

Interviews with Dennis Frydendall on September 10, 17, 29, and October 7, 2008

*Focus on western, state, and local water issues and early growth of
Red Feather Lakes Community*



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**Interviews with Dennis Frydendall on
September 10, 17 and 29, and October 7, 2008,
at his son David's home in Fort Collins**

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Red Feather Lakes Community*

Interview and transcription by Linda Bell

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Association with Red Feather Storage and Irrigation

I came to Red Feather in 1962, in the fall. I bought a cabin, or we bought a cabin in 1963 and proceeded to live there in the summer. I was the principal of a school in Greeley and my wife Della was a teacher so we had the summers off. We would rent our house out in Greeley, usually to some hapless graduate student and move to the mountains for the summer. This worked very well as far... it was awash financially which helped the whole thing.

About the time I came to Red Feather the leadership and the Red Feather Storage & Irrigation Company was aging and ready for new blood. They had done their thing, which was to buy the assets and form the company. The lakes were built in the late 1880s through 1910. The RFS&I Company was started in 1947 and as a result, the system was old, suffering from wear and tear. The Tunnel Water Company was the previous owner and the group that formed at Red Feather really didn't have the capital – or spend the capital – to fix some problems caused by age.

When I got there, all these things were happening at the same time – old directors and all these problems that are staring you in the face, as far as the system is concerned. Dirt wears out. We don't think of it that way, but you build a dam; eventually you have to rebuild the same dam. That's sort of where I came into the picture.

A couple of years after I bought property in Red Feather Lakes I became president of the Property Owners' Association. Soon after I was asked to become a director on the RFS&I board. I was immediately elected as vice-president and the next year I was elected president and it's been that way ever since. I could easily see we needed to spend some money to fix the problems, dams and ditches. We're not through yet, but at this point

we've pretty well rebuilt everything we own and made it much more efficient in the process.

One of the new directors that I wanted was Gene Barker and the change in direction was we're going to fix this damn thing so we can have water here. With Gene's experience in construction we started to rebuild the delivery system. The water storage season is short so the maximum delivery is important.

Water Development in Surrounding Subdivisions

The second part of this issue is that when the ... about 1968-69, there was a law passed that had to do with little subdivisions everywhere and water to serve them was the biggest problem. This was the beginning of Crystal Lakes, Fox Acres, Glacier View all getting into this rush to develop under this new law which essentially said that you were responsible for the water you used up. You had to replace it. If you flushed it and put it back in the ground, that was OK. If you watered daisies, why, it was gone, and that was against the rules. There've been all kinds of interpretations of that. Crystal Lakes got a particularly early, a particularly good interpretation of that. They have to replace 10 percent of the water they take out (of the ground) and it's not near as heavy a burden on water as if they had to replace 50 percent.

Each of these little subdivisions was put together with some great panic about how to fix the water situation. Crystal Lakes was easier than any of them and it's not troubled with water replacement. Any property that had been subdivided prior to this law was exempt. Red Feather was all subdivided in 1925, so it was exempt. The only thing that Red Feather (residents) had to do was to have a place for the water (well) and a place to get rid of it, and they had to be more than 100 feet apart – that isn't very far apart. I'm not sure it's all that great, but....

Fox Acres had needs for water that exceeded beyond imagination of these other places. But each development had proposals that went through the Water Court and had to show how they would manage the water they lost to get the proper amount of water returned to the earth. Buying water rights is about the only way to do it.

Water Development in the West

At this point we should get back to the very beginning.... Most of the water in the Poudre drainage, and lesser in the other drainages such as the Thompson, the Platte, became crucial to the economics. You could buy land for 50 cents an acre and if you could put water on it, you could get 5 dollars an acre. All that was missing was the water. Naturally everyone started out with the same idea, just tap into a river and put a ditch out, and you

have irrigated land. This worked very well for very few because as the settlement increased, the Poudre couldn't produce enough water to finish the irrigation season. As you know, I'm sure, water comes into the Poudre during the snow melt and as the season goes, why, the water levels in the river continue to drop and drop and drop and finally get way down. By the time fall comes, you can't irrigate very many acres of land out of the Poudre. It doesn't have the water. And you've got some complication in that cities want water through the wintertime.

During the early days of settlement fights became common over water and there was no law that governed who got the water. It was a matter of just location and opportunity, so during the constitutional convention that made Colorado a state they developed this "right of prior appropriation" and put that into the Colorado constitution at that time.

This system was basically a new system in the United States, this "right of first priority" of water. "First in time, first in right," so this set of laws required a Water Court to adjudicate in fact who was first and also the administrative function to decide how much water there was and if there's a lot of water, well, you get to open your head gate and for how long. Those are the building blocks of our current water system. Since then we have refined this idea and today it does govern all our water and water distribution in the state.

