ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Jerald (Jerry) R. Butchert

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STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH

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Interview Conducted and Edited by:
George Petershagen
Historian
Bureau of Reclamation

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JERALD R. BUTCHERT

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Introduction

In 1988, Reclamation began to create a history program. While headquartered in Denver, the history program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

The senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation developed and directs the oral history program. Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to the senior historian.

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For additional information about Reclamation's history program see:
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Brief Summary of Career

Jerry Butchert was born on August 28, 1931, in the San Joaquin Valley community of Dinuba, California and spent some parts of his childhood in Orosi and Visalia before the family settled in Bakersfield where he graduated from Bakersfield High School. He then went on to the University of California at Berkeley and attended Bakersfield College before being drafted during the Korean Conflict. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers and served two years of active duty.

Following his release from active duty, Butchert enrolled in Western State College in Gunnison, Colorado. While at Western State he married. Shortly thereafter, he returned to California where he and his wife graduated from (now) California State University, Fresno.

Butchert's first job out of college was with the Fresno Irrigation District where he worked as an assistant engineer for six years. He then assumed the duties of Executive Officer (manager) of the Eel River Association, later known as the Eel River Water Council, a lobbying and public education organization promoting development of the Eel River as a water and power source and seeking local flood protection. The ensuing struggle over Eel River development, a landmark contest between those favoring development and those favoring preservation of the natural environment, led to the adoption of California's Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and contributed to the adoption of other significant environmental legislation.

From the Eel River Association, Butchert went to Washington as a lobbyist for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. In that position he continued to

develop working relationships with both state and federal legislators dealing with water issues that affected southern California, especially the Colorado River.

Returning to California, Butchert became the General Manager of the Westlands Water District, headquartered in Fresno. Westlands is the Bureau of Reclamation's largest California customer and likely one of Reclamation's most frequent opponents in litigation over such issues as the Central Valley Project Improvement Act and other allocation and drainage issues. Butchert had announced his impending retirement following some eighteen years with Westlands by the time of this interview.

George Petershagen, Bureau of Reclamation historian, interviewed Jerry Butchert in the offices of the Westlands Water District in Fresno, California, on October 20, 1994. Barbara Heginbottom Jardee transcribed the interview, and Petershagen completed the editing.

Oral History Interview
Jerry Butchert

Petershagen: This is George Petershagen conducting an interview of Jerry Butchert for the Bureau of Reclamation. Mr. Butchert is currently the General Manager of the Westlands Water District. Today is October 20, 1994, and we're in the Water District's office in Fresno, [California].[1] This is Tape 1, Side A.

Petershagen: Jerry, just a few administrative comments: Would you please acknowledge that you're voluntarily being tape recorded?

Butchert: I am voluntarily doing this.

Petershagen: And that you did sign the Statement of Donation of the interview.

1.
Note that in the text of these interviews, as opposed to headings, information in parentheses, ( ), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [ ], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition. In the case of strikeouts, that material has been printed at 50% density to aid in reading the interviews but assuring that the struckout material is readable.

The transcriber and editor also have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

Butchert: I did sign the Statement of Donation.

Petershagen: Thank you very much. And with that, we'll get into it. Let's start with where and when were you born, please?

Born August 28, 1931, in Dinuba, California

Butchert: I was born on August 28, 1931, in Dinuba, California, which is thirty miles southeast of Fresno.

Petershagen: And you were raised in Dinuba?

Raised in Orosi, Visalia, and Bakersfield

Butchert: I was raised variously in Orosi and Visalia and more than any in Bakersfield– graduated from high school from Bakersfield in 1949.

Graduated from Bakersfield High School in 1949

Petershagen: Which high school did you graduate from?

Butchert: Bakersfield High School. At that time it was called Kern County Union High

School, the largest high school in the United States. (Both chuckle.)

Petershagen: Alright. Is it fair to say that . . . . You grew up in agricultural communities? Are you from a farm background?

Grandparents Were Farmers near Orosi and He Spent a Good Deal of Time There on the Farm

Butchert: My parents were not farmers, but my grandparents were. My grandparents were second-generation farmers in the San Joaquin Valley, near Orosi, and I spent a good deal of my youth, particularly summers and one full year, living with my grandparents in Orosi.

Petershagen: So you're really familiar with the San Joaquin Valley's agricultural culture.

Is Familiar with the San Joaquin Valley's Agriculture and the Way People Thing and Feel

Butchert: Yes, I think I am. And I'm acquainted

with the mentality and the way people think and feel here in the valley.

Petershagen: And then from Bakersfield, where did you go?

Attended College at the University of California-Berkeley, Bakersfield College, Western State College, and Fresno State University

Butchert: Well, I went away to school at University of California-Berkeley, back to Bakersfield College in 1951.

Drafted into the Army in 1952 Where He Went to Officer Candidate School and Received a Commission in the Corps of Engineers in 1954

Korean War came along about that time, or was underway at that time, and I was drafted into the Army in 1952. I elected to go to Officer Candidate School while I was in the Army and received a commission in the Corps of Engineers in 1954. Then I spent two years on active duty in Colorado

and was discharged in 1956. Went back to school at Western State College in Gunnison, Colorado, for a year; fell in love, and met the girl I wanted to marry there, and we got married. And she was pursuing an education degree, and I was pursuing an engineering degree. And they didn't offer the engineering degree at Western State, so we came back to California and went to Fresno State University.

Graduated from Fresno State University in 1959 with a Degree in Civil Engineering

At that time we both graduated from Fresno State–I in 1959.

Petershagen: Did you maintain a connection with the Army, stay in the reserve or anything like that after you . . .

"I stayed in the reserves for about eight years, because,

you know, at that time it was a source of income, that came in real handy. . . ."

Butchert: I stayed in the reserves for about eight years, because, you know, at that time it was a source of income, that came in real handy. And I stayed in a reserve unit here in Fresno, but in 1965 we moved to Santa Rosa, and the job I took up there was so time consuming, and the kids were just getting at the age where they were very active in things, and the reserve went to weekend drills, all weekend, instead of one night a week. So all things considered, I concluded it was time to retire from the reserves and make sure I had plenty of time to spend with my family.

Petershagen: So your total Army time is about eight or ten years?

Butchert: Twelve years.

Petershagen: What's your degree in from Fresno State?

Butchert: Civil engineering–Bachelor of Science in civil engineering.

Petershagen: And is there any specialty attached to that?

Butchert: No.

Petershagen: Then what was your first civilian job?

First Job Was with the Fresno Irrigation District

Butchert: First civilian job was kind of a toss-up at that time. There were two jobs that were offered me: one with the State of California Division of Highways, up on the Sacramento River for $505 a month, and I was also offered a job by the Fresno Irrigation District here in Fresno for $508 a month. So we took the one for $508 a month, and I went to the Fresno Irrigation District as an assistant engineer.

Petershagen: Couldn't turn down the big bucks, huh? (Laughter)

Butchert: Couldn't turn down that kind of money. Besides, with my background, I have an affinity for water and for agriculture, and I think it was just kind of natural I head in that direction.

Petershagen: Now that was with the City of Fresno, or was it a separate water district?

Butchert: No, it's a separate water district, Fresno Irrigation District. You know, it started back in the 1800s as a private company, and ultimately became an irrigation district. Serves about a quarter of a million acres in and around the City of Fresno.

Petershagen: Does it also serve the city?

City of Fresno Used its Water to Recharge the Groundwater Because it Doesn't Have a Surface Water Treatment Plant and Wanted to Continue to Use

Butchert: At that time it did not. The city, though, has since entered into a contract with the Bureau of Reclamation and the irrigation district has entered into an agreement with the city that we were talking about back in those days, whereby the irrigation district takes delivery of the city's water and deliberately recharges it into the underground. The city doesn't have a water treatment plant, a surface water treatment plant, and it historically has obtained all its water from the underground, and they wanted to continue to do that, in lieu of building a treatment plant. So the district takes the water, delivers it, recharges the underground, and the city then takes it from the underground.

Worked at the Fresno Irrigation District for Six Years

Petershagen: I see. Then about how long did you work for the Fresno Irrigation District?

In 1965 Went to Work for the Eel River Water Council and Moved to Santa Rosa

Butchert: I was with the district for a total of six years, and in 1965 I took a job with the Eel River Water Council, which was a joint exercise of powers public entity, consisting of ten counties of the North Coast and the Bay Area, and we moved to Santa Rosa, where the office was.

Petershagen: That was headquartered in Santa Rosa?

Butchert: In Santa Rosa, yes.

Petershagen: And that particular group specifically was involved in the proposed projects that involved the Eel River?

Eel River Water Council Put Together Because of the Flood of 1964

Butchert: That's correct. The organization was put together following the flood of 1964, a devastating flood on the North Coast, particularly in the Eel River Basin.

". . . at that time the Eel River was looked upon to be the next component of the State [Water] Project after completion of Oroville Reservoir. . . ."

And so the counties up there got together, partly as a result of that, and partly due to the realization that at that time the Eel River was looked upon to be the next component of the State [Water] Project after completion of Oroville Reservoir.

"It was known at that time that while the state had contracts for water service, amounting to about 4.3 million acre-feet, the system as it was under construction and built at that time could only supply about half of that. . . ."

It was known at that time that while the state had contracts for water service, amounting to about 4.3 million acre-feet,

the system as it was under construction and built at that time could only supply about half of that.

Dos Rios Project and English Ridge Project

And so they were looking for further sources, and the source they looked at was the Upper Eel River, particularly the Dos Rios Project and the English Ridge Project.

"So those counties up there wanted to protect themselves against adverse impacts of that plus they were very interested in obtaining flood control benefits from those projects for the Lower Eel. They were interested in developing more recreational opportunities as offered by lakes and reservoirs for tourism . . ."

So those counties up there wanted to protect themselves against adverse impacts of that plus they were very interested in obtaining flood control benefits from those projects for the Lower Eel. They were interested in developing

more recreational opportunities as offered by lakes and reservoirs for tourism, which was a big industry, and *is*, I guess, on the North Coast.

Clear Lake Was a Big Issue Due to Algae Blooms

A big issue had to do, and one of the largest issues, had to do with Clear Lake, which at that time, and to this day, is infested with algae, which makes it unattractive at certain times of the year for boating and skiing and one thing and another.

