction basically, what time frame are we talking about?

Al Trout:

We began in June, I can't remember which year, but we began in June, it must have been '04, then we went that entire year to the next June, which would have been June of '05, and then into the next January, which was January '06, of when, it shouldn't be hard to remember I retired in '06, this year, but it was January of this year it was completed. Gosh, it seems longer than that. But January of '06 it was completed, we got the keys one winter evening, and did that seem strange! Steve and I stood there, why the contractor came out and he said, "It's all yours now." It passed all that stuff. About 5 o'clock one Friday night, the sun was already kind of down in the western sky, and we got to the keys and Steve and I looked at each other and said, "This really feels strange." So we walked through the facility, it took about a half hour walking through it together, and that was the first hour that we owned it.

John Cornely:

We've got a couple more minutes here, I would like you to just tell a little bit about the building, how big it is and what some of the features are.

Al Trout:

The building is about 29,000 square feet. The features are that it's got an exhibit hall there, totally designed by our own people; and Sherry Featherman by the way, I can't say enough good about her shop, but working with Vickie, who by the way Vickie Roy/Vickie Hirschbaeck then was a full-time refuge biologist, she was not trained nor was she paid to be another recreation planner, that was in addition, we had nobody on staff that could be assigned to either design or to watch the center go up, we just ate that effort within our own staff. Anyway, as folks come in they see the exhibit hall first, and

that's to connect with people of all levels, whether you are a 5-year-old or whether you are 95 years old, why you can go through the exhibit hall and get something out of it. Right next to that is a book store operated by the Friends, designed to provide educational materials and secondly, to operate as a profit to put money back to the refuge. Then we've got a theater, a small theater that runs a short loop introducing the refuge system, **not just** Bear River and how it fits in. And then we've got a viewing deck for wildlife, and it's right on the wetland, the building sits on the wetland, the natural wetland, and then there was part of a wetland that was created to come around the building and we have a viewing deck there with actually a sound amplifying apparatus over it so that people can actually get up close and personal, here the sounds as well as see the critters there in the water in their natural habitats. Then on around the corner there, as you keep walking down the hall, we have a 200 seat theater, which by the way the Friends of Refuge now have in their war chest money for a documentary, which they've hired their own film photographer, and by the way they put me on the board after I retired and gave me responsibility for the documentary, so that's my main project now but it feels really good, I don't have any contracting CJS kind of stuff, this is a straight on private deal. "Either you perform or you're out, do you understand that?" And he says, "You've seen my work, you are going to like it." And it's going to be much, much higher quality product than we've got otherwise. So theater, then we also have a research lab there that is fully capable of doing up-to-date research, doctorate kind of stuff, stuff that the National Health Lab people can come out to, it's all visible to the general public so they can see work going on in there. And then we have two classrooms.

Larry Shanks:

And the laboratory is also to help us with botulism and cholera and those types of waterfowl diseases and particularly botulism, which we have encountered there at the refuge almost yearly.

Al Trout:

Yes, and one of the reasons the refuge was established in 1920 was because of botulism. So that facility is there for researchers, both university and service or other government agencies to come in and utilize. Two classrooms that connect then with students of all from elementary on up through high school, and then we have a conference room, a very nice conference room that can be divided in half. Our offices are in there and also the shop. So it's quite a multifunctional, it's really a headquarters site; it's not just an education center.

Larry Shanks:

I would say in our downsize that was one thing that we downsized the shop, the shop part there that is associated with the offices really not nearly as big as the maintenance facility, which we do have out closer to the refuge and where the work is being done.

Al Trout:

Yes, the building was modified from a total buildout accommodating 23 employees, which we looked at as being the long-term full staffing need of the refuge, we wanted to build to that. So it would originally accommodate a staff of 23, and we had a separate

metal building planned then for the maintenance area. And as things progressed, we had to eliminate the second building, shrink down that function and stick it within the area that we had originally planned for the 23 FDEs, we shrank them down to I think 15 or 16 FDEs that we can accommodate in the building now, and then we had that big storage area we had to put within that same footprint. So that was the modification that was made.

John Cornely:

All right, well I want to thank you both very much. This is a great story, a story obviously of perseverance by a lot of people, and a lot of people know but a lot of other people don't know about the partnerships and all of the volunteer work that's gone on there. We really appreciate this addition to the History and the Archives of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Unverified: Carl Caldis (assistant) (pg 3), Terry Fisher (admin-assistant) (pg 3); Steve Dankers (pg 10); Willard Echols Foundation (pg 10); Mr. Sakutchev (pg 13); Sherry Featherman (pg 15); Rich Iwanski (pg 16);

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