Today George Varra, the River Commissioner, will go up – well, I don't think he has to go up, I think it's all automatic today – and get a reading on the Poudre just above Ted's Place. Then he mathematically constructs a virgin river, if there is such a possibility, but that would be the amount of water that would be in the river if nobody was doing anything – adding water out of Chambers or subtracting water out anywhere. This then determines the rights of those people that are affected. The whole idea of storage is to get the water in the spring runoff, hold it, and dump it later in the season for the purpose of irrigating longer in the season. As a result, they have farmers basically – and there were some... I don't know how to say this without leaving a bad taste in somebody's mouth, but there have always been hucksters trying to make a buck off of land in the west and certainly greedy. The early days were no exception and the deal was that break between 50 cents and 5 dollars an acre, which was pretty attractive if they could just get the water.

That's the same kind of mentality that drives anybody that wants to convert land. That new (960 land) project that they've talked about in Red Feather is the same basic deal. If you do these things, the price of land will go up and sell and make bucks. That's what they want. The part I'm interested in is the water and how they're going to solve that. I don't know if they already have water rights on that land. At one time there were some old hay meadows on that property and ever since Ray Stenzel bought it they've been recording how much each ditch runs. Ultimately they're going to claim this water is in

their name and their right is number “what” for so many acre feet, and they’ll go to Water Court and everybody from Thornton north is going to be watching that case, fighting it.

When we went to court in the 1970s, the Red Feather Storage & Irrigation Company had two or three objectors. And if you can change things around to the satisfaction of those objectors, why, then you could get the deal approved. You had to satisfy not only the objectors but also the law. Usually it costs in order to get somebody to buy off, and you lose part of your water. What you have to factor in is the expense of the law which goes on forever and then once you know what your water is, then what can you do with it? Will the project then fit the water? I don’t know whether their water will fit or not for 50 houses, and whatever else. Conceivably after all the horse tradin’ is done you have water for 49 horses and 4 houses.

Our water rights (for the Red Feather Storage & Irrigation) are out of the North Pine and the South Pine coming off the Baldies. Very few people recognize it, but we have a tributary of the South Pine that crosses our ditch system so we can take water from it. We divert most of our water from the North Pine.

History of Water Development in Northern Colorado and Wyoming

The source of the water for the Division of Wildlife lakes is – you have to kind of back up and look at it as a system. All the lakes in Red Feather, with the exception of Parvin, were part of a system. They were owned initially by the Laramie Poudre Irrigation Company, and the Laramie Poudre Company had dreams of irrigating all that land out there (to the east) – “Watch Nunn grow.” As part of that scheme, clear to Briggsdale, you can drive out in those pastures and there’re places where a pickup can drive in a lateral ditch. That’s how much water they expected to get there. It was all to come out of the Laramie River through the tunnel. The tunnel is through the Green Ridge; from the Laramie River.

This (plan) caused Wyoming to take it to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court of the United States had a Wyoming judge on it. His name was Vanderway or some such name, I’d have to check that. The net effect was that this judge decided that Colorado’s water rights were based on their completion of the tunnel. So he split the amount of water going to Colorado and going to Wyoming in such a way that Colorado got only 19,500 acre feet of water as their share of the Laramie River. Of course, after that loss, the project was dead.

Historically under the Prior Appropriation water laws, the first shovel of dirt is the starting point in your water right. They had started the tunnel, run out of money, gathered up some more money, started again and finally got it through. The Supreme Court ruled that they didn’t get credit for any of this time, except when they punched a hole through it, as a

result they were cheated out of their water. And Wyoming sort of woke up after they saw what was going on up there.

The Laramie Poudre Irrigation Company decided to kick that horse again to see if they couldn't get more water out of it, so they went back to the Supreme Court with the argument that the water used in Colorado was to irrigate hay meadows, whereby the water just runs through the meadow and back into the stream (toward Wyoming) and therefore shouldn't have a charge against the limit set by the court. Once again the court ruled against the Laramie Poudre. The Supreme Court said it was a problem they were going to have to settle in Colorado; it was not a matter for the court. This was about 1910 to 1915, something like that. Down the Laramie (River), to Four Corners, those ranches down there run water out of the Laramie and it wouldn't take much to run out a few thousand acre feet of water through a hay meadow, and by the time it melted up where the tunnel was there wouldn't be any of the allotment left. The problem was finally solved by agreements between the ranchers and the Laramie Poudre Irrigation Company over sharing the water on a seasonal basis rather than just getting all (the water) you can get. So much was allotted for the downstream ranches and then the rest of it was used for trans-mountain diversion of water.

People don't realize it, but there are several places where this water is diverted. For instance, the water out of Deadman ditch that we see when we go on the (*Meadow*) tour, that is water that would go out into the Laramie River and once you open that ditch it flows into the Poudre System. It gets to the Eaton Reservoir and runs out east. There's an old Columbine ditch system that was tapped up there just off of the main Deadman Road; the Tower Road – if instead of going to the tower you go south, less than a quarter of a mile, you'll cross the old Columbine ditch. I've hiked that. Ditches are easy to hike because they all have a grade that doesn't kill you. On the east side of that road, a short distance downstream there are some old buildings that the ditch camp used. The Forest Service probably tore them down and burned them up – they are terrible about maintaining historic....