". . . they also had a very strong interest in taking Eel River water and transporting it *through* Clear Lake as a means of flushing the lake. . . ."

And so they also had a very strong interest in taking Eel River water and transporting it *through* Clear Lake as a means of flushing the lake.

". . . the southernmost counties–Marin, Solano, Yolo, Sonoma, Mendocino, and Contra Costa–all had an interest in obtaining a . . . supplemental water supply from the Eel River. So for different reasons the counties joined together in forming that organization . . ."

And the southernmost counties–Marin, Solano, Yolo, Sonoma, Mendocino, and Contra Costa–all had an interest in obtaining a water supply–a supplemental water supply from the Eel River. So for different reasons the counties joined together in forming that organization, but it was centered around promoting what they termed "the comprehensive and the proper kind of development for the Eel River."

Petershagen: Okay, I want to come back to that Eel River, that whole era, in a few minutes. But if we could, just to kind of continue on with your life, where did you go then from

there?

"In 1972, I think it was, the State Legislature passed the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Governor Reagan signed that bill, and that kind of put an end to the Eel River Water Council. . . ."

Butchert: In 1972, I think it was, the State Legislature passed the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Governor Reagan signed that bill, and that kind of put an end to the Eel River Water Council. (Chuckles)

". . . I was on the lookout for something else, and . . . Metropolitan Water District of Southern California [MWD] wanted somebody to take their Washington office because they had a bill that they were very interested in getting through Congress. . . ." so moved to Washington, D.C., in 1973.

And so I was on the lookout for something else, and it so happened that the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California [MWD] wanted somebody to take their Washington office because they had a bill that they were very interested in

getting through Congress. They offered a job to me, and I took it. So we moved to Washington, D.C., in 1973.

Petershagen: Then how long were you there?

Moved from Washington, D.C., to Fresno in the Fall of 1977 to Become General Manager of Westlands Water District

Butchert: I was there until the fall of 1977, at which time I was offered the opportunity to come out here and interview for the job here as General Manager of Westlands. I did that. They made me an offer of the job, and I took it, and moved back to Fresno in 1977.

Petershagen: Were you fed up with Washington by that time? A lot of Californians (Butchert chuckles) feel out of their element back there. Would you have come back here for just about any job? (Butchert: No.) Or was it Westlands specifically?

". . . the first year back there [D.C.], neither my wife or I cared for it. . . ."

Butchert: No, as a matter of fact, the first year back there, neither my wife or I cared for it. The different climate, different way of doing business–personal business– different bugs–I think somebody was in bed their entire first year with some kind of flu or some nutty thing.

". . . after a few years we kind of got to where we liked it. We bought an old, 1890 Victorian home in Falls Church, Virginia, and just loved it . . . I observed many of my colleagues who were from California back there . . . all of a sudden they woke up one day and they decided 'this is our home.' And I never considered Washington or Virginia to be my permanent home. I always considered California or the West to be my permanent home. . . ."

But after a few years we kind of got to where we liked it. We bought an old, 1890 Victorian home in Falls Church, Virginia, and just loved it, remodeled it. But I observed many of my colleagues who were

from California back there–we had a very large California state society back there–many of them, when they went back there, their kids started going through school, started going to college, met and married people, and all of a sudden they woke up one day and they decided "this is our home." And I never considered Washington or Virginia to be my permanent home. I always considered California or the West to be my permanent home.

"So it was with some reluctance that we moved out. My wife *loved* the house and really didn't want to move back to Fresno at that time. She kind of came kicking. . . ."

So when this opportunity came along, I took it, partly for that reason. My family was all here in California–my

personal family–my wife's family is in Colorado, and we just did not want to become permanent residents of the East Coast. So it was with some reluctance that we moved out. My wife *loved* the house and really didn't want to move back to Fresno at that time. She kind of came kicking. (Both chuckle) But we ultimately did settle out here. Coincident with that, my daughter, who *did* go to college back there at Virginia Tech, met and married a man from Virginia Tech. While she didn't stay there, they did move to Colorado. So they did come part way.

Petershagen: Alright! Then you've been in this job then for, gosh, it's getting close to twenty years–seventeen or eighteen years.

Butchert: Well, it's right at seventeen years. I came

here seventeen years ago this month, as a matter of fact, in October.

Petershagen: And you plan to be here a few more, I take it?

Butchert: I plan to retire next May. I've already announced that, and by that time I will have had close to thirty years in the water business, and it's time to move on and do some other things.

Petershagen: Okay, before we move on in the interview, let me make sure that I'm correct. I believe that Westlands is the Bureau's biggest Central Valley Project customer, is that correct? (Butchert: Yes, it is.) And can you give us an idea of how much area you cover?

Westlands Water District

Butchert: Westlands covers about 600,000 acres. Of

that about 560,000 are irrigable. That is to say actual land that is capable of growing crops.

"We have a contract with the Bureau of Reclamation for 1.15 million acre-feet of water per year, and that is somewhat insufficient. In the San Joaquin Valley to irrigate 550,000 acres of lands requires about 1.5 million acre-feet . . ."

We have a contract with the Bureau of Reclamation for 1.15 million acre-feet of water per year, and that is somewhat insufficient. In the San Joaquin Valley to irrigate 550,000 acres of lands requires about 1.5 million acre-feet in actuality, in order to bring crops to fruition. In Arizona it's a good deal more than that, in northern California it's somewhat less, but here in this valley it takes about that amount of water. So we are the largest contractor.

"The district is by-and-large row crop land, although

permanent crops are becoming more and more prevalent . . .”

The district is by-and-large row crop land, although permanent crops are becoming more and more prevalent as time goes on. But it has historically been row-cropped.

“Prior to obtaining the Bureau contract, the land was irrigated entirely with ground water, and there was a badly depleting groundwater situation . . . the quality of the ground water is very poor . . .”

Prior to obtaining the Bureau contract, the land was irrigated entirely with ground water, and there was a badly depleting groundwater situation out there over the years, although they did start irrigating that land clear back in the 1920s and did very well. In addition, the quality of the ground water is very poor and has a lot of salt in the water and over time is not

good for the land.

". . . the district decided back in the '50s to form a district and seek a freshwater source from the Delta . . ."

So for those reasons the district decided back in the '50s to form a district and seek a freshwater source from the Delta, and that they did.

Petershagen: Now, just for the record, let me ask you one other personal question: Do you farm yourself besides this job?

Butchert: No, I do not farm.

Petershagen: I'm assuming, though, that probably the majority of your board of directors would be farmers or ranchers?

"Every one of my directors are engaged in a farming enterprise . . . and they're required by law to be landowners. . . ."

Butchert: Every one of my directors are engaged in a farming enterprise–some of them farm

directly, others work for or are a partner in or owner of a farming operation, and they're required by law to be landowners.

Petershagen: Does that requirement extend to them to be customers of the district also? (Butchert: No.) Just a property owner within the district.

Butchert: Must be a landowner to be a director on Westlands' board.

The Eel River and the Book *The River Stops Here*

Petershagen: Alright. Now, if we could get out of the details of Westlands, then, I guess, and go back. One facet of your career that I think is extremely interesting, and you and I have talked on the telephone about this book [holds up book], *The River Stops Here*, by Ted Simon, which is his version of all the events surrounding the Eel River

and the proposed water development there. So I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about details in the book. He refers to a thing called the Eel River Association (Butchert: Yes.) which I think is the equivalent of what you called the Eel River Water Council.[2]

"The original name was the Eel River Association, and some years after I got there we changed the name to the Eel River Water Council. . . ."

Butchert: Right.

Petershagen: Now you described it as being largely–if I heard you correctly–a local area kind of an association. If he doesn't come right out and say it, he certainly does by implication, that this was more of a kind of a mouthpiece for the Metropolitan Water

2. Ted Simon, *The River Stops Here: How One Man's Battle to Save His Valley Changed the Fate of California* (New York: Random House, 1994), 18.

District.[3]

Eel River Water Council Was Not Representing the Interests of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

Butchert: That's totally incorrect. The organization was organized, set up, and governed by the counties that formed the association. The representatives on the board of the association were appointed by the county boards of supervisors of those counties up there. And as I recollect there were two members of each board of supervisors, according to the bylaws, had to be on the board, and then they had other people who were either actively involved in the water business in those areas–for example, the general manager of the North Marin Water District, general manager of Marin

3. Simon, *The River Stops Here*, 38, 135.

Municipal Water District, the chief engineer of the Sonoma County Water Agency–people like that, a county administrator here or there, were also appointed to the Board of Directors. So his characterization of that was just totally false.

Petershagen: I guess in his behalf, I might say in a way you might see how he might conclude that if you worked for that outfit, and then went to work for the Metropolitan Water District later on (Butchert laughs), but I'm not so sure that the chain of evidence is there to make the story all fit together. (Butchert: Nope.) Well, in that job, you were the general manager of that council?

Butchert: I think the title at that time was executive officer.

Petershagen: Okay. And it looks to me like it was largely a public relations job, an educational kind of a job?

"The organization was formed to *promote* the development of the Eel River. . . ."

Butchert: That is correct, it was that. The organization was formed to *promote* the development of the Eel River. They very definitely wanted to see the construction of dams and reservoirs on that river, and that was very clear.

"They felt that they needed a larger organization, because politically the North Coast doesn't have a whole lot of clout. . . ."

They felt that they needed a larger organization, because politically the North Coast doesn't have a whole lot of clout. So they wanted to band together to give them a little bit more effective voice in

guiding things.

"So my job was part political–I did a fair amount of lobbying . . . tell the story of the North Coast as that board *wanted* it to be told, and describe the needs and the desires and the wishes of the North Coast as it pertained to development of the Eel River. . . ."

So my job was part political–I did a fair amount of lobbying when I was up there on behalf of the organization–and partly promotional in the sense that we were out there trying to put forth, in whatever form was available–be it through water meetings or statewide water organizations, local news media, statewide media, national news media–try to tell the story of the North Coast as that board *wanted* it to be told, and describe the needs and the desires and the wishes of the North Coast as it pertained to development of the Eel River.

