

BLM and BPR: An Important Partnership

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This office first started doing BLM maintenance and construction in the early 1950's, and the work continued through the 1960's, and 1970's.

“When I went to work in 1954, they were just really gearing up (for the BLM program,” **Vern Ford** recalled. “They were hiring people like mad.” Although he did some surveys on BLM roads, he was not involved in their construction. “There was a real distinction between forest highways and the BLM program,” he observed. “The type of specifications....were just completely different. There was a whole different ways of building roads on that side.”

Jim Hall made a similar observation when he arrived in Vancouver as Division Engineer in 1978. The design program that was in place, he said, was “not outstanding, but adequate. It was good for building BLM roads...” BLM, he said, “didn’t need a sophisticated design; they needed good quality construction, and we had that.”

There were projects of all sizes, but **Ray Westby** described the Smith River project that he worked on in 1955 as “probably the biggest development that Direct Federal had while I was here.” He said the “camp was built special for BLM; that was their money we were spending.”

Willis Grafe worked the Smith River and other BLM projects in the early 1950's. “We were building BLM roads...out west of Eugene,” he said, “Steamboat (on the North Umpqua) was one, and...Twin Sisters Road, which connected the Siuslaw...over the top of the mountain.” He added that “the job I had at Twin Sisters—the first job they let—it was over \$1 million dollars. The project was 22 miles, all timber country.”

He explained that “the BLM lands were all in sections that they called Oregon California Railroad revested lands. The railroad went broke, so all of the alternate sections that were granted to them reverted back and became BLM.”

Fred Rogers spent a good portion of his early career working on the BLM side of the office. When he came out of survey in the early 1960's, he started working western Oregon BLM jobs under **Dave Judkins**. “Occasionally we got over to the east...like along the Deschutes, (but) there were very few over there.” He did designs for work



In 1965 “Building A” occupied an area that is has since become parking lot and stretched out into what is now I-5 right-of-way. The building housed the BLM maintenance shops and construction operations. WFLHD Archives.

out of Salem District (which included the Tillamook Office), Eugene District, Roseburg District, Coos Bay District, and Medford District. That work “involved meeting with the BLM on their desires, design work, plan-in-hands, going out (and) looking at this and that.” For several years he did the work as Dave’s assistant, but later took on full responsibilities himself.

Fred remembered a couple of notable plan-in-hand reviews. One time he and **Cliff Christianson** went on a 10-mile BLM plan-in-hand. “The BLM fellow, Assistant Engineer out of Medford, dropped us off at the top.” He was going to drive around and pick them up on the far end. Fred and Chris “came out on the other end, and then we had to walk a little bit more on some dirt roads, and finally break out into this town. In the meantime, he had come back to pick us up and he missed us. Then he went back, and forgot about us.” The two found a country store, and “bought a beer, because it was hot. The proprietor kicked us off. He said, ‘You don’t drink a beer in my place,’ but he sold it to us, of course.”

They finished their beers in the middle of the street, then “we thought, ‘what are we going to do?’ We started hiking up the road – it was about ten miles to the next town.” About 9:30 at night, the BLM engineer came by in his pick-up and found them. He took them back and dropped them off at their hotel in Medford where they walked in on a fancy dress ball that was underway. They crossed the lobby in the dusty clothes they’d worn out hiking around the country. Fred said, “there’s ladies in long dresses and guys in their tuxes, and we walked in, and our pants were torn from going through the ‘jungle,’ so to speak.”



Another time, Fred recalled that he, **John Burton**, and Dave Judkins went to another BLM plan-in-hand at Galice Creek. The road follows Galice Creek and the Rogue River and goes over the Klamath Mountains to Gold Beach. “There was a lot of work to be done....(but) there was a great division within the BLM on the philosophy of where (the road) should go. We were kind of caught in between.”

They met the local BLM people from Medford at the Galice Creek store, and a fellow named **Brad Krueger** was there from the Portland BLM office. “I brought the plans down,” and laid them open on a picnic table beside the store. Then, Fred said, “I smelled smoke. I looked to my left and the corner of the plans was on fire. Brad Krueger said ‘this is what I think of your plans.’ He actually wasn’t talking to us as much as to the Medford BLM people.”

When they broke up into groups to do the plan-in-hand, Fred went out with Brad Krueger and one of the guys from Medford, and said, “they wouldn’t speak to each other! So that was a fun time!” It turned out that Brad got his way, as Fred noted that particular line wasn’t built for geological reasons. He recalled that **Frank Rogers** was later involved in the construction of the alignment that was finally selected.

Prior to moving to the Portland BLM office, Brad Krueger had been Assistant District Engineer in the Eugene District, and Fred noted he and Brad followed each other throughout their careers. He remembered being sent out with Brad one wintry day. “You couldn’t see anything because of the snow, and we were looking for materials sources...but, the powers that be insisted” that the trip be made.

The District Engineer drove them up the road until he couldn’t drive any further, then dropped them off and went around to meet them on the other end. “So, we started walking – we did our look-see – eventually the snow was six feet deep...We ended up going about 17 miles. It was the only time I’d worn snow shoes – the old type,” he said. “The BLM fellow had skis.

“The steepest the road went up was about a 10-11 percent grade.” They met up with the District Engineer about two miles from the far end. “He said I was going too slow, because they had skis and I had snow shoes. So I had to take off the snow shoes and stand behind Brad ...on the skis,” and that was how they continued on out.

When they got to the car, “the District Engineer says, ‘I’m low on gas....’ so he coasted down all the grades.” They came out somewhere south of Cottage Grove, just off the highway, where there was a country store and a couple of houses. “He ran out of gas just as we got there, and we had to push his rig” up to the pumps. “Then he had to go up and wake somebody up.”

Fred said he reported to work the next day, but he found out later that Brad was off for three days, because he’d strained his legs walking out with Fred behind him on the skis.

Willis Grafe said of the BLM partnership, “I always had an easy time with...the BLM, as you look back on it. They were paying for that with timber revenue, so it didn’t come out of appropriated funds.” The BLM work lasted for many years. “I had 15 jobs, something like that. That was the real blossoming of the BLM work that came in.

“For years we did a lot of BLM work,” he said with a knowing grin, “before they stopped everyone from cutting trees, and the owls put them out of business.”

After spending several years in BLM design, Fred Rogers moved on to the Forest Highways program and later spent an extensive period in technology transfer. If you have comments or stories to share about the BLM work done by WFLHD or other stories to share, please email me at marili.reilly@fhwa.dot.gov.

-- Marili Green Reilly