After the Supreme Court cases, that bankrupted Larimer Poudre Irrigation Company. They had a sheriff's sale in 1936 on the courthouse steps in Fort Collins. The assets of the company were sold and at that point, I think – and this is supposition – some of the bondholders or people who had money invested gathered together and became the Tunnel Water Company and they bought up the Red Feather assets originated by the Larimer Poudre Irrigation Company in the deal. It just took quite a while for the Larimer Poudre to get to the bankruptcy stage. The Supreme Court cases happened in 1910-1912, something like that, and it wasn't until 1936 that it just disappeared.

About Water Rights

Now, another concept that – this will do nothing but confuse you, but you ought to have it anyway – there are basically two kinds of water rights in the United States. One is “first in time, first in right” or a Prior Appropriation Water Right and the other is a Riparian Water Right System. This has caused a number of problems and they’re still happening.

If you can imagine moving west and developing as you go, you get to the Kansas-Nebraska border and you have heavy rainfall and the population is heavy there too. You go to the state legislature and adopt a water right system for the state, they tended to make a “riparian system” because that’s where most of the people lived at the time and they had plenty of water so it was kind of a natural fit. So they would do that. A “riparian system” is such that the water doesn’t belong to anybody in the sense that when needed the water is assigned to the most beneficial use.

Let’s say you live on Mississippi River which has a nice stream, you live next to the river and you can cut a ditch in and irrigate your farm. Your neighbor who lives in the next farm up away from the river could not cut a ditch through your property, or somebody else’s, and irrigate his farm.

In a Riparian (Water Right System), only the farm on the river has any right to that water. If it touches the river, it’s got a right to that water. The right is limited by the concept of “most beneficial use” which can change from year to year or time to time. For instance, if your beneficial use is to raise corn for ethanol and the river goes down, you couldn’t get water anymore because the water itself would be ruled to be more beneficial to run this mill downstream and they need a full head of water to do it. If at some place in the system there was a hospital that needed the water, it would be seen as more beneficial than the mill. It’s always a decision of what’s most beneficial to the community, time by time. Barges, for instance, floating barges down the river is very critical to the economic health of the whole area, so they get a different priority.

You get to Colorado and we have an absolutely opposite kind of situation. In Colorado, in the west by “prior appropriation” you have the right of eminent domain. In other words, if I want to put a ditch in across this golf course and I’ve got water over there and I want to use it over here, and I’ve met all the legal requirements, you can condemn this ground and put a ditch in here. That would be possible.

It’s like the pipeline coming from Bellvue that the City of Greeley put in. Pipelines and ditches are like public utilities, like electrical lines. As a result they put them where they have to put them, even though the land is privately owned. The same is true with roads.

Our problem has always been, and will continue to be, that we originate all the water up here in Colorado, like all the western United States, and as the rivers flow east they turn into a “riparian system,” which has caused a lot of confusion and will continue to cause confusion. Now water going out the other way, out of the western rivers – like the Colorado River, California, Nevada, those states are water scarce, so the “right of prior appropriation” is much more important.

Right now today Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas are fighting over water in the Republican River. It runs through Wray and out, and the source is sort of up near Bonny Reservoir (in Colorado) and a big chunk of western Nebraska. Now they’re trying to figure out, and tie the underground wells into this thing, and if they do, why if you take water out of the well, you’ll really be taking it out of the Republican River, and if you take it out of the Republican River you’ve got to satisfy the Kansas water right.

But Kansas has a “riparian system” and that is – now we are used to measuring in acre feet, we owe so-many acre feet this year, next year we owe so-many acre feet and if you make those things happen, then you’re in – but the compact between Colorado and Kansas is an off-shoot of this riparian idea and it has been described as both the worse and best of the compact system. It determines who gets the water and the purposes for which it’s used.

History of Red Feather Storage and Irrigation Company, the DOW Lakes and Fox Acres Lakes

In 1947 the Horsetooth-Big Thompson project was ready to come on line and start furnishing water, so there was a widely spread feeling that we would have all kinds of water. The Red Feather System was in need of repair and replacement on many of its facilities and of course the Tunnel Water Company was not ready to put that kind of capital into doing this, so therefore it became their choice to simply sell it and get it off their hands. That’s when the Red Feather Storage and Irrigation was formed to buy it.

When this opportunity came along in 1947, it was too good to pass up. The leadership in Red Feather was very anxious to get this ownership. So people like, oh, Ted Dunning I’m sure was a prime mover, I’m sure Ralph Swanson was and I can almost bet Ray Higley was a prime mover, and those are probably the only ones still there in the 1960s. What they did was to form a company which paid four percent interest and went out and sold stock just up and down the street until they got the money they needed – anywhere they could sell a share, not only in Red Feather.

Of course, in 1947 Game and Fish desperately wanted the lakes. The Tunnel Water Company for some reason or another, hated, would not do business with, Game and Fish.

That's hearsay and there's no way of proving that, it's just what I understand. What happened was, the Red Feather Storage and Irrigation Company decided it would sell Dowdy, West and Bellaire to the DOW (Colorado Division of Wildlife) for half of the \$35,000 investment. Then (Red Feather Storage and Irrigation) would keep the remainder of the lakes and eventually two or three years later they sold Red Feather Lake to the private group for \$3000. We are still responsible for all the remaining lakes.

