

The Environmental Program – Part I: The Beginnings

From an Interview with Allan Stockman, Summer 2009

The National Environmental Protection Act was passed into law in 1969 and government agencies, including the Bureau of Public Roads, began to put more focus on protecting the environment.

During the 1970's, the Bureau of Public Roads began working to implement requirements of the National Environmental Protection Act. **Allan Stockman**, who would later head up the Environmental office at Western Direct Federal Division, remembered that initially it was the Survey and Mapping office that did environmental clearances on selected projects.

“One of their responsibilities was to decide if any environmental things ought to be addressed,” he said, adding that the review “wasn’t real complete. They didn’t do them on all projects until they had a review of their processes...eight or nine years after the environmental law came into effect.

“The NEPA Act (specified) that you ought to be addressing environmental clearances in some fashion on every project – at least recognizing what’s going on.” To more fully address the requirements of the Act, WDFD set up an environmental planning unit in 1980 or 1981, shortly before Allan joined the staff. **Ralph Frame** was put in charge, said Allan, and “he had three people that worked for him” who were moved in from other parts of the office. “These guys had worked all through the field and they were really good guys,” but their experience did not prepare them for environmental work. “They worked in design and worked in construction,” then, when they were put into the Environmental unit, they were expected “to study environmental impacts, and write documents....This was kind of interesting, because they were such straight-laced guys and they were just used to a construction environment.”



North side of the second floor, 1965. WFLHD Archives.

“When I came,” Allan said, “I was the first...outsider,” both in terms of having worked in Federal-aid offices and in terms of having an environmental education. On the Federal-aid side, the work had been quite a bit different. “In a lot of states the Federal-aid office got involved in a lot of meetings and activities,” similar to Federal Lands offices, Allan said, however, for the most part, they were more involved in program issues” rather than the hands-on type of work.

The environmental unit at WDFD was located in the southeast corner of the second floor, and it was just one big room. “There were no desks,” Allan said, “just big layout tables and a couple of drafting tables,” and only one telephone.

When they set it up, he said, they didn’t know what the work would involve and what kind of space they would need. “They were more used to working in a construction trailer.”

Having already spent nearly ten years doing environmental work in the Utah and Colorado Divisions, Allan had different expectations of the office setting, and he didn’t mind suggesting changes once he arrived in Vancouver. “I thought it was great to go in there and say, “Hey, maybe we’re going

to have to get a desk, maybe we're going to have to get another phone, maybe a couple of chairs, and have a table to meet with people," he said "you need to have books...you've got to be calling people, and coordinating."

Allan said "he finally got a desk to sit at and a regular chair," but up until then, "everyone sat on a stool and at big long tables. That's just how they worked."

Recalling the original staff, Allan said, "there were some unique guys." In many cases, people were tapped for the new office from the "design or construction or materials or survey sections." One of these was, **Jim Brooks**, that sometimes appeared to some people as "a cantankerous old guy....He never said much," Allan said, "but when you actually talked to him, you realized he did have (an) appreciation" of the environmental program.

Another person who was put into the section when it was created was **Mel Replogle**. "He had worked through construction and design, but he was an architectural kind of guy. He drew sketches, he loved to talk, and he loved to reminisce about historical things." Allan added that Mel probably "fit the environmental section better than anyone else."

Ralph Frame was Chief of the new Environmental Unit. "He stayed there for a year or two, then he retired, and I took over his job," Allan said, noting that others came and went as well. "After Ralph left, we started to pick up more people." Two of these were hired from the Washington DOT. **Dan O'Brien** and **Pierre Hendrickson** "were older guys. They had the last word on the things that they did. After 30-40 years of working, they knew what was right." As the group became bigger, "they became our team leaders for projects," Allan said.

When the environmental work took them into the field, they encountered even more "interesting" personalities. From his environmental perspective, Allan found that "construction guys were always a little bit different." He recalled one project engineer who worked in Glacier National Park and other Montana projects, **Max Ulver**, whom he described as "colorful...(He) kind of liked environment, but yet he had his own interpretations on what was an impact and what was mitigation.

"I dealt with him on a bunch of projects. You would have to go out there as the job was being built," Allan said, to make sure that the environmental mitigation measures were being implemented. We had "to see if it was anywhere close to what we thought it was supposed to be like...That's when you got to see the construction side."

The environmental staff continued to grow, "and before long, we became almost the biggest unit in Western Federal Lands. We did planning, preliminary design, location, and environmental work in our unit, and it was quite a deal. We hired a lot of people. We realized we needed people with a good background, so we hired retirees or guys that came from the highway department."

At one point, as the unit grew to 12-14 people, it became apparent that a good knowledge of environmental work was not always enough. "Some folks were good in the engineering side, but when it came to actually writing documents, they were a little sub par." They started looking for technical writers, to put "it down in King's English," he said. **Greg Humphreys** "was one of the first people we hired to help us do that."

There were many changes over the years, but the experience was well worth it. Looking back on his work in the Vancouver office, Allan said, "It was neat – I just loved the experience, and I liked the people a lot."

Allan Stockman came to the FHWA training program in 1969 and arrived in Western Federal Lands Highway Division in about 1981. Stories in this series have been developed by Marili Green Reilly from interviews and correspondence. If you have memories to share about your experiences on federal lands work, you may email them to marili.reilly@dot.gov.