"At that time the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation and the Department of Water Resources were actively planning the construction of dams and conveyance facilities on the Eel River . . . And we tried to be engaged in that process with the Bureau and with the Corps and with the state, to recommend things to them, obtain whatever documents we could from them . . . translate technical information to basically lay boards of supervisors so that they knew what was going on . . . So the organization was designed to have an input into the planning process so that their wishes were known, and the things that went into the final product, they at least had a say in. . . ."

At that time the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation and the Department of Water Resources were actively planning the construction of dams and conveyance facilities on the Eel River–very actively planning that. Nothing was authorized for construction at that time, but there was a *lot* of planning and activity. And we tried to be engaged in that process with the Bureau and with

the Corps and with the state, to recommend things to them, obtain whatever documents we could from them, and my background as an engineer gave me the ability to read those documents and translate technical information to basically lay boards of supervisors so that they knew what was going on and had a chance to react to that sort of thing, and that enabled us then to be active participants with the Corps and with the Bureau and with the state of California. So the organization was designed to have an input into the planning process so that their wishes were known, and the things that went into the final product, they at least had a say in.

Petershagen: Then it looks to me that the whole idea of Dos Rios or Eel River development was

largely a partnership with those North Coast area counties, and I think probably more than anybody at first, the Corps of Engineers. Is that correct?

The Corps Was Active, as Was the State as it Looked for Additional Water Supply

Butchert: Certainly they were probably the most active because they were working at that time in pretty close cooperation with the state. The state was probably the driving force for the development in terms of having the need for the water supply, because as I described earlier, they were looking beyond Oroville. They needed to find an additional supply of water to fulfill the contracts, and at that time the logical source of that was the North Coast.

"Forty percent of the runoff in the state of California occurs in the North Coast rivers. And so that was

looked upon as being the supply. . . ."

Forty percent of the runoff in the state of California occurs in the North Coast rivers. And so that was looked upon as being the supply. The cooperation of those counties was solicited *by* the state, and *by* the Corps of Engineers, because they wanted to have the counties on board.

Dealings with Members of Congress

Whatever came along, they wanted to have that local support. I remember our Congressman, Don Clausen at that time, was very actively engaged at the congressional level, with the Corps of Engineers–less so with the State of California, but more directly with the Corps, because he sat on the committee that authorized Corps projects. (Chuckles)

Petershagen: And from everything I've read and heard and seen, Congressman Clausen was a big mover behind this. You must have spent a good deal of time with him, or at least somebody from his staff, I would think.

Butchert: With him, mostly, although his field man, Ray Paschke lived in Santa Rosa and was also very active in following what we did as an organization and attended probably all of our meetings. Don was very much engaged, and I spent a fair amount of time with him in Washington, talking over issues and problems and legislation and appropriations and that kind of thing.

Petershagen: Was there help available from any of the other members of the California congressional delegation? Any of the senators get involved during that period of

time?

Butchert: I think we did have some discussions, although very low-level discussions with Senator [George L.] Murphy. We had some dealings with [Congressman Harold T.] "Bizz" Johnson, because Bizz was also, I think, on public works committees, also on Interior Committee.

". . . probably our most significant activity at that time dealt with the Appropriations Committee, because we were back there supporting appropriations for these studies . . . making sure the money was there to carry out the studies. . . ."

I think probably our most significant activity at that time dealt with the Appropriations Committee, because we were back there supporting appropriations for these studies, so that they could continue to carry out these studies and trying to offer some direction as to which

way they should be going. And the Corps of Engineers relied *on* the appropriations to carry these things out. So I would say our most *significant* activity at that time had to do with making sure the money was there to carry out the studies.

Petershagen: How would you describe Don Clausen?

Butchert: (Chuckles) Don was an interesting guy– totally political. Seemed like every time I was with him he had to make a speech about how we had to elect more Republicans, (Laughter) that the world would be all right if we could elect more Republicans to the House of Representatives. And I'm a Republican, and while I did not necessarily argue with that, I thought he carried it a little bit too far. But he was a good guy to get along

with, and very much in tune with what we were doing, I think, in the Water Council, and very supportive of all the efforts. Of course he had good backing because local politicians on boards of supervisors were in touch with, at that time, feelings of communities, and I think accurately portrayed those to the Congressmen.

Petershagen: My sense of that whole era of Eel River development is that it was probably pretty popular in the local area at first, or as more and more people found out about it, it made sense to them. And then over time, opposition started to build.

Opposition to Projects on the Eel River Grew Gradually

Butchert: That is correct. That's an accurate portrayal.

Petershagen: Again, in the Simon book, his principal

character is Richard Wilson, whom he gives credit for being the man that stood up and stopped the whole process. Is that a fair summary?

Dick Wilson and Opposition to Eel River Development

Butchert: I think that's a fair summary. Dick Wilson was a newcomer to the area up there, came from a wealthy family in Southern California, bought a cattle ranch in Round Valley near Covelo, became aware of the Dos Rios Project, which would have flooded Round Valley, had it been built. I think [he] took it upon himself as kind of a personal crusade to prevent that because he kind of found his "Shangri La," if I can call it that, and he didn't want anybody messing with it. (Chuckles) And he's a very smart, intelligent individual–very

intelligent individual–and was able to parlay the forces that were emerging at that time. And I want to say that time was around 1972, ‘73, along in there, ‘71, ‘72, and those were the objects of the environmental forces. The environmental movement was just beginning to kind of awaken and gain momentum.

“. . . opposition to development on the Eel River began in Marin County as a result of, I think, Dick Wilson’s efforts. . . .”

I think Dick very skillfully parlayed those feelings, particularly in the southern part of the area, Marin County, and the opposition to development on the Eel River began in Marin County as a result of, I think, Dick Wilson’s efforts. And he found some kindred spirits in Marin County and was able to utilize that emerging environmental

consciousness into bringing the project to a halt–ultimately resulted in the enactment of the California Scenic and Wild River System.

Petershagen: Now that project–I've seen two possible physical descriptions of it. One is the Clear Lake kind of a passage that you already described. Another is a direct tunnel into the valley that would have left Clear Lake out of the picture. (Butchert: Correct.) But then in either case, the idea was to get this water into the California Aqueduct, correct? (Butchert: That's correct.) And that would have been the main conveyance down here and farther south, wherever the destination of that water was.

". . . the Eel River Water Council very *strenuously*

objected to the easterly route for the conveyance of that water into the Sacramento *Valley* . . . We got in big fights with the Department of Water Resources director . . .”

Butchert: That’s correct. I should say that the Eel River Water Council very *strenuously* objected to the easterly route for the conveyance of that water into the Sacramento *Valley–very* strenuously objected to it. We got in *big* fights with the Department of Water Resources director at that time. (Chuckles)

Petershagen: Why was that?

Butchert: Well, because there was no apparent benefit to the southern counties. It totally bypassed them. It totally bypassed Clear Lake. And the only reason Lake County was in this game was because they wanted the water to go *through* Clear Lake so it would flush out the algae. The only reason

Sonoma, Mendocino, Napa, Solano, were in it was because they looked upon this as a supplemental water supply–bypassed that totally. And so we had a *major*, major confrontation with DWR [California Department of Water Resources] over that issue.

Petershagen: So your constituents–your *employers*, actually–a good share of them then were opposed to the bypass of Clear Lake.

Butchert: Adamantly opposed to it.

Petershagen: I see. Well, let's stop right here then, and I'll turn the tape over.

Butchert: Okay.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 20, 1994.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 20, 1994.

Petershagen: Jerry, as we were discussing the Eel River Water Council and the Dos Rios Project

and so forth, you mentioned disagreements, especially with the Director of the Department of Water Resources. Who was that at the time?

Butchert: Bill Gianelli.

Petershagen: And Bill wanted the direct shot into the valley? Or he just wanted to get the water there whichever way? Or what was his position?

". . . his [Bill Gianelli's] position was to take the water directly east into the Sacramento Valley and thence to the Sacramento River. And I think it was probably based mainly on cost considerations. There were some horrendous technical problems with the tunnel going east, as there was with a tunnel going anywhere up in that country. . . ."

Butchert: Well, his position was to take the water directly east into the Sacramento Valley and thence to the Sacramento River. And I think it was probably based mainly on cost considerations. There were some

horrendous technical problems with the tunnel going east, as there was with a tunnel going anywhere up in that country. The geology is–I forget the exact term–serpentine, broken up rocks and everything like that–no solid granite. And it's very difficult to build a tunnel in situations like that–that's a stable tunnel–let alone maintain it. And we maintained it would have been much safer and easier and cheaper to go south through what was then called the English Ridge Project, which was a Bureau project on the main stem of the Eel. The water would go from Dos Rios into English Ridge and thence through another short tunnel into the upper reaches of Clear Lake. And so we just had an honest disagreement, and Bill was a

very . . . determined man, and we were very determined, and so we did have some serious disagreements about that. (Both chuckle)

Petershagen: Besides being determined, how would you describe Bill Gianelli?

Bill Gianelli

Butchert: Professional. Engineer to the core. Very cognizant of the costs of doing business. I would say he was as much concerned about the costs of the water project and the ability of the state to finance it and the ability of the users to pay for it, as much as anything. Enormous amount of energy, enthusiasm, determination, single-mindedness. Bill, once he got into something, he was just a bulldog. He'd just put his head down and just go right

straight ahead, and "get out of the way!" you know. He was that type of guy, but a very likeable guy. And while we disagreed–he and I disagreed on issues–we, I think, became very good friends. And, you know, we each recognized that we each had the ability to disagree, and we didn't mind disagreeing with one another, but it was a very friendly relationship, despite that.

Petershagen: Alright, thank you. I certainly don't know him as well as you do, but I think I would have used probably all those words in describing (Laughter) the man that I know, too.

Butchert: He's very obvious. He's not the least bit subtle. (Laughter)

Petershagen: When the opposition really got to be strong

. . . . Well, let me ask it this way. Was there a time when you could point to when you realized that the project was not going to come about?

