

The Teton Dam Disaster Collection

# Jack Forbush – Life during the Teton Flood

By Jack Forbush

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## Box 6 Folder 7

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

HF: Teton Dam Disaster project, sponsored by the Utah State University, Ricks College and the Idaho Historical Society. It is my opportunity this morning, Saturday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 1977, to have here in the study area of my home, my brother, Jack Forbush, that I might interview him concerning the part he played in reclaiming and restoring and cleaning up following the wake of the bursting of the Teton Dam. Jack, welcome to the office this morning. I appreciate your cooperation in furthering this announced project, feeling that you have something special to offer and contribute to the manuscript of this great disaster here in eastern Idaho. Now, first of all, give your full name and spell the last name.

JF: Jack Forbush.

HF: Where were you born and raised, Jack?

JF: I was born here in Madison County in 1936 and was raised here, probably twenty of the past forty years.

HF: What is your present address and what is your occupation?

JF: Present address is 540 West 800 North, Malad City, Idaho. My occupation is a Soil Conservation Technician with the Soil Conservation Service.

HF: How long have you been working with the federal government?

JF: Approximately seventeen years.

HF: Was all of that time spent in Malad, or perhaps did you have some experience here in Madison County?

JF: I started out here in Madison County in '60-61. I transferred for a couple of months to Weiser, Idaho and was there for about two months and then went to Shelley, Idaho. I was there for two years then I transferred to Malad where I have been since.

HF: Jack, do you recall who your first boss was here in Madison County and then if you will share with us the person who is the head of the local office here at the present time, who is the director at that present time, so you will be reconnecting a little history of those who have occupied the position of the SCS, Soil Conservation here in Madison County.

JF: Well, I am not for sure if I can give you the total field office personnel or the advisors that were here, but James Reed was the work unit conservationist. He hired me on, then after he left, I am not sure who it was who took his place, but the present field office man here is Merrill J. Pickett, who has been here probably for the past two years.

HF: Now the soil conservation service, as I understand it, is a division of the Department of Agriculture, isn't that correct?

JF: That is right; it is part of the Department of Agriculture.

HF: What overall program do they follow just in the general statement, what do they do in working with the farmers or with people?

JF: We try to help farmers apply conservation measures and practices on the land to protect and conserve soil and water resources.

HF: So it was a rather natural assignment that the soil conservation service received to help with the cleanup program following the Teton Disaster. Is that correct?

JF: That's right, we were in a position where we could render a lot of aid in the restoration of the land, and restore their irrigation systems.

HF: Were you assigned in 1976 to the flooded area here in Madison County, and, if so, when did you commence to fill the tasks assigned to you here in Madison County?

JF: Well, I believe the dam broke on June the 5<sup>th</sup> and it was about two or three weeks after this time that I received the detail of coming down here for about two weeks at a time during the summer, I think it was about June the 20<sup>th</sup> that I received the detail. However, I was here three or four days directly after the dam broke and assisted my brothers and sister and mother in helping them clean up.

HF: It was quite a trauma in your life to come back to your community where you had been born and reared and where you actually launched your career with the soil conservation?

JF: That is right. Of course, I have always had a soft spot in my heart for Rexburg, Idaho. But it was kind of a thing of mixed emotions to come back and see this much damage and destruction that took place on the break.

HF: Jack, about how many soil conservation service personnel were assigned to work with you and others who were assigned?

JF: Our main assignment, of course, was to remove the debris, to restore irrigation systems and salvage, or restore the irrigation systems if we could, if possible salvage that year's crops. Otherwise try to get the systems going so that the crops that were planted would not be lost.

HF: What means did you have to work with in order to achieve this?

JF: Well, contractors throughout Idaho and throughout western United States converged upon Madison County to get this work done. Of course, these contractors owned the equipment and we were inspectors and had the job of supervising the clean up of this debris throughout the fields and farmsteads of the county. I would imagine at times there

were possibly twenty-five to thirty crews going in the county at once. The equipment on these crews ranged all the way from maybe ten to twenty-five pieces of equipment per crew, besides several laborers. Our responsibility was quite demanding in supervising and seeing that these crews were working efficiently and also seeing that they reported actual hours worked at the end of the day to the government who would pay them.