We had 200 shares in stock, at \$100 a share, we got \$3000 (for the sale of Red Feather Lake) so every share holder got 15 bucks – cash, money. Anybody that got \$15, their stock was now worth \$85 because now they'd been reimbursed \$15, but we've given up on that over the years. But there's still a few of them around. God yes, there's quite a few who predate me in the Association – old people.

So when I bought my share of stock up in Red Feather I would get a check every year for \$4 which was the interest on my \$100 investment. And then, shortly after – dates would be helpful here, I could probably chase them if they're important – we got something from the county assessor who wanted to assess our assets to pay real estate taxes. Of course that would be the worst or all possible scenarios for our operation, and we fought this for two or three years. Finally we decided the way out of this was to go through the United States government and get established as a – what became in the end as a 501c12 – which meant that it was a voluntary and membership (nonprofit) organization. We also reorganized as a Colorado nonprofit company. So we have not had any problems with this issue since. But we also don't get \$4 every year.

Columbine Lake which is – you probably don't even know about – is just west of Creedmore Road across from Hiawatha Highway. If you go upstream from the road about two to three hundred yards there's a small lake. We own that. It was built by Fox Acres in an exchange program. They wanted something we had, and we wanted something they had. They were trying to get a boundary below Leticia that would let them put in the back nine of the golf course and there's a little lake in there. I convinced them that was going to be our rearing pond. That was the deal, but it was a deal for us because Ray Stenzel, to accommodate his golf course near Letitia Lake, agreed to provide three items.

First, he would furnish or build Columbine Lake (on land owned by the Quaintance family) and make it operational. Secondly, he would rebuild the dam at Letitia and, thirdly, he would provide the ground we needed for the south and east part of Apache Lake. Part of Apache Lake was on Quaintance land and this is hard to describe --. The section corner is located in the Apache Dam. The land south and east was owned by the Quaintance family, the land to the north and west was part of the Snowy Owl Ranch owned by K.G. Rath Cribbs.

That's how Columbine was built and became ready to use as a rearing pond. It holds about 3 acre feet of water. We can always fill it, then dump it later into Shagwa, which is our next lake. And then ... Shagwa is about 9 acres I think. I think that's right, but if you're going to publish these numbers, make sure you get them right. That gets you down to Hiawatha which is about 35 acres, Ramona, 19, Snake, 12, Letitia about 19. Going down the other channel from ... instead of going to Shagwa, you've got to go to Papoose, which is a rearing pond. I don't know how much water it holds, it's about the same size as Columbine. We have Apache and that's a little over 19 acres and Nokomis, which is I guess 12 acres maybe, a little more. Then the ugly step sister is Erie because it's way off and looks like it should be a part of Crystal. Many of the poachers think it is.... Erie gets its water out of the same head gate as all the rest of the lakes. Except we can not put any South Pine water in Erie – it's physically impossible. All the water comes from North Pine.

Among the DOW lakes, Parvin is a separate issue. The water that feeds Parvin is (straight) out of the South Pine (and not part of the system), but the interesting part, is that when they built Parvin they simply put a dam in the drainage and never filed for a water right. And they had no water right until in the 1970s we filed on the Elkhorn and they were objectors to us taking that because of the minimum flow interests the DOW had ... the minimum flow rights on all Colorado streams came in about this time. They were pushing this over on the Elkhorn. The Elkhorn where we're diverting had about three or four branches and we're diverting out of one of these branches. So they are holding our feet to the fire over this two cfs bypass – cubic feet per second – on this and finally after going up there on a field trip and yakking and whatnot it came out that they didn't have a water right on Parvin and they were just getting ready to file for one. They wondered if we would object and we said naturally we'll object.... Can't get a water right for 1930 or 1931 or whenever they built the damn thing then and in 1970 get the same water right. The compromise was that we would bypass one cfs. Parvin itself, as far as I can tell, was a DOW experimental lake that they wanted and has a history of its own.

Dowdy and West Lakes get their water out of a ditch that's head gate is right about where (Byron) Swanson's house is. When you drive east you cross that ditch at Lucille Schmitt's there (Ponderosa Realty) and it leaks like Hell. It's the responsibility of the DOW. Bellaire is ... acres, I don't know, but West Lake is probably in the 15 to 19 acre range and Dowdy is a much bigger lake, I would guess it's more like 150 acres, off my head. Bellaire has a ditch system that fills it out of the Elkhorn.

We actually own some shares of water in the Mountains and Plains Irrigation Company. The Mountains and Plains Irrigation Company is owned primarily by the City of Greeley. The water we own there, we bought most of it from the cement company, Ideal Cement, there at LaPorte. It became Holcim and they finally closed it up.