California's Scenic and Wild Rivers Act Spelled the End of Eel River Development

Butchert: (Long pause) Yes. And I think it had to do when we realized that at that time Governor Reagan was going to sign the Scenic and Wild Rivers Act. We had thought a few years before that, through the efforts of [state] Senator Randy Collier, who was *our* Senator at the time, in putting together . . . I can't remember the name of the program, Protected Waterways Program, I think it was, which basically did what the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act did for all of the North Coast rivers, except for selective reaches of the Eel. And we

tried to carve out those sections of the Eel River that covered the Dos Rios Project and English Ridge Project and provide essentially the equivalent protection for the other North Coastal rivers–not quite as stringently as the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would have done because my bosses up there were also mindful of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act impact on logging and road building and all of the other things that it protects, and they didn't want it to be that strict, for a variety of other reasons aside from dams and reservoirs and that sort of thing. So we crafted together the Protected Waterways Plan, and that passed the Legislature, but the main author of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which is [state] Senator Peter Behr from Marin

County–he's *also* very determined, and he kept coming back and kept coming back. And when it got to the point where it got to the Governor's desk, we had a meeting with the Governor–took over a delegation of my directors–and we met with the governor for the better part of an hour, explained *our* case. We also knew that he had a meeting with the environmentalists, headed by Peter Behr, who wanted him to sign the bill. We wanted him to veto the bill. When we heard that he was going to sign the bill, then we knew it was all over. That was the end of it.

Petershagen: I guess that's pretty close to the full list of questions I expected to ask you about the Eel River. Is there anything that you'd care to add on your own?

Butchert: I think that covers it. I think I became, as a result of that whole process of going through that process . . . The fight over the wild and scenic rivers was a different kind of fight than fighting with Bill Gianelli over which way to take the water. And it was a different kind of fight than we had convincing the Corps of Engineers to do this or that or the other thing. It became more "the ends justify the means" kind of a fight.

". . . one of the things in that fight that outraged me more than anything else was an ad that appeared in *Time* magazine, full-page ad, and it showed a stretch of the Eel River. And it said that this piece of river was going to be dammed, and this beautiful stretch of river would be forever underwater. And that picture in the ad didn't look like any part of the Eel River that we were talking about . . . It just characterized to me the dishonesty in running a campaign. It was not based upon fact. It was not based upon reasonable . . . In my mind it was somewhat scurrilous and misleading, but the thing that came back to me–well, the other side in that context were the environmentalists–whatever

justifies what they want to do, that's what they will do–that's what they did *then*. And I was very bitter about that. I was very disillusioned by that kind of tactics. . . ."

And I think one of the things in that fight that outraged me more than anything else was an ad that appeared in *Time* magazine, full-page ad, and it showed a stretch of the Eel River. And it said that this piece of river was going to be dammed, and this beautiful stretch of river would be forever underwater. And that picture in the ad didn't look like any part of the Eel River that we were talking about, that *I* knew about, up around Round Valley or up the upper main stem. It looked suspiciously like the South Fork, which *is* a beautiful stretch of river along Highway 101. And I remember we went up and drove up and down that South Fork,

and we found the spot–found the exact spot. You could frame it with our camera! That's the picture that they took. It just characterized to me the dishonesty in running a campaign. It was not based upon fact. It was not based upon reasonable, you know, stand-up-and-duke-it-out-like-a-man type of thing. It was a different kind of a campaign. In my mind it was somewhat scurrilous and misleading, but the thing that came back to me–well, the other side in that context were the environmentalists–whatever justifies what they want to do, that's what they will do–that's what they did *then*. And I was very bitter about that. I was very disillusioned by that kind of tactics.

Petershagen: That sort of a thing, I'm sure, certainly

helped to prepare you for this job.

Butchert: (Chuckles) Well, it was an awakening to the real world–I'll put it that way.

Petershagen: Was there anything in working previously for the irrigation district here that prepared you for that sort of a thing?

Butchert: No. No. My relationships in dealing with other people and dealing with issues has always been one of trying to deal with them straightforwardly and honestly. And that's the way I was brought up. That's the way I dealt with people when I worked with the irrigation district. That's the way I dealt with things up there, until that. But it was, you know, a maturing thing, because then I realized, well, this is the way a lot of things work, and you'd better recognize that. I still, to this day, hue to

the line that that's not the way to do things. That's not the *proper* way to act. That's not the proper way to accomplish things. But I do know it's out there, and I do know that there are people who do that. I just recognize it.

Petershagen: So from that experience you went to work for the Metropolitan Water District.

Went to Work for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California [Metropolitan, Met, MWD]

Butchert: Right. At that time I was not out of a job when the Governor signed the bill. I want to say he signed the bill the latter part of 1972–I think that's what it was. And so we all knew that was it. The council stayed together for some time, and I can remember one of the directors, one of the people, they were kind of moaning about,

"Well, what's Jerry going to do?" this kind of thing. "We've got to find something for him." And one of the directors, a guy by the name of Bert Smith from Sonoma County said, "Don't worry about Jerry. He'll land on his feet." (Petershagen laughs) In fact, I can remember that comment to this day!

In 1973 He Was Invited to Work for MWD in Washington, D.C.

And along about June–May or June of '73–I got a call from Al Williams who was the Director of Public Relations at Metropolitan. And they had an office in Washington, and it had a secretary there at that time, and prior to that time, about a year or two before that, they had Bob Will, who was their first full-time lobbyist back there. Bob had been moved to

Sacramento, set up shop in Sacramento, and he was moved out there *especially* by Metropolitan to promote the Peripheral Canal. His job was to go to Sacramento and see to it that the Peripheral Canal gets authorized and built. So that office was vacant out there.

MWD Wanted Him to Work on the Colorado River Salinity Bill

Al called me up and we met and we had lunch at Scoma's in San Francisco, and he said, "We got this project back in Washington. It's called the Colorado River Salinity Bill, and we want somebody to staff the office back there and work with the Congress in getting that bill passed." And he said, "Well, things don't look too good up here." I said, "No. Let me talk it

over with my wife."

Leaving Santa Rosa Was Hard for the Family Because They Liked the Town and the Home They Had Built

It turned out we had–soon after we moved to Santa Rosa, we bought a lot up in the hills between Santa Rosa and Calistoga–beautiful, beautiful lot with fir trees and everything, lovely view–and we had paid that lot off in 1972 and designed the house, our own design of the house, drew up the plans and worked on the construction of that house. My boys helped me pour the foundation when they were eight and ten years old, eleven years old or something like that. And I built all the cabinets, and we just put a lot of sweat and energy into building that house, and *loved* it, just loved the house. Moved into it in January of 1973, and there was a very,

very agonizing decision that we just literally cried over, the prospect of leaving Santa Rosa–and boy, we *loved* the town–and moving back to Washington, D. C. Finally, literally, it was either that or, you know, I was going to be out of a job. So I accepted it, and went back there. But it was *very*, very painful for my wife and myself and the kids. The kids were just devastated. So any connection between what I did on the Eel River and Metropolitan was just absolutely–just absolutely wrong.

Petershagen: One has to wonder about the state of mind when you took this job with the Metropolitan Water District. You had essentially just suffered a heavy defeat (Butchert: Right.) with, at least in your

perception, probably not all the rules of how to fight being followed. (Butchert: Right.) And here you are once again taking what might very well turn out to be the same kind of a job. Did you look at it that way?

"I have an engineering mentality: I like to take on a task and do it. . . . You kind of [have] what I call 'linear thinking,' straight ahead, you know, just do one thing after another, and do it. And that's the way I looked upon the work back there. I *did* enjoy the political arena. . . ."

Butchert: No. Well, I didn't look at it *that* way. I guess I have an engineering mentality: I like to take on a task and do it. And a little bit, Bill's the same way. You kind of [have] what I call "linear thinking," straight ahead, you know, just do one thing after another, and do it. And that's the way I looked upon the work back there. I *did* enjoy the political arena. I enjoyed

politics as an observer. I know I participated, but I enjoyed the things that went into legislating. It was an interesting process to me, intellectually interesting to me. I don't think I was ever very good at it, but I did enjoy doing it and being on the scene. I don't . . .

"After I'd been back there a few years as a lobbyist, I realized that *that* is not what I wanted to do for the rest of my career . . ."

After I'd been back there a few years as a lobbyist, I realized that *that* is not what I wanted to do for the rest of my career, being a lobbyist was not what I want to end my career with.

"But it was a worthwhile experience and a very interesting experience and interesting to work on a piece of legislation where you had a goal out there . . ."

But it was a worthwhile experience and a very interesting experience and interesting

to work on a piece of legislation where you had a goal out there, and just a matter of kind of lining up everything such-and-so, to work that goal through and get there. It was interesting in that respect.

Petershagen: You must have worked fairly closely then with members of the California Congressional delegation.

Worked Closely with the California and Other Colorado River Basin Delegations to Congress

Butchert: Indeed I did. And, as importantly, with members of the delegation of the Colorado River states, because all seven states were involved in that legislation, and all fourteen senators were co-authors of the bill. And about thirty-five or thirty-six representatives from the various states were co-authors.

Ivol Goslin

I worked with a guy from the Upper Basin. He and I were probably the two guys that spent the most amount of time on that legislation. His name was Ival Goslin, and he worked for the Upper Colorado River Commission in Salt Lake. And we became *very* good friends and really worked together as a team. And he kind of brought along the Upper Basin states and I kind of brought along the Lower Basin states.

"Bizz Johnson was clearly the architect. . . ."

And the guy that was sort of the focal point of the whole piece of legislation was Bizz Johnson, who at that time was chair of the Interior Committee. And so we just kind of followed Bizz's lead. You know, he said, "Here's what I

need to have done, I need to have this fellow talked to, I need to have this organization on board, blah, blah, blah." And he was a very careful crafter of legislation. He was very cautious and always sought consensus. He never exercised any leverage to a great extent. He always tried to find that consensus, and he used me as one of his, I guess you could call us, "lieutenants." That's kind of the way I looked upon myself, because I'd go walk into his office maybe twice a week, and we'd sit down and visit about that. We'd just plot out the strategy and everything like that, and then I'd have my kind of (chuckles) marching orders of what to do. And I looked at it the same way. Bizz Johnson was clearly the architect.

Petershagen: And can you spell his name for me, your Upper Basin contact?

Butchert: Ival, I-V-A-L, Goslin, G-O-S-L-I-N.

