

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT ROADS – PART II

### THE BLM ROAD MAINTENANCE PROGRAM MOVES TO VANCOUVER

FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH BILL MALTBY, SEPTEMBER 2010

*The Western Oregon Roads Maintenance Program had been headquartered in the Federal Highway Administration Division Office in Salem, Oregon, since its inception in the mid 1950's. By 1972 that was about to change.*

William E. Maltby had taken over the BLM roads program in 1969, and recalled that at that time all of the BPR construction program “was done out of the division offices.” The facility that now houses the Western Federal Lands Highway Division in Vancouver, Washington, was “originally...the survey and design office,” he said, but by 1972 “they’d formed the Federal Projects Office as a construction and design and survey” operation in the facility. The Federal Projects Division Engineer was moved from the Regional Office to Vancouver, and “at the same time they moved us in because they said this is part of the Federal Lands Program rather than the Federal-aid program.”

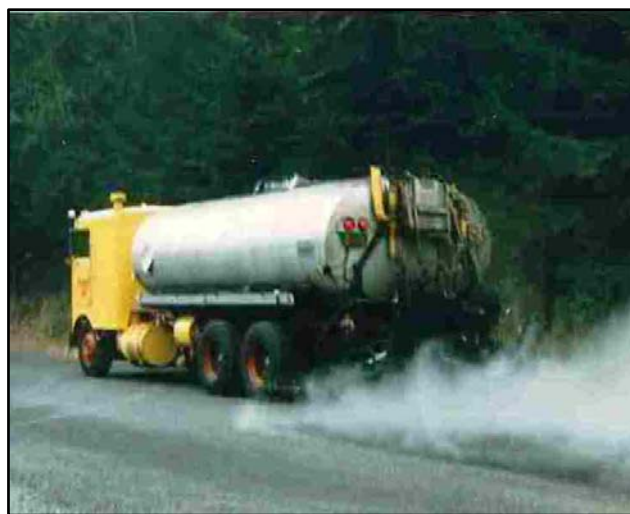
As the maintenance operation had grown, management of the operations in the five BLM districts had been split between two general foremen, **Ken Schearer** and **Evan Wruck**. But with 99 employees and the continuing addition of more and more timber access roads, Bill thought this operation would be even more easily managed “if we had a foreman in each of these districts in charge of all the units within that district.” He said “we correlated with those people all the time, as well as the BLM district managers, of course.”

Staff in the various districts of the BLM agreed with the changes he proposed, “so we took this to the Regional Office and I said, ‘the BLM is behind it. They feel that the coordination between us and them would be great.’”

When they moved the office from Salem to Vancouver, Schearer and Wruck both opted to retire. Two new general foremen were brought in, **Max Foster** and **Stan Pierce**. “Max

