

The Environmental Program – Part II: Two Decades of Growth

From an Interview with Allan Stockman, Summer 2009

As the National Environmental Protection Act was implemented, federal agencies had to make changes in how they managed their programs. At Federal Highway Administration, changes were sometimes gradual as people learned to look at a road project within the context of the environment.

By the time Allan Stockman arrived at Western District Federal Division, the National Environmental Protection Act had been in force for over ten years. He became head of the environmental section in the mid 1980's, and recalled that "in Federal Lands, it made us think about environment in a lot more systematic way. You had to actually address these environmental concerns and document them...."

"Not that we had many huge projects," he allowed. "We didn't have to do Environmental Impact Statements, much: we had some environmental assessments and some categorical exclusions, as different levels of environmental review, but you did have to actually *do* them, you had to know the science, you had to be formal about it, you had to have coordinated efforts with different agencies: local, state and federal. So it was a big change."

As a project moved through the office, "lots of people didn't like" the addition of environmental requirements", he said. "It actually slowed the process down, if you think of it, because it was another step to take. You couldn't jump into final design. You had to go through this coordinating process with people" and decide what was to be done and what the effect of that effort would be. "Some of the improvements might not be the best improvements, if you consider the other effects that they would create. That was hard for some people to accept." They wanted every project to be the "biggest and the best."

As Allan recalled, on "a few projects that the Environmental Location section handled, (we) scoped out the size of the road, the kind of improvements that we wanted, how wide and how straight" to make the road, and then sent the project to Design. When the Final Design folks got hold of it, "they came back with, 'Well! We can build it wider and straighter,' and so they did..." But that was not the intent: "It's not if you can build it wider and straighter; there (are) reasons why you don't want to build it wider and straighter....And that was, for different people, hard to get over...."

"To me it was a lot more exciting to have to deal with all those different interests in the road corridor instead of just building a wider, straighter paved path. There's other things going on."

Allan recalled that **Darrel Lein**, "who was the head of Design for quite a while...was always someone that we butted heads with....Darrel was a pretty straight forward guy, and he was frustrated because he thought everything should be under Design" while Allan and his section believed that it was better "to have the preliminary work done under Location and Environment."

Despite the opportunity for rivalry, Allan liked and respected Darrel. He was a "nice, nice guy....He was very influential in getting things done because his section had to put up the final design plans and specifications. If he couldn't do it, he said why, and they made changes to make sure we'd be able to do it."

Throughout the program's evolution, Allan appreciated the support he received from the Counsel's office. First **Jim Zotter** and later **Tim Binder** became "friends of mine because they were well into the environmental program....They have an understanding and appreciation of all the requirements side," Allan said, "and appreciated it being done right the first time." If it wasn't done

right, “they had to be drug into it, and problems” would have to be dealt with “that could have been avoided.”

Eventually, “changes in philosophy” started to take hold, and “the people started to change. People came in (who) were willing to accept that process.” The Environmental unit “finally got going,” he said, and “did some pretty good work, and had some pretty interesting projects.”

One of the bigger projects they worked on was **Banks to Loman** in Idaho. That “was an early Environmental Impact Statement that we did.” It involved “some really interesting work with the National Parks, although we didn’t write the documents. We did a lot of coordination (and) location studies work....



“We did a great job, I think, in **Grand Teton National Park**. There was a big section of road that was designed, and we did the layout of that and the preliminary designs, and a lot of the preliminary studies. That was a lot of fun,” Allan added, “to go out there and see the roads for the very first time.



“Then we did a project—**Paulina-East Lake**--in Central Oregon. We did a location and environmental study for...10-12 miles of road going up to it.” He noted that he really enjoyed that whole process, also: “When you start in the very early stages, and hold the public meetings, and do all the scoping, and stuff like that – those were fun projects.”

Before and after shots of a slide repair on the Banks-Loman road in Idaho. WFLHD Archives.

Another project he enjoyed was in Alaska, the **Kenai Fiords National Park** Access Road. “There was a road on private land to access the National Park, and we went through a little community. It had huge right-of-way effects, which we don’t usually get into, where we’re having to move people and businesses....**Walt Langlitz** was the team leader on that project.

“We held a lot of meetings,” he said, but also had to walk through a lot of wild country. “We’re talking *wild* country,” he emphasized. “Grizzly bears...you don’t know what’s out there. (We’re) hacking our way through such thick brush—you couldn’t even walk through some of that brush.”

Another project he remembered was the **Mather Memorial Parkway** in Washington. “That was on a state highway and (gave) access to Mt Rainier.” They put a lot of work into that document, but, Allan said, “It was actually one of our best projects, I think, from start to end, as far as a big scale project. We had to go through all the hoops, and we got it built, and when it was done, it was impressive.”

It was a major access road to the park, so there were “several thousand cars on parts of that road,” and it also got a lot of traffic during the winter’s ski season. The project required a lot of “mitigation measures to stay out of the river and to minimize the impacts (and) to restore the hillsides and vegetation in that park environment.”

The “office worked together pretty well,” during that project, he said, which involved several partner agencies and became something of a show piece for the office. Allan recalled that Division Engineer **Jim Hall** took Federal Lands Highway Program Administrator **Tom Edick**, among others, to see the project. “It was done pretty well...a lot of nice work—walls—and it was a good project.”

By the time Allan retired, the environmental staff had been split out among the design teams and much of the work was being farmed out to consultants. At that point, he observed, “you become a consultant overseer, you administer a contract, but you didn’t actually do the stuff.” For Allan, “that was not why we were there.”

He was someone who “liked to get more hands-on,” and so he found that particular organizational change occurred at an opportune time in his life. “I was 'eligible,' so I was ready to go.”

He’d had a rewarding career at WFLHD, had seen the office through enactment of NEPA requirements, and had helped build the environmental section from a ragtag assortment of people borrowed from other sections into one of the largest staffs of trained professionals in the office. It was time to turn the program over to people who shared the new vision, and so, he said, “I left. (Retired). That’s the story.”

Allan Stockman came to work for FHWA in 1969 and worked in the Colorado and Utah Federal-aid Divisions before coming to WFLHD in about 1981. Watch for more of Allan’s memories in future stories in this series. If you would like to share experiences from your federal lands work, you may email them to marili.reilly@dot.gov.