Petershagen: Thank you. You interfaced with, as you said, congressional delegations from each of the states, and the way I perceive this as having been put together, it was largely ironed out both in the Senate and in the House by the senatorial *and* congressional delegations of the states, and presented as a unified proposal.

Butchert: That's correct, it truly was.

Petershagen: So if there were any hurdles to overcome, it was getting senators from out of the area, congressmen from out of the area, to go along with the bill.

"Probably the biggest roadblock at that time was the Nixon Administration. . . ."

Butchert: *And* the administration. Probably the biggest roadblock at that time was the Nixon Administration.

". . . Watergate was just beginning to emerge as a story. It was fascinating to get up every morning and go out and get the *Washington Post* and read the latest front page article on it. . . ."

And that was the time when we got back there, Watergate was just beginning to emerge as a story. (Chuckles) It was fascinating to get up every morning and go out and get the *Washington Post* and read the latest front page article on it. It was just a fascinating unravelling of events back there at that time.

". . . the administration was the chief opponent . . . treaty with Mexico to provide 'X' amount of water at the border of a certain quality. But in the sense of not wanting to add salinity control projects to the treaty obligation, and then the bill did both. It satisfied the obligations of the treaty, but the states wanted to have these other salinity control projects for Upper Basin and Lower Basin . . . And the administration was greatly weakened by what was going on with

Watergate, and . . . Craig Hosmer . . . says, 'You just put anything we want to in that bill and it'll go.' 'Why?!' 'Well, because the administration is against it. Therefore, the members up here will be for it.' . . . it's just as simple as that. . . . They could just do what they wanted to with the administration because Nixon was so weakened by Watergate. . . ."

But the administration *was*, I would say the administration was the chief opponent, in the sense of not meeting the obligations with respect to Mexico. Because Nixon at that time had worked on the treaty with Mexico to provide "X" amount of water at the border of a certain quality. But in the sense of not wanting to add salinity control projects to the treaty obligation, and then the bill did both. It satisfied the obligations of the treaty, but the states wanted to have these other salinity control projects for Upper Basin and Lower Basin as a part of the package

in order to pass it. And the administration was greatly weakened by what was going on with Watergate, and I remember at the time Craig Hosmer, who was also the ranking minority member on that committee, from Long Beach, I remember a conversation with him saying, "Gee whiz, you know, we've got the administration against us. They got all these other things, blah, blah, blah." And Craig says, "You just put anything we want to in that bill and it'll go." "Why?!" "Well, because the administration is against it. Therefore, the members up here will be for it." I mean, it's just as simple as that. He's right. They could just do what they wanted to with the administration because Nixon was so

weakened by Watergate.

Petershagen: Very interesting observation.

Butchert: Yeah, it was–coming from a Republican.

Petershagen: Yeah, and a California Republican, to boot!

Butchert: *Southern* California Republican! (laughter)

Petershagen: This is certainly somewhat out of sequence, but let me ask you one or two questions about the Metropolitan Water District. (Butchert: Sure.) And again, principally it comes from the Simon book. Well, another one I have with me is the famous, or perhaps infamous, *Cadillac Desert*.[4] It says a little bit about the Metropolitan Water District too. But characterization of MWD as being run by

4. Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*. New York: Viking, 1986.

the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Is that fair or not?

Disputes Ted Simon's Assertion in *the River Stops Here* That MWD Was Run by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

Butchert: No. Not at all fair, and not true. In fact, if you talk to Los Angeles members of the board the organization was run by the rural areas of Riverside and Orange Counties at that time. (Chuckles) They were the ones, according to the L-A Directors. L-A had the most votes of any agency, but *far* short of a majority. There were like fifty-one members on the board at that time I think, and I believe L-A *at most* had nine or ten–eleven, along in there. So it was certainly not run by the Department of Water and Power.

Petershagen: So I guess the follow-up question, You

didn't feel an allegiance to the L-A Department of Water and Power at all, then, (Butchert: None whatever.) in your capacity of working for Metropolitan.

Butchert: In fact, the L-A Department of Water and Power were not–the member agency was the City of Los Angeles, and the members of the board were appointed by the Mayor, not by the Department of Water and Power. There was a separate agency. Although the *water* that the City of L-A got was with the Department of Water and Power. They had the distribution system and all that. The Mayor made all the appointments. They were basically political appointments that he made.

Petershagen: And all the time you worked for MWD you were back in Washington?

"I would come out to the board meetings once a month . . . I'd come out on a Sunday night. We'd have committee meetings Monday and board meetings, and then I would be on the plane going back to Washington that afternoon, as a rule . . ."

Butchert: Yes. I would come out to the board meetings once a month, and that was really the only chance I had to get acquainted with staff. You know, I'd come out on a Sunday night. We'd have committee meetings Monday and board meetings, and then I would be on the plane going back to Washington that afternoon, as a rule, or Tuesday.

". . . I was kind of insulated from a lot of internal politics at Metropolitan. . . ."

So I was kind of insulated from a lot of internal politics at Metropolitan.

". . . my basic contacts were Al Williams who was my immediate boss, and the guy who's Al Williams' boss was Dave Kennedy. . . ."

I was back there [in Washington,

D.C.] full-time, and my basic contacts were Al Williams who was my immediate boss, and the guy who's Al Williams' boss was Dave Kennedy. So Al and Dave and John Lott was General Manager. Didn't have a whole lot to do with John except every once in a while he'd write about something. And I'd known John from Fresno, because John used to be the City Attorney at Fresno when I was with Fresno Irrigation District, so we went back a long ways. But it was Al Williams and Dave that most of my contact was with.

Petershagen: Alright, besides Congressional delegations, then while you were in Washington you certainly must have interfaced with the people in the Bureau of Reclamation, Corps of Engineers, the different water

kinds of organizations. True? False?

Butchert: Bureau of Reclamation, yes. Corps of Engineers, very little. But the Bureau, yes, because they were the ones that were authorized by the Salinity Act to carry out the mandates of that. So yes, we dealt with . . . The guy who was commissioner at that time was old Floyd Dominy.

Petershagen: You anticipated my next question! (Laughter) Tell us about Dominy. What are your recollections of him?

Floyd Dominy

Butchert: (Laughing) Well, Floyd was a wheeler-dealer. And he was a pretty good operator. He's also a rounder. He liked to party and hobnob and do the bon vivant and all that kind of thing. He was enamored with women, was always flirting with some

woman. Every time I'd go to a party, if he was there, he was always flirting with someone, including my wife. (Both chuckle) But at that time, he was kind of at the . . . maybe a little beyond the peak of his power and influence, but still kind of there. He was coming on the downhill side. But he enjoyed the prestige and the power of being the commissioner of Reclamation, and he flaunted it and let everybody know about it, and you knew who was front and center: Floyd Dominy.

Petershagen: In the course of doing that, did you make any contacts, perhaps with Bureau people that have served you well now that you're here at Westlands?

Billy Martin and Jim Casey

Butchert: In those days, let's see, probably the most

important contact I had was with Billy Martin, who was then I think chief of planning, or assistant chief of Planning in the Bureau in Washington, then came out and became regional director in Sacramento. The other one was not a Bureau employee but was a former Bureau employee, and that's Jim Casey. Jim was Bizz Johnson's Chief of Staff. And Jim knew the Bureau inside and out. I mean, he knew where everybody was in the Bureau, and Jim and I were very good friends–continue to be to this day. So that was a really, really good contact for me back there.

Gil Stamm and Jim O'Brien

I'm trying to think, there's not a whole lot of Bureau employees that I

remember back there that I associated with too much when I came out here, aside from Billy. Gil Stamm was there for a while, but he wasn't there very long. Jim O'Brien was a good solid guy, but he, shortly after I was there, went with World Bank. I'd have to think on that a little while. It's been a while (Both chuckle) and I can't remember just who was there. I would say Jim Casey was a great help.

Tony Coehlo and Bernie Fisk

And the other contact that I had a *lot* to do with, and got acquainted with when I went back to Washington, and spent a lot of time discussing and that sort of thing, was Tony Coehlo who was Bernie Sisk's Chief of Staff, at that time–of course went on to succeed Sisk in

Congress.

Petershagen: Then when did you come out here to Westlands?

Butchert: Fall of 1977.

Moved to Westlands Water District in the Fall of 1977

Petershagen: And as you said before, you've been here ever since. (Butchert: Yes.) I think in your earlier description of the district, there was a deficit in the amount of water that you needed versus what you buy from the Bureau under contract. How do you get the rest of it?

How Westlands Supplements the Water it Contracts from Reclamation

Butchert: The rest of it at that time was made available to us [as] what they called "interim water."

". . . each and every year following the drought of 1977, until the latter '80s, we were able–well, actually until the San Felipe Project went on-line–we were able to get

what they called interim water. And interim water, by definition, is water that is under contract to somebody else, within the yield to the project, but not being used. . . ."

We got our contractual amount of 1.15 million acre-feet, but each and every year following the drought of 1977, until the latter '80s, we were able–well, actually until the San Felipe Project went on-line–we were able to get what they called interim water. And interim water, by definition, is water that is under contract to somebody else, within the yield to the project, but not being used. Classic case: East Bay MUD [Municipal Utility District] has a contract for, I think, 50,000 acre-feet of water. Haven't used it, haven't taken a drop of it. Contra Costa County has water under contract that they're not able to take.

So that water was made available to us, same price, on the basis that it was there, it was available, and we were a willing buyer. The Bureau could use the revenue, and so we bought it, and it was available almost every year until the San Felipe Project went on-line.

Petershagen: So in layman's terms it's excess water.

Butchert: Excess water.

Petershagen: East Bay MUD could have called their contract any time they wanted, and you wouldn't have gotten that.

Butchert: That's right.

Petershagen: Is that kind of water still available?

Butchert: No. (Both laugh) The yield of the Central Valley Project has kind of disappeared. The first . . .

Petershagen: Maybe before you start that answer I

should stop you here because we're right at the end of the tape.

Butchert: Okay.

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BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 20, 1994.

Petershagen: Jerry, as we completed the last tape, you were describing the . . . Well, I had asked you if there was any more of the interim water available, and you were starting to describe how things are now, so please continue.