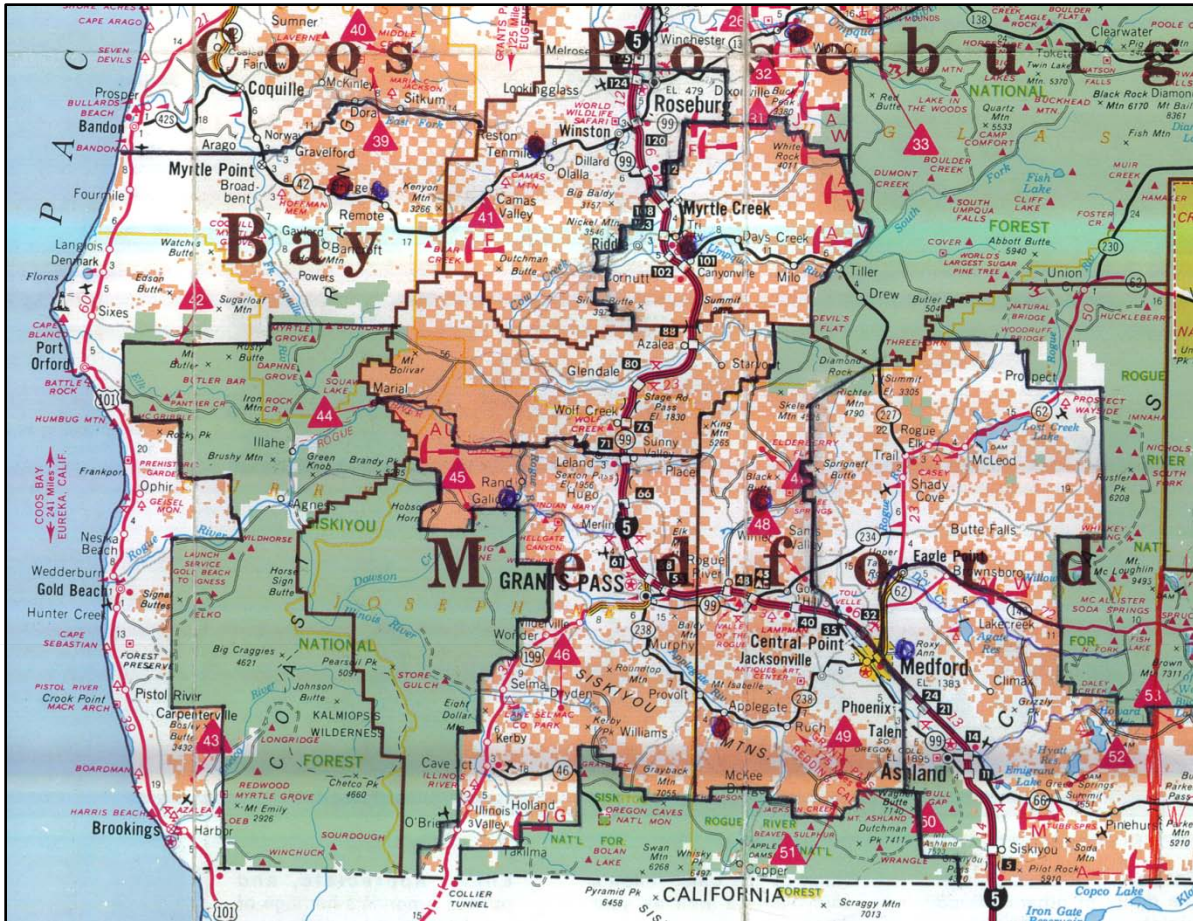
had been the maintenance foreman in the **Reedsport** area and Stan was the maintenance foreman in **Roseburg**,” Bill said.

Once these Lead Foremen for FHWA were located in offices correlating to each of the five BLM districts, “it really worked well,” Bill said. “They could coordinate...on a week by week basis...They could go to the area managers that were handling the timber movement and talk to them about where they were moving and what the project was and get some advanced information...”



*Wells Creek-Vincent Road, early 1970's.  
Photo courtesy Bill Maltby.*

“Along with this, the good thing about it was, if the **BLM** had some work outside of Western Oregon” or in other land management programs, FHWA people could be sent in to do the work. “We went over into eastern Oregon to the Lakeview area and built a little airport for them. We went over into the Prineville area and redid the road along the Deschutes River, the Deschutes River Road.”



Bill Maltby pointed out the Rogue River in southwestern Oregon “where they had the big burn.” These were BLM roads, he noted, including Cow Creek, “all the way from Riddle down here to Galice.” Galice is just to the east of the Shady Branch Recreation Site, #45 on the map, and Riddle is just southwest of Myrtle Creek. BLM Recreation Guide for Oregon, © 1978, courtesy Bill Maltby.

When there was a big fire in the Rogue River area, crews from the FHWA “built a strip up in the area above the Rogue River, up above Galice” to facilitate bringing in the fire crews. FHWA also had a number of cats and could bring them in, and Bill noted “we were doing a lot of fire suppression work” on the Rogue and at other fires at different times.

Under the BLM general lands program they worked on projects in the Steens Mountains and in Burns and Baker City. “We sent a crew of three graders and operators over into the Burns/Lakeview area to blade the public lands roads,” he said, noting that “those districts over in Eastern Oregon district had very little personnel for road maintenance.” He recalled one tour he took of the public lands in Eastern Oregon. “I took a drive from Frenchglen...(The road) went across...to Lakeview, and I’ll tell you—that was

an experience...I had a regular sedan, and I said, ‘I need a Jeep for this thing.’”

In the Eugene area in 1972, heavy storms caused extensive flooding and a lot of erosion. “We did a lot of the work that was involved in that reconstruction of some of the roads after that flood.”