HF: Now, for example, Pahsimeroi, there was one called the Pahsimeroi Construction. Now, just taking that one example you would make a detailed report as to how many trucks, or loading devices or whatever they had in the field on a given day and how many men were working for that company. Is that correct?

JF: That is correct. They had a foreman and we, as inspectors dealt specifically with the foremans, we would keep track of the hours and if they didn't add up, then it was our responsibility to see where they did. Whenever a piece of equipment would break down, we would have to deduct this from their day's pay. Up to a certain extent we watched this pretty closely because there was a lot of tire repair. I think that we would allow the contractor two or three flat tires a day without charging them because they were right down in the debris and those front end loaders received a lot of flat tires.

HF: Jack, so that our readers may know, will you enumerate some of the heavy equipment, the tools, and the means that were used in cleaning up this Herculean disaster.

JF: Sure, a standard crew consisted of having a front end loader, this is a loader that they would scoop up the debris and load them into trucks. A small cat or caterpillar tractor, which would be used for perhaps digging out debris from ditches, or snagging logs, or bigger pieces of debris and breaking it up and that kind of gathering up used mostly in the ditches themselves. Then we had all the way from seven to ten trucks with four or five laborers that would be picking up around the equipment to keep boards and that from getting in their tires, and nails, and etc.

HF: How much of a distance would these trucks have to haul the debris so that it could be deposited?

JF: Oh, all the way from a quarter of a mile or five or six miles.

HF: Were there several debris areas or places?

JF: Yes, they had them scattered throughout the county, especially through Rexburg and Plano area.

HF: What procedure did the contractors have to use, did they themselves have to pile the stuff up and smash it down and then cover it with soil or did some one else have that assignment at the site to do that?

JF: There was someone, it was a contractor, one of the contractors who would come in there and be responsible for the dumping area and they would have D-9 caterpillars that

would push it out, tromp it down and just keep extending it but these big machines would break it up and smash it down pretty good. This is where a lot of trucks and those that were dumping would get their flat tires in these debris pileup areas.

HF: Now, we realize, both of us, that you had all types of debris, including live animal debris. Surely there must have of necessity had to separate this and pile the dead animals in one place and so forth, bury them up and burn them up or something and trees and old buildings, etc., would be placed elsewhere, is that correct?

JF: Yes, of course the dead animals and that were pretty well gathered up by the Civil Defense, I believe, prior to the time that we would remove. However, in some of the big debris piles we would find cattle that were pretty well decomposed and pretty ripe, and, of course, when we would come to them generally they were decomposed enough that we just had to either bury them on the spot or load them in with the rest of the debris and cover it up.

HF: Jack, when you arrived on the scene where you were going to do your work, getting out into the fields and so forth as inspectors, what were your overwhelming observations, what reactions, what did you see?

JF: Well, of course, all of the fences were down and anywhere around the farmsteads and canal banks where the water would back up and have to go over, there was a tremendous concentration of debris in these areas. Well, we wondered if we would ever get the job done, it was a monumental task to see as much debris as there was piled up. Sometimes our crew would take as long as a full week to clean one farm. There were several hundred farms and areas to clean up it did take a long time and the cost was great to have a crew of fifteen pieces of equipment or such going maybe for a week or so. You can imagine the cost.

HF: If you don't mind, let's take these reactions that you had and your feelings that you had step by step. When you saw the extent of this thing, what feelings came to you, maybe of compassion, overwhelmingness, just try to detail your emotion.

JF: Well, I think it kind of left a hollow feeling in your stomach. I've never had ulcers before, but I am sure anyone that would be on a detail that would stay up here all the time would probably get ulcers pretty fast. Just by working in this debris cleanup because of the things that you saw. And when I say this, it bothered you to see the overwhelming costs that it was costing the government and sometimes you kind of took this upon yourself. I know, of myself, I am quite conservative, and when I see all of this waste and all of this money that is being spent to do these jobs, well it give me a good idea, more so than ever before, what a million dollars was. The feeling was almost sickening and many of the crew in working, when I say the crew—inspectors—felt the same way because we talked amongst ourselves a lot. It was a very challenging and hard detail. After two weeks you would just about be at wits end and you was ready to go home because it just left an effect upon you that you had a gnawing feeling in your stomach at all times when you would see all of the waste and all of the money that was going into this effort of

cleaning up. Things that were being wasted, I seen hundreds and hundreds of railroad ties that was just being loaded into trucks and hauled away. And other good lumber that no one knew who it belonged to, it was hauled away and broken up and buried.