The Available Yield from the Central Valley Project Has Dropped for Several Reasons, and Interim Water Is No Longer Available

Butchert: The answer to that is no, partly because the yield of the project back in the early '80s was assumed to be something on the order of 8 million acre-feet. For a variety of reasons that yield has dropped down to

where it isn't that much, partly for Trinity River outflows and partly for other reasons, quite aside from the Central Valley Project Act or anything like that. But the other reason it is not available is because the San Felipe Project, which serves San Benito and Santa Clara Counties, came on-line in the mid to late '80s, and when that project came on-line, it . . . The combined water diverted for that project, and the federal contractors south of the Delta along the Delta-Mendota Canal in the San Luis Unit, exceeded the capacity of the canal, exceeded the capacity of the Bureau to pump the water to meet all of those needs. So the water we get now is basically confined to what the Bureau can pump us and the rest of us

combined *or* what they can get transported through the state aqueduct [California Aqueduct]. And those are uncertain. So the water is no longer there, to answer your question.

Petershagen: Alright. But as you were talking about water that could be transported through the state aqueduct, so in a way, maybe that doesn't meet the legal definition of interim water, there is that possibility.

Butchert: The possibility is there. They've been hung up on a technical thing for a good many years, and that is the point of diversion. In order to *do* that legally, under state law, they have to get the state board [California Water Rights Board] to authorize that as an additional point of diversion for the federal project, and the

state board hasn't done that. Now, informally, the state and the feds are cooperating. The feds are moving state water when they have the ability to do so, and the state will do the same thing for the feds, but it's very informal, day-to-day kind of arrangements. And before we can rely upon the state aqueduct for transport of Bureau water, there has to be this state board authorization, first of all. And that involves digging into that. They have to get a permit from the Corps of Engineers. They have to go through the Section 404 analysis and *all* kinds of regulatory stuff to go through to get that, to make it happen.

Petershagen: There's more to water decisions than just some of the simplistic things we read in some of the classic books, the 160-acre

limit or nothing, black-and-white kind of a thing. (Butchert: Yeah.) But maybe, can we talk about the acreage limit a little bit? (Butchert: Sure.) You buy water by acre-feet, big numbers like that. Does the law then require you to enforce the acreage limit? You can't just sell it to anybody, right?

Dealing with the Acreage Limitation

Butchert: That's correct. We must make sure that the water is not delivered to excess lands, which is the acreage limitation. So we are in charge of making sure that the water is only delivered to lands that are eligible to receive the water, and we do that. We run systematic checks of the water deliveries to make sure it's going to the right fields, that the people that farm out there tell us at

the beginning of the year is the land that they intend to farm. And we do check on it to make sure that that happens.

Petershagen: And they're required to make a report along that line on an annual basis? (Butchert: Yes.) Then you must be subject to audit by the Bureau or some federal agency.

". . . because of the spotlight that's always been on Westlands because we are so big and because we have been somewhat controversial over the years, we *studiously* make sure that the laws are *meticulously* obeyed and that our skirts are absolutely 190% clean in terms of enforcing and complying with the law. . . ."

Butchert: The Bureau conducts a–I'm not sure it's an annual audit–but it's a biannual audit, to make sure that we are enforcing the laws. And because of the spotlight that's always been on Westlands because we are so big and because we have been somewhat controversial over the years, we *studiously*

make sure that the laws are *meticulously* obeyed and that our skirts are absolutely 190% clean in terms of enforcing and complying with the law.

Petershagen: Now, I know that you've been here, in your position at Westlands, you've been both a friend and a foe of the Bureau, as probably anybody in a customer and provider relationship would be. (Butchert: Uh-huh.) Is there a classic disagreement with the Bureau that you'd like to describe? Any one particular . . .

Recalling Contract Disputes with Reclamation

Butchert: Probably the one that jumps out at me in my mind is the contract disputes we've had with them and the devil of a time we had in reaching settlement on those disputes. It took many twists and turns. To start off

with, when the secretary of interior was Cecil Andrus, and he and some of his people in the department, including the assistant secretary, Guy Martin, and the associate solicitor, John Leshie, and others, kind of had it in for Westlands. And that followed upon a report that was prepared that was called the San Luis Unit Task Force Report–Guy Martin chaired the committee that did that report and was quite critical of a lot of things of Westlands. Preceded me, I mean, it was underway when I got out here. And very critical of the way . . .

"They really used Westlands as kind of an archetypical example of what was wrong with the Reclamation program. . . . we were big, and we're very visible. We had the most excess land of any district in the entire West, and probably more than all of the other districts combined . . . subject of Senate investigations and House investigations. And so one of the very first things that I became engaged in was the dispute over the

contract. . . .”

They really used Westlands as kind of an archetypical example of what was wrong with the Reclamation program. And they used us because we were big, and we’re very visible. We had the most excess land of any district in the entire West, and probably more than all of the other districts combined, and we’re a very highly visible target, subject of some social engineering projects by people out here, subject of Senate investigations and House investigations. And so one of the very first things that I became engaged in was the dispute over the contract.

And they tried to, by different interpretations of the way the law was to be administered and the way the contracts

were to be administered, they threatened our water supply. And in fact, at one point, basically cut it off to the extent that we were operating without a contract.

"We reached agreement with the secretary of interior, Cecil Andrus, largely because of political pressure we put on the secretary to bring this . . . to closure. . . ."

We reached agreement with the secretary of interior, Cecil Andrus, largely because of political pressure we put on the secretary to bring this thing to an end, bring it to closure.

Issues While Working on a Contract Renewal with the Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan Administrations

I remember he called me up one day and said, "Jerry," and I'd never met the man before, "this is Cecil Andrus. I'd like to sit down with you and some of your board members to see if we can bring about [settlement of] this contract dispute." I

said, “Gladly!” I was overwhelmed. So we jumped in a plane and went back there, four of my directors and myself, and we set down with the secretary and in an hour-and-a-half we hammered out a deal. I characterize it as kind of hunkering down over a fire and “let’s cut a deal” type of thing. That’s exactly what happened. Came back with the deal, and we couldn’t get all of our board members to go with it because the price of water went from $8.00 to $9.30 or something like that, and they just were outraged that we would do something like that when we had a contract that said $8.00. So when we attempted to go ahead and do that contract at those prices, we were sued by some of the landowners for doing the deal.

We also said we'd get a better deal if we could get rid of that administration. Carter was, you know, the Carter "hit list," and anti-dams and all that. All we needed to do was get a Republican administration in there, and we'd get a better deal. So time went on. We were in litigation. We couldn't close the deal anyway. Reagan was elected. He appointed Jim Watt Secretary of Interior. We thought, "Oh, boy, we really got a guy on our side. Came out of the Chamber of Commerce. Came out of the Rocky Mountain Legal Foundation or something like that. Good guy to go back there and make a heck of a deal." We went back there, and we went in and shook hands. He had with him Bob Broadbent who was appointed

Commissioner, and Gary Carruthers, who I think was the designated assistant secretary. And he made a comment as we were being introduced, "Look out for these guys, these Westlands guys, because they're out to pick your pocket." And I thought to myself, "Uh-oh!" (Laughter) And subsequent to that, he basically reneged on everything we'd agreed to with Cecil Andrus. "It's a new day. You guys got to pay the full cost of the water, and blah, blah, blah," and then we're into litigation big time, because there's no way we could hope to get anything like that passed.

And that litigation went on from 1978 to 1986. And to finally reach a settlement on that thing, which we did in

the same administration–it was the same people involved in it–in finally cutting the deal, which was a settlement to litigation–it was completed in 1986 and included a very *strong* effort by George Miller to stop it in the House and Senate, and he did a (Chuckles) major job, and it was a major, major fight, but he lost out. It finally got okayed. But that was a big, big problem.

Petershagen: So if your board had bought the original deal with Andrus, you could have avoided that.

Butchert: Bought the original deal with Cecil Andrus, we would have avoided that whole flap.

Petershagen: Well, those are the things that make life interesting, huh? (Butchert laughs)

especially for the general manager.

"One of the things about life at Westlands is that it is never boring. . . ."

Butchert: One of the things about life at Westlands is that it is never boring. (Laughter)

Petershagen: You're big in the amount of water you get. You're big in the area you cover. How many employees do you have?

Westlands Has about 120 Staff and a $5½ Million Payroll

Butchert: Right now we have about 120.

Petershagen: What sort of a payroll do you run?

"We have a largely professional staff. . . . Fresno Irrigation District, we had about 120-130 employees there, I was the only college graduate in that whole staff. . . ."

Butchert: We run about $5½ million payroll. We have a largely professional staff. I remember when I first started in the water business, Fresno Irrigation District, we had

about 120-130 employees there, I was the only college graduate in that whole staff. Westlands Water District, I'm going to say we have around 25-30 college-educated people, counting attorney, engineers, water conservation specialists, public relations, public information, journalists, computer technocrats, public administration graduates.

". . . the whole water business in my career has *immensely* changed in terms of it's professionalism . . ."

So the whole water business in my career has *immensely* changed in terms of it's professionalism, what I call professionalism. You got to have field men. You got to have mechanics. You got to have meter readers. You got to have repairmen and electricians and things like that, but it's been a seed change in the

professionalism, I think, of water organizations in California.

Petershagen: Is there a day that–you're going to laugh at this question -- is there a day that you can point to that you noticed that change? And certainly I say "day" facetiously.

Noticed the Change in Professionalism When He Joined Westlands

Butchert: (Laughing) I think it's when I came back to Westlands. There were not as many when I came back, and we've since enlarged the staff and the professionalism, but I think coming back to Westlands. When I got back here, there were about 65 on staff. It went to about 140 in the late '80s, and then, because of the drought and all of the things, we've had to lay off people and cut back on staff. But yeah, it

came to me then because I'd been away from being over the water districts since I left Fresno the first time.

"I came back fourteen years later, and the change was noticeable. . . ."

I came back fourteen years later, and the change was noticeable.

Petershagen: So the district is a fair contributor to the Fresno economy. By that I mean through the payroll and that sort of thing besides the agricultural business.

Butchert: Oh sure, a pretty good-sized payroll for Fresno. A lot of that doesn't go *in*to Fresno city because we have a lot of people that live on the west side, Coalinga and Hanford and Lemoore and Mendota and Firebaugh. But sure, that contributes to the economy, let alone the farms. That's peanuts compared to what the

farmers contribute.