Way back when we got into the early water wars (the Board of the Red Feather Storage and Irrigation Company) sensed that we needed some additional water to use to fill our lakes. One alternative was to get some Mountains and Plains water. The cement company owned 69 shares. A share doesn't mean anything, but 69 shares will produce in a good year about 110 acre feet of water. In order for us to use that water, we filed for a transfer right, which is another of the many water rights which are available, and the water right simply says if you own water at Point A and want to replace it at Point Z, if nobody is hurt in between, you may do that. So we examined the Elkhorn and the water rights on the Elkhorn are basically junior rights, so we filed for a transfer right on the Elkhorn and when timing is right we can release water into the Poudre and pick it up out of the Elkhorn, run it through Bellaire Lake and dump it into the South Pine. The South Pine eventually gets back into the main stem of the Poudre below Seaman Reservoir, so if you haven't hurt anybody between either the point where you dump it in up at the Poudre to the place where you replace it, that half of the equation is alright. The other half of the equation is you've got to satisfy the ranchers' water rights at Livermore. For example, assume that you've got 5 cfs running and Hansen's running 5 cfs (on his ranch in Livermore), and where I put my water in there's 10 cfs, and I can take out 5 cfs and he hasn't been harmed at all. If you put this in there, nobody will understand it! We bought these shares in the mid-1970s and we use them pretty nearly every year.

Maybe we should explain the operation of the Red Feather Lakes as irrigation reservoirs and then throw in the idea that that's not really compatible with what recreational use requires – for fishing, everything. An irrigation and storage lake is to pick up the water in the spring when the snow is melting and then hold it until there's a call for it when you release the water. If it was a wet year you'd probably go ahead and release all of it anyway because these old earthen dams are pretty much designed to dry out. They are not designed to store water permanently. As a result, people live on a lake, they don't like to see that mud hole out there. It isn't a matter of whether they can fish or can't fish, it's just an ugly thing. Fox Acres has the same trouble. They want all these lakes, but they want them filled with water all the time. You can't use them for irrigating grass if they're full of water. So that's a problem.

Then it does affect the fishing negatively, as we previously discussed. The fish go down stream, little fish, and all kinds of stuff happens.

We try to build the dams better now for what we want to use them for, which is year around storage. They never really last year 'round. The dams are built basically with a clay trench in the middle, clay being impervious.

How one can join the Red Feather Storage and Irrigation Company is a mix of everything. For instance our stock is sold to anybody that we consider to be really interested in preserving the lakes for Red Feather. Developers wanted to buy them up and use the water. We have stock, but we don't necessarily sell it to people who have other uses for it. We also have a strange set of bylaws which say if you own multiple shares of stock you still only get one vote.

Who can fish in the lakes is a separate package entirely. Frankly that's changed and we're not through changing it. I don't know if you keep up with the sporting world but fishing and hunting has really dropped. DOW for instance will have a free license day for kids and for fathers where you don't have to buy a license. It's just an attempt to market fishing. We suffer from the same problem. People come to Red Feather and they want to bring these ATVs, motorbikes, and all those kinds of things, and they don't care about fishing. The young people are more interested in these sports that are more adrenalin sappers. Different strokes for different folks. But it's been hard to maintain our membership. We have expanded who we will take. It used to be you had to own property in Red Feather. Now we have different prices for different situations. But if you wanted to come to Red Feather and fish and had family, you could pay about \$400 to \$500 a year and get all the fishing privileges you want. And that will change as the market changes.

If they own property in Red Feather they still have all these multiple choices on how they want to sign up. We tried tying the membership to the property, there's some of that. It is almost a covenant on the property. In the past, fishing membership was contingent own owning property, as a result lots unsuitable for building were often sold as "fishing lots."

Our position is that the lakes in Red Feather are important to everybody there. They are the heart of Red Feather. Over the years the fishermen had been essentially paying the bill for everybody's use of this beautiful lake atmosphere. We're trying to attach it to the property so there is a stream of revenue that we can depend on.

Right now we have to replace a dam at Hiawatha, which is one of the bigger, more expensive dams that we have, and it's going to cost a quarter of a million dollars and we need money to do that. It's a management sort of thing, not easily done and it's hard to convince people....

For instance, diesel has shot up out of sight. Our fish guy, almost everything he does has a diesel connection. Delivery (of stock) alone from Hotchkiss to Red Feather is a major expense. The good trout are in Hotchkiss. We can't use the ones raised in the hatchery on the Poudre. That's a state operation and they can't sell them privately. Hotchkiss is over on the Western Slope.

When I came to Red Feather, the lakes were all full, nice looking, and then in the winter of '63-'64 we didn't get any snow. The winter of '65 volunteers hiked into the upper ditch and we shoveled the snow out of ditch to get water before Hansen needed it for irrigation. We had a string of 10 or 15 guys, including my son David who was just a kid, which went up there. The merchant class even realized that without water, there isn't much going on in Red Feather. We proceeded to get it cleaned out and the water stored a little early. We still didn't have enough water to come close.

The ditch system was such that if you got a really heavy runoff you couldn't deliver it because the system was in poor shape. When I finally got the company to agree on a resurrection program, we were going to do the delivery system first. There were places where you couldn't walk on the ditch bank, it was so insignificant. We'd have all these breakouts and lose the water and it was going someplace else.