HF: And you wished, as a conservative person, that there would be some way that that could be put to use. Those who really wanted and could use it that they could have opportunity to use it.

JF: Yes. I kept thinking, "Boy, look at all of this stuff I could use on my own little place down in Malad." Of course, I know that this would be prohibitive. Nevertheless, at times when we were approaching a debris area and was gonna haul it away and break it up, probably it was against the law, but nevertheless, I talked to the farmer and suggested that if he could use any of that stuff to use it. Most generally they were too busy in getting their own lives and places in order that they didn't pay any attention to it. But I kind of have them do this if they wanted to pick through the stuff, if they found some stuff that was useable it was gonna be destroyed, I let them.

HF: Jack, what particular communities did you work in last summer?

JF: I worked in the Burton area and the Hibbard area. And then on one detail I spent most of the time west of town down in the river bottoms on cleanup of the river bottom area.

HF: Now, let's take each of those communities step by step. For example, in Burton, what happened, what physically happened to the land what was the overall destruction to the land in Burton?

JF: Well, of course, there was some land damage by erosion and sedimentation or siltation which was probably the two damages to the land other than leeching and chemical spills. Probably the biggest would be siltation and then, of course, erosion.

HF: What do you mean by siltation?

JF: Well, I mean the silt that was mixed up in the water between the dam and here had settled out in some of these areas. Of course, most of these, the silt probably come from the neighbors who perhaps had a fallow field that it would pick up and just distribute it on the next guy down and so on. I don't think that the silt load carried very far, but nevertheless, the silt deposited on the ground varying from one to two inches, to eight to ten inches. Generally alfalfa was a collector of silt, it would hang in there and collect just like a magnet. Most of the alfalfa fields collected several inches of silt.

HF: What type of debris seems to be located in the Burton area?

JF: Oh, most of the debris was straw and things from people's houses; had TVs, fridges, patio furniture, well, you just name it. Every kind of debris. Of course, it come right

through town and then we had an awful lot of big timber; poles and that that had come from the sawmill that was distributed throughout that area.

HF: How about trees?

JF: Not too many live green trees that come down. Most of them they were broken down or something still hung with the roots. We didn't get too much of these kind of removal of live trees. Most of it was logs that had floated from up out of the dam storage area. We had some of those big cedar junipers that come out of the dam itself. They were distributed throughout the country.

HF: Ten or twelve miles downstream from the dam?

JF: Yes.

HF: Now, comparing, if there is a means, as you recall, say Hibbard community with Burton community. We know that Burton is just about the same level on the westerly way but it is to the south of Hibbard, isn't that correct? Now can you make any comparisons with those two communities, was one hurt worse than the other or can you make a comparison?

JF: Well, yes, I think probably the Hibbard area was hurt a little bit more especially down towards the river. Hibbard is closer to the Snake River. I think damages (land damages) was a little greater there than it was in the Burton area.

HF: In the course of the cleanup you indicated that you would find TVs and other items of personal property right from the household, maybe trunks containing mementos, choice saving items of people. When you found these kind of things, what would you do? You wouldn't haul those off to the dump yard would you?

JF: Well, on some of the salvageable items, like fridges, and really I don't think that they are salvageable, but, nevertheless, some of these items that were still together—they had a collection place and that was there at the church house at Hibbard behind the church house. There they would take motorbikes, snow machines, and fridges, and anything that they felt might be salvaged and deposit it there for people to come and sort through them to see if they could find anything. For example, I was looking for a dump area down next to the Snake River and I found a big trunk and it was probably fifteen, twenty feet up on a pile of debris in the river bottoms. I climbed up and opened it up and the contents were wet but I sorted it until I found a name and I knew that the person that lost this would be very interested in recovering it because there was church certificates, and silverware, and crystal, and different things of value in there. So I contacted the Rigby's and found out later that it belonged to the daughter of Mr. Ray Rigby, one of our local attorneys here. I called her up and asked her if she had lost a trunk and she said that she had been looking for it for a week or two and was real grateful to get it. But there wasn't very often that you could find a name.