Petershagen: Right. (Both laugh.) More and more I think we're hearing about contractual arrangements being made. I think it's getting more popular now to talk about people being able to sell allotments and that sort of thing. As I think I mentioned to you on the phone, I certainly don't want to get into any ongoing litigation or anything like that, that the District might be involved in, but what's your position on that, if you can?

"We have supported, pretty consistently, the notion of free markets for water. And we've done that because, quite frankly, we're in the 'buy' mode. . . ."

Butchert: We have supported, pretty consistently, the notion of free markets for water. And we've done that because, quite frankly, we're in the "buy" mode. And I have just

recently reorganized my staff, with the approval of the board, so that we can more highly focus.

"We have a very highly professional, highly focused small unit on our staff whose sole charge is to go out and find water, wherever they can find it, from whomever they can buy it. . . . I think you have to be careful that you don't get into a situation like we could potentially see whereby you devastate one economy to help another. I think that's wrong. . . ."

We have a very highly professional, highly focused small unit on our staff whose sole charge is to go out and find water, wherever they can find it, from whomever they can buy it. And so in that sense, we are pro-free-market water transfers because we are basically in a buying mode. I have to temper that with a comment. I think it reaches a limit when it becomes a devastating effect upon the areas that will *sell* water. The classic

example is Owens Valley. I think you have to be careful that you don't get into a situation like we could potentially see whereby you devastate one economy to help another. I think that's wrong. And I think most people would agree with that, but if we're not careful about that, that could happen.

Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA)

Now the Central Valley Project Improvement Act [CVPIA] . . . I was engaged in discussions on coming up with a way of limiting that exposure by putting a cap on the amount of water that could be transferred out of a district by an individual, as a percentage of the district's entitlement. And we felt that there had to be something in there that would limit the

exposure to the third-party adverse impacts. We'll see how that works out. I don't know how it's going to ultimately work out.

Petershagen: One of the things I've noticed, or at least I *think* I've noticed in the short time I've been here in Fresno as we approach the election, water seems to be in everybody's campaign ad. (Butchert: It does.) Whereas where I come from, from farther up north, we have plenty of water and there's not a whole lot of talk about it in the campaign ads. (Butchert: That's right.) But I've heard a lot on the radio this morning about the Central Valley Improvement Act. Probably anybody that's running for office has that statement in their ads, they're going to do something

about it. And I think the most serious thing I heard was somebody talking about the possibility of Friant water going away altogether. Is that a real fear on the part of the people in the area?

Butchert: It's a fear. I don't think it'll happen. I think there's been talk by Hal Candee and NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council] they ought to tear down Friant, let all the water run downriver. I don't think that's going to happen because of the fact it would be *so* devastating to the economy of the east side of the valley. I don't think anybody could contemplate something like that. And I think that ultimately people will realize that. That's not to say that, you know, what was done back in 1940 may have not been a good

decision. We couldn't do that thing today, for example–we just could not do that. There would have to be some degree of flows down the river, past where it goes now, which is Gravel Ford which is not to the Mendota Pool, and that would not happen today.

". . . on the other side of the coin, it's unrealistic for people to think that that San Joaquin River was a broadly-flowing river all the time. You can go to any river in the San Joaquin Valley, in certain years, those rivers dry up. . . ."

But, on the other side of the coin, it's unrealistic for people to think that that San Joaquin River was a broadly-flowing river all the time. You can go to any river in the San Joaquin Valley, in certain years, those rivers dry up. Because I was born and raised here, and I've *seen* them dry, and I know it happens. And people who

say, "Well, yeah, the San Joaquin River was once this mighty river flowing all the way to the ocean all the time," don't know what they're talking about. They just don't know what they're talking about. On the other hand, I have seen salmon in the river. When I was a kid we went fishing in the Mendota Pool one time to see the salmon run–and they're no longer there. But that happened fifty years ago. It's not *this* generation that made all that happen.

"What you've got to deal with today is what's *here* today, and you do the best you can for the fish and the natural resources, but I don't think you can rewrite history and devastate tens of thousands of people in the process . . ."

What you've got to deal with today is what's *here* today, and you do the best you can for the fish and the natural resources, but I don't think you can rewrite

history and devastate tens of thousands of people in the process–and that's what would happen.

Petershagen: Do you foresee that there's going to be a solution someday to the whole drainage problem down here–Kesterson and all that? Have you got that all figured out?

Kesterson and the Drainage Issue

Butchert: (Laughs) Well, I've got it figured out, but I'm not sure a lot of people would agree with me!

"That business was probably the most vexing problem I've had to deal with here. It had political ramifications . . . And when I say 'drainage,' what I'm talking about in reality is salt balance for the San Joaquin Valley. Because unless there's salt balance . . . this valley sometime in the future will cease to exist as we know it. . . ."

That business was probably the most vexing problem I've had to deal with here. It had political ramifications–big time

political ramifications–technical issues that were almost overwhelming, and are still, to some degree, almost overwhelming; environmental issues that were out there; financial issues that were out there–everything you can think of was involved in this issue of trying to obtain drainage. And when I say "drainage," what I'm talking about in reality is salt balance for the San Joaquin Valley. Because unless there's salt balance, unless there's a balance between the amounts of salts brought into the valley or left here as a result of the river being diverted here and not going out to the ocean, this valley sometime in the future will cease to exist as we know it. We can see it coming. It may take 500 years, but it's going to

happen.

". . . yes, there are solutions. Technically, it can be done. Engineeringly, it can be done. . . ."

But yes, there are solutions. Technically, it can be done. Engineeringly, it can be done.

"We, just the other day, completed the final arguments to the Federal District Court down here in Fresno, to demonstrate . . . that it technically can be done, and engineeringly it can be done, and financially it can be done. The issue before the judge was whether the United States is relieved of its obligation to provide drainage service. That was at issue. And the United States was saying, 'Yeah, we're relieved because circumstances have changed.'. . ."

We, just the other day, completed the final arguments to the Federal District Court down here in Fresno, to demonstrate that, that it technically can be done, and engineeringly it can be done, and financially it can be done. The issue before the judge was whether the United States is relieved of its obligation to

provide drainage service. That was at issue. And the United States was saying, "Yeah, we're relieved because circumstances have changed." Well, they authorized that thing in 1960 and said, "Well, wait. You can't do it today, because you can't get a permit to discharge anyplace, blah, blah, blah." And we were arguing the other side, "Oh yes you can!" Nothing *precludes* you from doing that. So we'll see what the judge has to say.

City of San Francisco Proposal to Use its Treated Wastewater for Irrigation in the San Joaquin Valley and Put the San Joaquin Drainage out into the Pacific Through the City's Sewage Outfall

There is an answer out there that has emerged recently that offers some hope of coming about if everybody kind of keeps their heads about them. And that is a proposal that was advanced, interestingly

enough, by the Bay Area, the cities and the waste discharge people that, you know, manage sewage treatment facilities and all in the Bay Area. The water that's used by the City of San Francisco, by the East Bay, and by the [San Francisco] Peninsula, is fresh off the snow drops in the Sierra Nevada. It's *very* high quality water. They take it into the Bay Area. They use it once. Now it goes out to the ocean. Once they use it, once it's properly treated, it's still very good water. In fact, in the South Bay it's too fresh. (Petershagen chuckles) That's a fact, they complain it's too fresh. So they said, "Well, it's kind of dumb to just run this stuff out to the ocean." San Francisco has an outfall, sewage outfall that goes six miles out to the deep Pacific

Ocean, and they were saying, "Well, this is kind of dumb to run this stuff out to the ocean, because it's really pretty good quality water, and there are people out there that could use this water." And so they constructed a proposal that would take treated wastewater from the Bay Area, and somehow transport it to the San Joaquin Valley to be used for irrigation. And basically we in the valley said, "Well, that's okay, but hey, by the way, guys, we got a drainage problem. It's okay to bring water over here for irrigation. It's not as good as we get out of the Delta, but it *can* be used. If you can somehow figure out a way to help us with the drainage problem, we would consider a notion like that." Well, they came back and said, "Well, we

got this outfall that goes to the Pacific Ocean–City of San Francisco. Maybe we can construct a parallel facility, a pipeline within a pipeline, or a pipeline beside a pipeline, and take drainage water and run it the other way, and put it out through the ocean outfall. So we said we would certainly entertain that kind of a study. And that study is underway, and it's partially funded by the Bureau and partially funded by the Bay Area agencies, and we have people that sit on the advisory committee.

"It's risky politically because of the obvious scare about selenium and what that's likely to do to an environment. But technically it's not a big deal. Technically, selenium is not a big deal in the ocean, but people don't always listen to technicians. . . ."

It's risky politically because of the obvious scare about selenium and what

that's likely to do to an environment. But technically it's not a big deal. Technically, selenium is not a big deal in the ocean, but people don't always listen to technicians. (Chuckles) That to me is the solution. I think it's out there, and we have the ability to concentrate the salts, takes a smaller pipe. And we'll see what happens in the next few years because right now it's the only thing that offers any hope in my mind, that we will achieve some kind of salt balance.

Petershagen: And I'm sure there's more water districts than just Westlands that are cooperating in this.

"Basically the entire west side–the entire west side from Buena Vista area down in Kern County to all the way up to Tracy has some kind of a salt problem. . . ."

Butchert: Oh, you bet your life! Basically the entire

west side–the entire west side from Buena Vista area down in Kern County to all the way up to Tracy has some kind of a salt problem.

Petershagen: Okay. Is there anything else that we need to discuss, perhaps, with regard to the Central Valley Project Improvement Program?

Butchert: The Improvement Act? We really haven't gotten into that too much, not the CVPIA.

Central Valley Project Improvement Act

Petershagen: Well, let me start you off there, then. [Both laugh] Again, that's a current issue, but how do you see that affecting Westlands?

Butchert: Well, we see that as a forced reallocation of about one-third of our water supply. When you examine the impacts of the act,

the act takes 800,000 acre-feet of CVP water and devotes it to purposes beyond the reach of us.