We started up at the top – I've got some pictures, we may get into them; they are not here, they are in Greeley – and we get a program going to redo the delivery system and when you turn the water on, if there's a lot of water, a lot of water comes down and causes some other problems because we can't deal with it, but we can always bypass it. We got that pretty well straightened out. You couldn't run enough water around Shagwa to count. You could step across (the ditch) anyplace when it was running wide open. It was a worn out system. At any rate, we went to the expense and trouble of fixing that so when we did get a wet year, we could bring water to Red Feather.

Then we started working on our dams. We've essentially rebuilt Letitia, in agreement with Fox Acres, we've rebuilt Snake ourselves, we've rebuilt part of Ramona – we still need to do a section of it. We've done some work on Hiawatha but it still needs a major repair. We built Apache Lake and done some work, not very much, on Nokomis and on Erie, we've rebuilt the whole thing, and the ditch system into it.

And that's a story worth telling... .

Erie Lake History and Water System

Erie is a kind of off the beaten track as far as the other lakes. It's totally unconnected the rest of the system. Much of the ditch system to it is separate and apart from the main system that goes to Red Feather. Erie is off the Creedmore Lakes Road and appears to be in Crystal Lakes. But it isn't.

When I came to Red Feather, Erie Lake had been an old boys' camp, Camp Wayne. I think it was named after Wayne Akin who owned the house on the west shore of Ramona. It is one of the oldest pre-subdivision dwellings.

There was this boys club or camp, that's what it was. As you trace back the deeds, there were two properties. One of them was with the Kiwanis Club and the other one was with another club, like Rotary or Lions, but at any rate, the clubs functioned as the supporters of this camp. I have no idea where (the sponsoring clubs) were located physically. This was along, I would guess, in the 20s when camping out was kind of big for kids, and poor kids.

The lake itself was not very deep and had practically no natural drainage into it. It really sets up there on top, if you walk around it. If the Big Thompson (flood) would come, why, it wouldn't gain much water because most of it would fall right in the lake. We owned Erie as part of the Storage and Irrigation Company assets and the ditch system to fill the lake. The ditch ran across what was going to become one of the Crystal Lakes filings. The ditch was badly eroded and would not deliver water to the lake.

I don't think Camp Wayne did very much in terms of actually working the lake because they didn't own the lake. They just simply used the lake in agreement with the lake owner which probably would have been the Laramie Poudre outfit. I think the Laramie Poudre put that together originally, made the ditches.

At any rate, the Larimer-Poudre Irrigation Company brought water into this lake and built the dam there, and the dam today is very much like the first time I saw it. We have rebuilt it and put a new outlet structure in because that was all rusted out. So, this was the situation when I came. There was this little puddle of water out there, and you could see the old Camp Wayne. There was a toilet up there with three holes in it.... It was a boys' camp! In fact I still have the three holes. Any rate, when the time came for this development of Crystal Lakes in that filing, Erie looks like it's part of Crystal Lakes. We thought so too, and they thought so, and so we decided we better get organized and get it back into service.

There was a fence all along on the south side of the road and Curry ran cattle on his part. On the north side of the road you got into Quaintance land pretty quick, so there wasn't any fence there to worry about. We organized a crew of men to go over there and dig that ditch out so we could run water the next spring. Well, we did. We dug – no water. It wouldn't run through the ditch. If you go upstream from the road closest to Erie to the bottom of that little drainage, that little segment of ditch is what we had.

See, all the lakes in Red Feather are fed by a series of man-made ditches and a series of natural topography. You put the water in a valley up here, take it out down here and put it in a ditch and run it two or three hundred yards, and dump it into another valley, it will eventually get where you want it to go if you've got enough water. The system to fill Erie was no different.

We told the people at Crystal we were going to go in there and open that fence (on the south side) and take some equipment in there and open that ditch. Well, they threatened to shoot us. That was Weixelman's understudy, can't remember his name. He was an engineer. I know where he lived in Red Feather, but anyway, he was in charge of security and all that.

Gene Barker had an old D-7 cat with a blade that would tilt. So we decided we'd go over there Labor Day because there wouldn't be any judge they could get or anything to stop the process, and we'd be in there and out of it in a day's time. David, my son, 1969 probably, ran the rod, I ran the transit to look through to make sure the water would run downhill, and Gene ran the cat. I'll tell you, we ripped the worse looking ditch you've ever seen in your life. It was deep, ugly, and the next spring, we turned the water in and it worked. We filled Erie.

We heard a lot in the interim, for instance one of the things that was a big deal ... there was a pine tree growing up in the middle of this dam and it was probably about six inches around, and they hired someone from the CSU forestry department to core drill it to prove how long it'd been there. They were trying to prove abandonment. But Colorado water law at the time had no provision for abandonment unless you went to court and abandoned the water right. You didn't abandon it by just walking away; you abandoned it by legal action. When the smoke all cleared, we had a ditch and we've had it ever since.