HF: Now, where had the owner of this trunk lived? How far had this trunk...

JF: Oh, probably a mile. She was down next to the river bottom and what had happened was it sucked it right out of her basement and out a door and it just literally vacuumed it out of her house.

HF: Jack, did you find that some items that were lost, maybe valuable items, when you couldn't find the owner like you did in the Rigby case, what was done then? Of course, you know that it is unlawful to appropriate lost property, but under the circumstances what did you observe taking place?

JF: Well, I think that on some of the items that were laying there that there would be no way of people finding the true owner. We usually didn't pay too much attention. I guess that there was a few people that would collect souvenirs from the flood. If a person on any of the crews was spending any time looking for such things we reprimanded them.

HF: Jack, now shifting from what we've been doing to another kind of an area attitude. Did you find that the owners of the property were cooperative with you inspectors and contractors as you would come to their premises?

JF: Yes, really I've never dealt with a more gratifying group of individuals than the farmers, especially on this detail. They were just tops. They had nothing but praise for the Soil Conservation Service and for all the government agencies that was coming in and helping them clean up after this disaster. As a whole, the farmers were just choice. They treated us very kindly and they did everything in their power to assist us where they could.

HF: Did the wife and children come out and exhibit their appreciation and cooperate with you?

JF: Occasionally they would. Of course, at this time they were all in a turmoil and that and they were cleaning up their houses, many of them. But the farmers were just appreciative. They mentioned this many times, "We don't know what we would do if you fellers didn't come in and help us out." You could tell that they really and honestly appreciated our efforts.

HF: Did you observe any emotionalism on the part of those who had lost their homes and their farm machinery and their land being torn up?

JF: Oh, yes. Many times when we would pull on a place you could see that they were very upset. It wasn't too hard; it was hard for them to hide any concern that they had over the destruction that had happened to them and the things that they had lost. They were still very cordial to us and very kind and very appreciative of the efforts that we were putting forth in their behalf.



HF: In your experience in this program, did you see anyone shed tears, because of the destruction?

JF: Yes. One day I was driving down the street out on Highway 88 and I noticed a woman sitting on the front porch and she had her head in her hands and she looked very disturbed and I am sure that she was crying. This was I'm sure a result of the dam break.

HF: Did you hear anyone complaining about the fact that the government had built this Teton Dam and that they had made some mistakes and were they placing a lot of blame on the government?

JF: Very few. In fact I asked practically every place I went on, I asked the farmer, "Do you think that they will ever put the Teton Dam back?" And without question they would always say, "Sure, they will put it back, we need it back." Otherwise, they knew that this was something that was necessary and the ones that I talked to was ready to have it back.

HF: Did you ever meet anyone who groaned and moaned about their plight with the terrible destruction? Really complaining about the terrible thing that had happened?

JF: There was one or two, but very few of them that did too much complaining. There was one or two individuals that did some complaining, but generally they just kind of rolled up their sleeves and went to work and really I had very few comments against the government. Most comments were for them, and appreciative of what they had done.

HF: Jack, in your experience last summer, when you would go to different places, did you see anything humorous in the way debris was piled up, or maybe the things that you saw that just kind of tickled the humor of a person?

JF: No, I don't think that I can think of anything. However, in one large debris pile we had a moment or two of anticipation when we were cleaning up these big piles of debris we were always fearful that we might find a body. In this one particular pile down by Bill Weimer's farm in Burton area, we were cleaning up a huge debris pile, piled up against the ditch bank. The backhoe was there pulling stuff out of the ditch and I noticed a shoe sticking out of some material and it was sticking like whatever it was, was laying on its back. I reached down to pick it up and it wouldn't come and I thought for sure I had a hold of a corpse, but as it was there was a stick that was stuck in it and it had fastened and it scared us!

HF: Others were watching you as you...

JF: Yeah. Another occasion was one person was dozing and he pushed over a mannequin. The guy I guess turned two or three different shades of white, if that is possible.

HF: Jack, could you take one farm where you worked and had a real challenge in cleaning up, and detail just what had happened if you could reconstruct what was there,

the home, different buildings and so forth and then what the flood did to that and what debris had been piled up. Can you just give me a case history of what I am trying to get at.