But one of the biggest benefits of the coordination between the different units was the ability to move equipment between districts. “We would set up a crew to do the asphalt paving and we’d move equipment from the districts,” he said. “It took a fairly good size crew to do it,” and with enough coordination they could avoid taking a “district out of operation when we did the surfacing.” Resurfacing was a good sized portion of their work. “We’d probably do two or three thousand miles a year,” he said, “because about every five years you had to put another lift of asphalt on or do some really major repairs on it.”

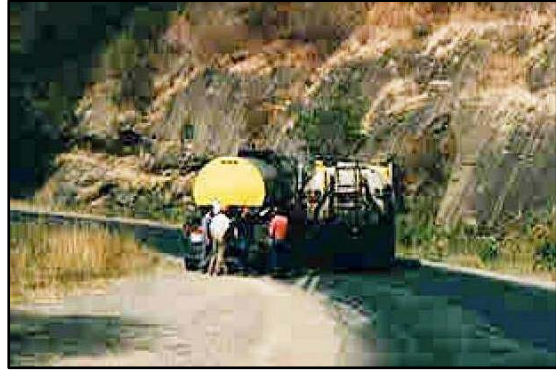
At one point, changes in government travel regulations prompted changes in operations. Bill explained that “in the early days we traveled half on government, half on individual’s” time. When the new regs were implemented, employees had “to travel totally on government time, and some of these fellows had to travel 30-40 miles.” At the time, some employees “were living in the nearest towns to their shops. So we went to the Regional Office and said ‘look, why can’t we have these crew members...drive their vehicles to haul people out from the city out to the shop.’” If an emergency came up, the foreman had his own vehicle and wouldn’t “have to drive 30 miles up in the woods to get to the equipment that he needs to use. He can go directly from the city to the work location.” Once those changes were implemented, it saved a lot of travel time.



Bill noted that when each shop or field office was set up, it was located as close as practical to the high use timber areas, but once the timber was removed from that area, he explained, the next area that is “high use is 30 miles away.”

Throughout these operations, he noted, equipment was customarily left in the field. “You’re in the timber land; normally no people are in there banging around.” Then when the gas crisis occurred, “we had some problems with fuel theft...” They selected some of the more vulnerable and heavily used locations that were “out in the timber, out away from the city,” and offered an opportunity to a crew member to live on site. That way they could “put a trailer there... and put a person on the property,” he said.

“We didn’t say to the individual, ‘you have to be there 24 hours.’ ....If a weekend came around, and the guy wanted to go for a trip or



*Above and below left: Wells Creek-Vincent Road, early 1970’s. Photos courtesy Bill Maltby.*

something, we said, ‘go ahead.’” The presence of a trailer and a caretaker was enough. “It worked really great. It stopped a lot of the pilfering that was going on and some of the damage to some of our heavy equipment that was parked in the yards.”

The unique needs of the work brought opportunities for improvement. “**Max Foster** invented a unit to put on a grader; called it a wing.” Bill explained how the wing collected the gravel into a berm along the edge of the road and brought it back across. “They gave him an award for that.”

The operation remained in FHWA’s Vancouver facilities throughout the duration of the Western Oregon Roads Maintenance program, and Bill Maltby was given the first Region 10 Service Award in recognition of his leadership of the program. Then, after many months of political maneuvering and negotiating between the two agencies, the program was finally moved out of FHWA and into BLM. Reluctantly, Bill Maltby moved with it.



*Max Foster, second from left, receives an award from Regional Administrator R. M. Phillips for his equipment design suggestion December 8, 1969. Bill Maltby is behind them, in the center. Photo courtesy Bill Maltby.*



*"I was lucky enough to get the first Region 10 service award ... I had some hair then," he quipped. Presenting the award in February 1972 is John Mors, Director, Federal Highway Projects. At right is Ken Oviatt.  
Photo courtesy Bill Maltby.*

*Coming next: The final installment in this series will take a look at the changes made to the Western Oregon Road Management program as it transitioned from being a part of the Federal Highway Administration to becoming a part of the Bureau of Land Management.*

*Stories in this series have been developed by Marili Reilly from interviews and correspondence.*

*Retirees who would like to share their memories may email [marili.reilly@dot.gov](mailto:marili.reilly@dot.gov).*