One of the examples of maintaining it, as soon as we put the ditch in and they developed that land, a guy by the name of Anderson I think – he was kind of a speculator contractor, built a house below the ditch. In the process, we sent him a letter indicating he was building that in a very swampy wet place and he should take precautions about draining water away from there. He sent a nasty letter back and told us not to bother him and all that stuff.

A few years later Joe Richards owned it, and Joe – I don't know what he did, but he also owned a plane and landed it over at Crystal on their strip and managed to survive, among the few.... So he talked to some sheriff's officer who'd lived up there in Crystal, and the sheriff's officer told him to just go in there and cut the ditch. So the next day, why, we had all our equipment and a whole bunch of chain saws and revved it up and went over there. We told him now we're going to build a road to that junction so we can service that head gate. We're going to have to take out a few trees and whatnot, so we thought we better put you on notice. I said we can't afford to have you shutting our water off all the time, water's too precious and when you get it that's when you've got to have it. That convinced him not to mess with our water any more. It was several years, I suppose about

eight or ten years later we put it in a pipe and it hasn't caused any problem since. But every time we ran water (before the pipe), the water would run right through his garage.

We cut down the tree when we rebuilt the dam. But it was a non-issue because it might have been there a hundred years and it wouldn't have proved abandonment, which is what they wanted. Camp Wayne died during the depression, and the buildings just kind of weathered away. It was a pretty site and you could see where the boys made these tepee rings. People go out there in these weeds and find these tepee rings and think the Indians have been there. But they haven't.

Mitchell Ditch System

Mitchell Ditch is kind of a ... it's kind of like Red Feather Lakes. The main ditch that taps the North Pine and starts water to Red Feather takes up the South Pine drainage and brings that over the divide into the Columbine drainage, the Columbine drainage drains down through Nokomis – if you can imagine that valley that... where you pull out of west Red Feather, across the cattle guard and down, that's Columbine Canyon. That water runs down that. We can divert it there just above the Creedmore Road and send it into Red Feather proper or let it go on down through Apache and Nokomis. The other part of the system, belonging to the DOW, is filled out of the South Pine. You can take water right there by Swansons' yard and put it into that ditch over to West Lake and Dowdy Lake. The third part of it is the ditch system to Bellaire which is entirely separate from all the rest, being the Elkhorn.

The Mitchell Ditch I suppose was built by the Laramie Poudre Irrigation Company. Water, water, water, water – you have to realize this country was an absolute desert out here without water. With water it is as you see it today. So all lakes, all water development was based on the idea that you needed to capture the water.

The Mitchell Ditch would be better described as the Mitchell Ditch System, rather than as a single ditch. From my understanding, the top part, which was the most important part where it intersects the North Pine, was blasted out in 1888. About half, three-quarters of a mile downstream from the amethyst mine is the head gate at the North Pine and the Mitchell Ditch.

Red Feather Lake over there, the outlet structure is way above the water. The same system feeds it. They own one eighth of the Mitchell Ditch System. Then they pay \$10 a day for running water – which is sort of ridiculous. Once you get it turned on, why, water runs.

If you look at a water system, you have to understand that easy is first. It's just the way it is.... And they could get into the South Pine part of that easily; you could get it with

horses and scrapers and just make it work. When you get up to the North Pine you had to probably use ... was dynamite available then? The rock face up there shows no signs of drill holes. Most dynamiting you can see the drill holes, but I kind of think that might have been black powder where they blasted. I don't know when dynamite was common....

The delivery system in Red Feather is a combination of man-made and use of the natural terrain. I don't know that there is a single lake that doesn't have some kind of natural basin. The land is all decomposed granite, and if you've ever flown over the area, it's just filled with little potholes that are natural. In wet years they were full of water. There's Lady Moon Lake on top of a ridge and north across the road, why there's Windy Gap Lake, way on top. They can't get any water into them, they just fill. Below Dowdy there's all kind of little potholes. The Harden Reservoir – I was out joy riding one day and I came in through the back and got in there and I noticed that at the head gate it says Harden Reservoir and a date in the cement. They tried to store water because water was the key to development out on the plains. Anybody who owned water had a deal.

Early Growth of Red Feather Lakes Community

The next part of this, there's a community growing up around this water situation. Very small, very – not much drive in it certainly. It would be pure speculation, but there was some attempt to homestead some places around here in the 1800s, 1900s. There might have been some timbering during the early part. Red Feather was kind of isolated, yet sort of strategic. You could not get into the upper Poudre, so in order to get to the upper Poudre, you came up to Log Cabin and across. But they also had stage service over to – eventually to Walden – but it went down Deadman Creek, there at the old Glendevey and then up over ... it opened up northern Colorado and the northern part of the county. Even after they opened the upper part of the Poudre the road over Cameron was later, so this was the early access to the rest of the county, an area that probably didn't pay much attention to the county anyway. I would assume there were some cattle, some timber, but it lacked much of a settlement.

