

NHPRC Grant NAR09-RD-10019-09
Digitizing Historic Oil and Gas Hearings Files, 1932–1972
Semi-Annual Narrative Progress Report, July 31, 2009

Project Objectives

With funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the Railroad Commission of Texas sought to digitize approximately 171 linear feet or 4,623 folders that contain records of national historical significance from regulatory hearings that occurred between 1932 and 1972. Railroad Commission hearings concern various oil and gas exploration and development issues including field rules, secondary recovery projects, maximum efficient rates of production, determination of responsibility for the proper plugging of abandoned wells, applications to inject water into reservoirs for enhanced oil and gas production, and prevention and control of oil and gas pollution.

The Commission established several objectives for the first six months of the grant period. Task 1 focused on developing an agreed upon statement of work in consultation between Neubus, the established digitization contractor, and the Railroad Commission. During this time Neubus was to ready their facility for receipt of the documents, and develop the website search interface.

The Commission anticipated that during the first six months of the grant period it would begin to prepare materials and digitize materials, using document preparation standards established during a pilot project in 2006. From the pilot project, the Commission learned that documents appear in varying sizes and on varying paper types. Documents printed on onionskin, thermal, carbon, or other types cannot be digitized using standard scanning procedures. As part of the preparation process, the Commission began to copy such documents to standard paper, with plans to scan the copies when scanning begins.

During the first six months of the grant period the Commission also sought to develop a website that publicizes the project and describes the processes and costs associated with preparing and scanning, and making available online the hearings files collection.

Summary of Project Activities January to June

The Planning and Development phase took longer than anticipated in the project proposal, delaying the schedule by approximately two months.

Statement of Work (Phase I):

- As detailed in the application, for this project the RRC is using Neubus Inc., the outsourced imaging vendor for the State of Texas, to digitize project files.
- The first step in the process when using Neubus is to prepare a “Statement of Work” (SOW), which outlines the requirements for the work to be performed and results to be achieved.
- Between January and March Neubus met with representatives of the Railroad Commission, Texas State Archives, and Texas Heritage Digitization Initiative to understand the requirements of each entity and their role in this project.
- The draft SOW went through several reviews and revisions before being approved by the RRC and Neubus on March 31, 2009.

Project Specifications (Phase I):

- The second step in the process is to detail the specifications of the project as outlined in the SOW.
- During this step, the Commission encountered several issues that are recently resolved, allowing the project to move forward. Issues are detailed below as part of an assessment of the project to date.

Preparing (Prepping) Physical Files for Imaging (Phase II):

- RRC staff began to physically prepare files in May 2009.
- Temporary employees provided by Neubus began work on June 1, 2009. 2.5 FTEs prepared approximately 45 boxes, approximately 18 boxes per FTE, for imaging in June.
- The preparatory process places each file in a particular order, identifies oversized documents that will need to be scanned on a large format scanner, and identifies fragile paper or other unique pages that might require special handling. These pages are copied for scanning to improve their legibility once they are available in digital format online.

Scanning Process (Phase II):

- The RRC anticipated that scanning would begin in June 2009. The start of the scanning process was delayed as detailing the Statement of Work requirements, and other initial planning and development steps, took longer than anticipated.
- Neubus purchased a Bowe Bell and Howell Ngenuity scanner specifically for this project that will be used for all paper that is ledger-sized or smaller. This scanner automatically detects color so that all pages with color will be scanned in color without slowing the scanning process to switch to color scanning. A pilot phase of the project will begin as soon as testing of the new scanner is complete with the proper settings determined for this project.

Project Assessment to Date:

The Railroad Commission anticipated a more aggressive timeline than was practicable. The Commission sought to address as many concerns and potential issues as possible through the statement of work process to avoid problems once digitization began. The Commission was able to work through the issues that arose with Neubus. Generally issues emerged when the contractor was required to implement a process required by the nature of this grant or the documents to be digitized that is not typical of their day-to-day work. The Commission and Neubus identified appropriate resolutions before moving forward to the next phase, but it was a more time consuming process than initially anticipated. Specific issues are detailed below.

File Order: It is important that each hearings file remain in the proper order online once the paper is all scanned and the PDF file is created. Each file contains paper in many different sizes, and all paper larger than 11 inches by 17 inches must be scanned on a large format scanner. Neubus had to develop a way to merge the images from the large format scanner back into their proper place within the PDF file of the hearing so that the correct file order is retained. Some documents, such as well logs that may be up to 80 feet long, cannot be merged into a PDF. These documents will be provided online as individual TIFF images with a notation in the appropriate

place in the PDF to indicate that the complete well log image may be viewed by clicking on the “Oversized” link.

Printing Oversized documents from a PDF: If the contents of a hearing file are needed as evidence in a court proceeding, the Railroad Commission must provide a certified print copy. For that reason oversized documents contained in a PDF file must be rendered back to their original size for printing. The Commission has a large format copier in our public records room, and project staff worked with the Commission’s IT department to add the necessary software on several computers that will allow a user to send one page from a PDF to the copier for printing with output at the original size.

Double Entry of Key Tracking Fields into PCS: Neubus requires that information for key fields be entered into their web-based Production Control System (PCS) for the purpose of tracking all documents during the imaging process. These key fields also serve as the indexing for online access of the records. For this project, the key fields to be entered into PCS are the contents of the file folder labels. Neubus decided that a double data entry process would be best for this project; however reprogramming of their web-based application was necessary to accept double data entry.

Additionally, it was necessary to determine how to best use PCS to associate the “merged oversized” and “true oversized” documents, each in separate boxes for scanning, with the contents of the base (or “parent”) box and continue to track all documents as they move through the imaging process. It took several months for the issues of double data entry and oversized document tracking to be resolved satisfactorily so that Neubus did not require additional work than necessary for tracking purposes.

Copyright Issue: In the process of prepping the files for scanning, project staff discovered that the exhibits submitted in support for several hearings are pages from a copyrighted loose-leaf publication of *Special Field Rules for Texas*, published by R.W. Byram & Co. The Commission contacted R. W. Byram and received permission from Mr. Byram Christiansen, owner of the company, to image the *Field Rules* copies contained in the files, as long as each exhibit is limited in scope. If, as an exhibit, an entire R.W. Byram publication has been entered as evidence, the Commission does not have permission to image the entire publication. Should this occur, the Commission would substitute a note that indicates that the copyrighted publication was entered as an exhibit and is available from R.W. Byram & Co. The copyrighted publication will be placed in the hearing file before it is transferred to the Texas State Archives after imaging.

Project Impact on the Grant-Receiving Institution:

The Railroad Commission issued a press release announcing the award of this grant in December 2008. Several local newspapers in areas throughout Texas that have oil and gas industry activity picked up the story. Specifically, the *Longview News Journal* and the *Pampa News* published stories about the award. Longview, Texas is located within the Railroad Commission Districts covered by this award.

The Railroad Commission had preliminary conversations with the Texas Heritage Digitization Initiative about presenting findings from this project at their annual conference in February 2010. The Commission is also pursuing other options to present its findings from this project in 2010.