JF: Well, there was one area down in Burton that was west of the Bob Powell farm that I thought was real severe. They had a windbreak in front of the house and this windbreak which was composed of black, or I think golden willow, but nevertheless, the pileup of debris and junk was several feet high and over two or three acres. You just got every kind of thing imaginable, pieces of houses, all types of debris out of there and it took us a long time to get this place cleaned up. But what I am saying is that wherever we had a windbreak or a shelter it really protected the house. There was a big difference between the upstream water surface and the downstream water surface, otherwise where the water backed up it might be eight feet, but behind the windbreak the water would maybe be only three or four feet. So there was a great degree of protection in some of those areas where we had trees as far as destruction of property.

HF: Okay, now let us turn our attention, before you finished last summer, weren't you assigned to go upstream and work on riprapping the Teton River, or some program like that?

JF: Yes, in October I got a little different detail, or assignment. I was to be an inspector to work with the Corps of Engineers in the placement of riprap along the South Fork and the North Fork of the Teton River. Of course, the job that we had there was the placement of this riprap, where we could haul from St. Anthony and Hog Holler areas and put huge chunks of basalt or lava along the edge of the river to prevent further damage to the banks in the future. This 216 program was started to build dikes around the river where there used to be high banks that were already there. The Corps of Engineers was given this responsibility and, of course, the Soil Conservation Service worked with them to get this job done. When the flood came down, Service worked with them to get this job done. When the flood came down, of course it cut new channels and it tore out much of the sod banks and areas along the river. It made huge gravel bars in the river restricting the flow of the river. So the Corps of Engineers went in and put dikes that was probably two and a half feet high and about thirty foot at the base and maybe twelve or fourteen feet at the top in places on both sides of the river and in most places, at least on one side of the river. Of course, the immediate reason for this was to keep the river in control in the spring when the Teton River again was expected to do some flooding and to protect the towns of Sugar City. And this was one of the big reasons why they put the work on the rivers. This was a very expensive thing, I know I worked for just two weeks and seen over two hundred thousand dollars worth of riprap placed. I think that we had to be real careful the way that we placed this to insure that we still had places for fish habitat and that we would also construct it so that we would prevent any further erosion in the future.

HF: Was the work done on this project mainly east of Highway 191? Or was there some done on both sides?

JF: Most of it I think was probably done on the North Fork, which would be west of Highway 191, but there was some done, of course, on the South Fork also.

HF: Now on the North Fork, that would be down in the Salem area?

JF: Yes.

HF: Well, Jack, went home about October then? Did the soil conservation people pretty well finish up then?

JF: Yes, they pretty well finished up the detail on the 216 project around the middle of October and the Corps pulled out. They had accomplished a tremendous amount, probably around 18 miles; I had better retract that statement. I am not for sure exactly how many miles of dike. It was quite a lot, but I don't have that on the tip of my tongue.

HF: Okay, now, you were again reassigned to come up here this summer. Will you state to me what the assignment of the Soil Conservation had been this summer? How many personnel and well, there are two or three questions that one could ask, maybe you could just kind of give me an overall statement of what is being done this summer.

JF: Well, practically every farm was damaged, had land damage done as a result of the flood. Our responsibility and it has been assigned to us, to assist USBR, United States Bureau of Reclamation, in satisfying some of these land damage claims. The Soil Conservation Service has given the assignment of going and making these evaluations and inventories of the land damage that has taken place as a result of the dam break. Now generally, the forms that we fill out are concerned mainly with the extent of erosion that occurred on the farm and the extent of siltation that occurred on the farm and what damages was incurred by the irrigation systems, whether it was sprinkler, surface irrigated and make a list of structures, irrigation structures, that was destroyed and we had to make an evaluation and inventory of these losses.

HF: Now, this would be an independent evaluation wouldn't it? Would you go to the farmer to get this information, or any of it, or would you try to get it all with out this help?