"There's no impact upon about three-quarters of the water users in the Central Valley Project area. . . . The only ones who are impacted by the reallocation of the 800,000 acre-feet are the contractors south of the Delta–*federal* contractors, *not* municipal non-federal *agricultural* contractors south of the Delta and the users in the Tehama-Colusa Canal in the Sacramento Valley. . . The total of those uses is about 2.2 million acre-feet. Take 800,000 away from that, and it's a big, big hit. So yeah, it's been a very, very difficult thing. . . ."

The act, knowingly or unknowingly, insulates . . . There's no impact upon about three-quarters of the water users in the Central Valley Project area. I'm talking about water rights holders, I'm talking about exchange contract, I'm talking about the Friant contractors, the municipalities, and wildlife refuges–all of which use CVP water. The only ones who are impacted by

the reallocation of the 800,000 acre-feet are the contractors south of the Delta–*federal* contractors, *not* municipal non-federal *agricultural* contractors south of the Delta and the users in the Tehama-Colusa Canal in the Sacramento Valley. They're the only ones that are directly impacted by that. The total of those uses is about 2.2 million acre-feet. Take 800,000 away from that, and it's a big, big hit.

So yeah, it's been a very, very difficult thing to grasp. Maybe you've heard on the ads down here, political ads, there's a great deal of frustration out there on what this thing has done and what it has done to the farm economy of Fresno County and Kings County and places like that.

"Put on top of that what's happened as a result of the Endangered Species Act and the enforcement of that and what's that caused, and it's reduced our water supply. Our estimates are our water supply was reduced by about half. . . ."

Put on top of that what's happened as a result of the Endangered Species Act and the enforcement of that and what's that caused, and it's reduced our water supply. Our estimates are our water supply was reduced by about half.

Petershagen: Is CVPIA here to stay? There's even some campaign material that would suggest perhaps certain Californians, if elected, might do something to overturn it or . . . .

Butchert: I've heard that. I think the CVPIA is here to stay as long as George Miller retains office and retains the chair of the Natural Resources Committee and as long as Bill Bradley is there. I don't even think there's

a *chance* of anything happening as long as those two men are in place.

Petershagen: Okay, perhaps I should stop you here because, once again, the tape is getting away from us.

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Petershagen: Jerry, we were talking about the Central Valley Project Improvement Act a minute ago. Is there a difference in effect on small districts perhaps versus large districts? I've also heard, at least by implication, that there may be a difference in effect on small farmers versus large farmers. Have you analyzed it enough to see if there is a difference there?

"The water rates have essentially doubled . . . and the water supply has been cut in half. . . ."

Butchert: The Central Valley Improvement Act?

(Petershagen: Yeah.) I don't think there's any distinction. I think it's a pretty broad sword that affects everybody equally. The water rates have essentially doubled to those that I mentioned due to the direct impact. The water rates have doubled, and the water supply has been cut in half. In simplest terms, that's probably what it amounts to.

Petershagen: Specifically in a campaign ad I've heard run by Senator Feinstein [Diane Feinstein], may not even be an ad, she's here right now. (Butchert: She was here yesterday.) And she has been addressing various groups, so this very well could have been a news report this morning, but she mentioned so many small farmers would be put out of business. The emphasis was

on small farmers. Yet I think one of the universal criticisms of the CVP and irrigation districts–any sort of artificial irrigation–is that here in the Central Valley it's all corporate agriculture, there is no such thing as the family farmer–you know that line. Would you respond to that please?

Family and Corporate Farms in the Central Valley Project

Butchert: Sure. There are both. There are a lot of both. I came from a small family farm where my granddad farmed twenty acres. And not many people farm twenty acres, because there's not many people can make a living off twenty acres. So farms have irreversibly grown larger. But when people say "corporate farmers," what you really have out there are family farmers

that have incorporated, and that's not by any means a majority, but it is a method of organizing a business–which they are–into something that has certain advantages because they can incorporate under family, Chapter "S," or whatever it is, corporations. Ninety-nine percent of the farmers in our district, if they are incorporated, are those kind of corporations. They are family. Some involve three generations. Most involve two generations of family that have gotten together and formed these family-type corporations. When people say "corporate farming," that's what they're talking about. If you talk about non-federal areas, then I think you're getting into an area where you do have true corporations. Superior

Farming, for example, was a spinoff of Superior Oil Company, I believe. Chevron has some land I think that is farmed– probably not by them, but probably they lease it out or something like that. We don't have any of that. None.

Petershagen: So is it fair to say then, you're saying even though there are a lot of corporate farms in Westlands, they're still family businesses?

Butchert: They're all families, uh-huh. Or partnerships, you know. You know, you and me, good friends, we're going to form something and we're going to farm together type of thing. There's that that goes on as well.

Petershagen: Okay. I think I'm getting close to [completing] my agenda. Is there somebody that you could identify over the

course of your career–and I will admit that this is a question that far more suits the Bureau people I've talked to–but is there somebody you could identify over the course of your career that may have been a mentor to you, somebody that really aided and fostered your career?

Bill Fairbank and Jack Stone

Butchert: Yeah, I think probably some years ago, Bill Fairbank I always regarded as kind of a mentor. Bill was a Sacramento lobbyist for MWD. I think, since I've been with Westlands, Jack Stone, who was the board chairman when I came on board, and he and I just hit it off. I've always regarded Jack as being kind of my mentor. Those two people kind of stand out in my mind. Jerry Gilbert, I think, although he's my

age, when I first went to work with him in the [Eel River] Water Council, he was the President of that organization and was always very supportive and very helpful and always an example to follow because of his energy and his intelligence and stuff like that. (Chuckles)

Petershagen: How would you describe the Bureau of Reclamation in your working relationships with them? Would you care to tackle that one?

"I would describe the Bureau of Reclamation as an organization that has lost its sense of mission. It doesn't know what it's supposed to be doing. It's receiving mixed signals . . . There is no cohesiveness. . . ."

Butchert: I would describe the Bureau of Reclamation as an organization that has lost its sense of mission. It doesn't know what it's supposed to be doing. It's receiving mixed signals from all manner of

people and bosses and this sort of thing. There is no cohesiveness. They do not know what they want to tell people, and oftentimes they tell them different things. I think you have the people who have been there a long time who are dedicated to the notion that these projects were built to benefit the economies and societies of the areas in which they were built–for a whole *variety* of purposes. They were built there to *do* things to help the economy, to *build* the economy. That was the whole notion of the Bureau to begin with–build and develop the West, create jobs, build economies. That has been, in the last four or five years, that has been shifting. And I think the most recent manifestation of that change was reflected in a memo that I saw

that was put out by Dan Beard in July this year, July 20. And it basically just says, "The mission of the Bureau anymore is *not* to deliver water for the economies. The mission of the Bureau now is to collect as much possible money as we can from wherever the customers are and to preserve ourselves the right to reallocate that water any way we want to reallocate it." That takes away stability that was there, to build and maintain an economy. And that sends to the oldtimers a message, "Well, wait a minute. You mean I've been working all my life, all my career, to do a certain thing, and now I'm told that that's wrong?!"

The *new* people that are in the Bureau, I think some obviously that don't have any exposure to the old time, buy into

a lot of that. "Yeah, you farmers are not important to our business. We're not here to help you guys. We got other things to do." I remember a talk that was given to the CVP water users a year ago January, and he just said flat out, "We are not here to help the farmers. That's not our job anymore. Our job is not anymore to help the farmers."

Wow! When did that happen? And why? But that's the way it is. They're an organization that is in disarray, in my judgement, because there is a clear lack of an identifiable mission.

They need to do like we did. They need to have one of these touchy-feely strategic planning sessions over to Asilomar, something like that, you know.

(Laughter) "Who are we?" type of thing. Need to get it together.

Petershagen: My young son, for example, is a mechanical engineering major. Would you recommend that he go to work for the Bureau of Reclamation?

Wouldn't Recommend Reclamation as a Career

Butchert: No. No. It might be good in terms of gaining an education and experience in the early years of his career, but I would *definitely* not recommend it as a career opportunity. Good place to learn some stuff, good place to learn some good nuts and bolts engineering, probably. They don't do an awful lot of that anymore, but there's enough of it out there for a mechanical engineer to learn. But I would not recommend it for a career.

Petershagen: What kind of person is going to take your place? (Butchert laughs) That's a leading question, obviously! What I'm trying to get at is, is the day of the engineer in this kind of a job perhaps behind us?

". . .my job is not a matter of having technical skill in engineering, my job is a matter of managing people, number one, and keeping them absorbed and involved and happy and all the things that go along with that, and the other half is managing the outside. It doesn't require an engineer . . . There are plenty of people out there that can take my place. . . ."

Butchert: No. No, I don't think so. But that is not to say that it's exclusively the domain of the engineers. More and more I think professional people in the accounting areas, the legal areas, public administration areas, can easily step into a job like this because it involves all those skills. And my job is not a matter of having technical skill in engineering, my job is a matter of

managing people, number one, and keeping them absorbed and involved and happy and all the things that go along with that, and the other half is managing the outside. It doesn't require an engineer, by any means, managing the political affairs and legislative affairs. And a lot of folks can do that kind of . . . There are plenty of people out there that can take my place. I'm convinced of it. (Laughs)

Petershagen: Okay. I think that's the end of my shopping list. Is there something else that we should have covered?

Butchert: Let's see, we got FID [Fresno Irrigation District], we got Eel River, we got MWD, we got Westlands. Yeah, you've kind of covered . . . .

Petershagen: Is there anything you'd like to say

[Butchert laughs] without my prompting you? Any sort of a closing statement? Anything at all -- it's yours.

". . . the water business as a career is one that . . . is never boring, and it's always fascinating, but you need a good deal of patience. . . ."

Butchert: (Chuckles) Well, the only thing I would say is that the water business as a career is one that, as I said before, is never boring, and it's always fascinating, but you need a good deal of patience. (Chuckles)

Petershagen: Alright. Well, with that, let me say thank you both personally and on behalf of the Bureau of Reclamation. Once again I'm compelled to ask you to affirm that you voluntarily sat through this. You knew that you were being tape recorded.

Butchert: Yes, I do.

Petershagen: And that you did sign the Deed of Gift on

the interview, making the interview the property of the United States.

Butchert: I did that as well.

Petershagen: Then again, thank you very much.

Butchert: You're welcome.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 20, 1994.
END OF INTERVIEW.