ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Michael Riley

DATE OF BIRTH: Not noted. GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: November 28, 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER(S): O'Cain, Shillingburg, Hodnett and Lombard

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM ___x__ OTHER_____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: January 9, 2002

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABSTRACTOR: O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: February 4, 2002

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Operation of the Elephant Butte Irrigation District with emphasis on delivery of irrigation water to Mesilla Valley farmers.

DATE RANGE: 2001

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Water held in the Elephant Butte Reservoir is controlled through provisions established in the Rio Grande Compact.

The Elephant Butte Irrigation District [EBID] works off a simple gravity-flow system with laterals and canals above ground level and drains below ground level.

The consultant began discussing the early spring release of water from the dam for crop irrigation. A normal allotment of water is three acre-feet, although this allotment can increase or decrease depending on water availability. Farmers can also purchase conserved water. This is essential given that vegetable crops, pecans, and alfalfa all take more water than the normal three-acre-foot allotment.

Administrative costs are charged to the farmer on the first two acre-feet of water. Technically, EBID is not charging for the water, which is a property right on water-righted land.

Small-tract irrigators own less than two acres of water-righted land. Farm irrigators own two or more acres. Small-tract irrigators receive water every three weeks on a schedule. Farmers, on the other hand, call in and order water. Water is delivered based on a complicated system administered by the water masters and the ditch riders (pages 8 – 13).

The consultant describes what occurs when there is a break in a main canal.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

EBID supports the concrete lining of farm and community ditches. It does not line their canals and laterals with concrete because the seepage recharges the aquifer. ("Applied irrigation water . . . is the largest source of recharge to the aquifer.") The single largest use of water in the state is surface evaporation—on average twelve vertical feet from the Caballo Reservoir and ten vertical feet from the Elephant Butte Reservoir.

When the weather is the hottest is when there is the most pressure on EBID staff to deliver water. Farmers, who have wells, irrigate from them if they are not getting water from EBIDin a timely fashion.

In the case where a farmer believes that water might be short (based on information on snow pack, etc.) he would decide to reduce the number of acres that he plants, "there's a potential for a lot of fallow land durin' a water-short year." Water is still measured on a projected basis by EBID, although EBID would like to move toward a metered system to measure the actual water used at each farm.

The consultant discusses the various departments and their duties within EBID.