Red Feather kind of has two histories. While early on it was ranching, timber, starve-to-death kinds of settlement, that was prior to the concept of a recreational environment that it became in 1925. There are some traces of the pre-Red Feather, but I don't know when or by what name Red Feather existed prior to that. There was West Lake School, but that would have been after the lakes were developed. Obviously they were developing dams for these potholes up there – well, that's what they were. If you drain these lakes, nearly all of them will have a hole that has been there forever. The water kind of erodes the soft granite out and makes a lake deeper over time. The ideal was to have a small dam and a large impoundment. They obviously made them in order of benefit that they could derive

from them, for instance the water they could get out of Erie vs. the water they could get out of Hiawatha, is just.... But 50 cents an acre or 5 dollars an acre, you have this incentive. The lakes weren't all built the same year. I would imagine (they were built in) a period of time between the late 1800s and World War I. And you also want to realize it wasn't built as a big project all under construction at one time. They'd find a place where there might be good storage, and then if you could get some water to it so you put a little ditch and get a little water, then you'd figure out how to get more water by putting more ditch in, and it just grows. That's the way they all did, not only in Red Feather.

Many of these ditch companies (on the plains) were put together because the farmer or somebody had land and some of it was already sold and the farmer wanted to participate in this deal, so he'd dig ditches in the winter as his contribution without spending any real money. In the farm country the labor was almost all put in by the farmers. Most of the mountain stuff was done professionally.

The hand dug ditches you see around here on land were built for different purposes. The same thing is true of this 960 land (development proposal). If you tried to ranch up here you had to have hay. So they always homesteaded the meadows so they could irrigate. (While) they were irrigating the meadows they'd turn the cows loose in the forest.

Along when Red Feather sporting came to be, that sort of changed that, because then you had a place where you could sell worms in the summer, offer fishing. No one was going that far hunting deer, that would be crazy.... The area was subdivided and promoted as a place to build summer cabins. At any rate, the economy kind of began to include this patch of people who were only here in the summer ... people who were interested in buying ice, for instance. They cut ice on Ramona, stacked it in sawdust, took it out, weighed it – always with the tongs on – took it off, put it in somebody's trunk and took the tongs off. You bought a pair of tongs every time you got a block of ice. Summer people really drove that economy. I doubt seriously if the winter people even bothered (with ice).

The fact is this established some economic activity that didn't have anything to do with timber or agriculture. It kind of began to change Red Feather and that change has gone through the years and still is very evident that you have people come up here It solved several problems. In the 1920s there was a big problem with tuberculosis. There was a common belief that if you slept with the mountain air, you could prevent or cure tuberculosis. It was pretty common for health reasons to come to the mountains and breathe the mountain air and this was an activity that was open to all classes of people. The camping out era started then, cars were a little bit better and people were beginning to experience vacations and better work schedules. I think it was a period of time when if you had a couple of days off, you could do things like this. So Red Feather became popular as a – it was often referred to as a “poor man's country club.” It was pretty much

a blue collar clientele. It's reasonably close to the populations to Denver and along the Front Range, but it also attracted a lot of people who were in the farming business out of Kansas and Nebraska, that once the wheat was harvested it was easy to get away for a period of time. So this kind of drove a new kind of economy in Red Feather that was pretty near impossible beforehand. And, as a result, we had some growth period there, where people were building houses or cabins, most of them were pretty rustic. They had no intention of living in them during the hard part of the year; they just wanted something to keep the mosquitoes out at night. You can go through Red Feather and most of the old cabins have a lean-to porch on them, which is a rather large part of the cabin, and now it's all incorporated with windows and all that, but when it was originally built there was nothing but screen separating you from the mountain air. That was the typical building.

If you want to see one of those, go over – just as you go out of Red Feather before the cattle guard on Hiawatha Highway, on the north side, about two or three houses in, there's this cabin with yellow and some dark color and a huge big porch. The screen is kind of waving in the breeze – it's not going to last much longer. But it is typical of that sort of solution to those problems.

Of course the fishing was an alternative, something to do, so that got that going. We first stocked the lakes in agreement with the owners of the lakes. They had no objection to us using them, I don't know what they paid, I don't think it was free, but I don't think money was a big item in the agreements. The problem with it was that the very nature of storage water is that you unstore it. In the fall, they'd open the head gate and drain it all out and that would leave you with shallow water during the winter and it likely killed the fish through the winter, so it was one of those things that everyone realized was not the best way to do it, but it was as good as you could do. That horse drove the whole business of buying the lakes when they became available. Once the company was formed and the price was paid, we no longer emptied the lakes because there was no water released. You didn't need to open that head gate every year; you just threw a little dirt in if it started leaking.

Red Feather will always be both blessed and cursed by the 1920 vision of mountain recreation. The subdivisions all have small lots crowded together in patches around the lakes. Walking distances within the village were important after the ride up to Red Feather Lakes. The roads in Red Feather Lakes were every bit as good as the road to Red Feather Lakes when I came here. As the future becomes the past we will have to deal with water and sewage, but also have to think about the EPA and dust control. The larger isolated lots suitable for Mc Mansions may become less popular. Fishing may change but Red Feather Lakes will always have the advantage of the lake view setting that's hard to beat.