JF: No, we never dealt alone. We always dealt directly with the landowner, the person who owned the land or the person who operated the land. We would not go out on the place without the farmer because of trespassing problems. They were very cooperative. We would go out and walk over all the farm and some of the tools that we would use to be a spade or a probe to determine how much silt. And it was very easy to determine the deposition of silt; it was a little harder to assess how much erosion had occurred. In most of these areas you had to about guess because much of the land had already been restored to its original position, or restored back to an irrigatable farm, leveled and "deep-plowed" and so much of this evidence was destroyed. So you had to rely mostly on a map that we had, that we would be able to look at a picture that was taken of the farm from up in the air about thirty days after the dam broke. So you could certainly see these characteristics,

whether it was erosion or siltation, just by the streak lines across the surface of the ground. These silt bars would show up very plainly and so it was not too difficult a job to do with the tools that we had.

GF: Now you would collect this data in the way of reports and file that with your boss, Mr. Pickett, is that what you would do?

JF: Generally what we would do is that we would go out with the farmer and go over the land, make the evaluation as to how much deposition he had received and how much soil he had lost. We would mark these areas with a pen and go back to the office and measure them off so that we knew just about how many acres he received deposition on and how many acres he received erosion on. And we would also work with the soils and knowing the original depth of the soil and what was left or how much was taken. This was all filled out so that the Bureau had their settlement with the farmer, well they had a form that they could pretty well go over and assess their damage, otherwise it say, 20% of their topsoil was lost then they would receive a settlement based on what they lost.

HF: Is it part of the program that before you submit your final report that you would go over the report with the farmer?

JF: Yes, before we would submit the report to the Bureau, we would go back with the farmer after it was all finalized and go over the report with him to show that he agreed with us. Sometimes he wouldn't agree on, come to a decision on, whether or not he lost five or six inches of soil or one or two inches. Then it was reviewed with the office personnel, or the work unit conversationalist here, who was Jerry Pickett. Then he would sign it and turn it over to the Bureau. This will be a more or less a final assessment of the damages on that place.

HF: How many of these reports have you made, possibly this summer the weeks that you have been up here?

JF: I think probably I have done about 35 of them so far. Figure close to about one a day.

HF: What is the estimated number that you will have to turn in, you and your co-workers?

JF: Five or six hundred reports here in Madison County.

HF: And these reports all pertain to the physical damage to the ground, to the soil?

JF: Yes.

HF: Based on what the individual farm owner submits and this independent report that you provided through SCS, the Bureau of Reclamation makes payment for the damages and so forth, settlement of the claim to the farmer.

JF: That's right. They feel, I guess where we have had this experience in soils and crops and this type of deal, well, they have given us that responsibility and I feel like we have done a reputable job in this regard.

HF: Has your work been pretty much confined to a given area of Madison County, like Hibbard or Burton, or are you more or less going over the whole flood area?

JF: We are taking the applications or the farmers as they are referred to us by the Bureau. Otherwise, we have a priority list that we work on, when the priority list is done then we just go to a map showing the different farms that have been evaluated and when these have been evaluated, we just cross them off and color them in. So we can pretty well tell on those farms that have been evaluated and those that have not. We just get into contact with them on the phone and go out and make this evaluation.

HF: As part of the report do you give any estimates of damage?

JF: No.

HF: I mean in terms of dollars and cents.

JF: We don't put any monetary figure on any of our reports. That is strictly up to the Bureau to determine this. We just provide the information for them.

HF: So you don't have any idea, do you Jack, as to say an average damage to a farm, whether it is \$50,000 or a million dollars or whatever. You don't have any idea?

JF: Well, we can make this assessment,, that if we figure the cost of restoring the land would be greater than the value of the land so we mark it on the report, so that the USBR will not over pay. Of course, we know the value of some land is greater than the other, but it would be idiotic to pay a claim that was greater than the value of the land itself.

HF: Have you found any situations like that in Madison County?

JF: Oh, yes. Most generally, it is not a total farm, but it is portions of the farm that just write off as totally destroyed and not feasible to spend the money to restore it.

HF: Can you give me an idea; you mentioned that you had done about thirty-five. Can you give me an idea of that total how many acres have been written off as being unworthy of being reclaimed and so forth?

JF: Well, it is not a great amount. There was just two or three farms that had this damage.

HF: Fifty acres, a hundred acres?

JF: Oh, somewhere like that, it was just portions of a farm that was next to the river that was eroded so badly and churned up that it would be just infeasible for the government to go in and restore it back to its original condition.

HF: Jack, have the farmers gone ahead before their claims had been satisfied and tried to restore, reclaim it?

JF: Yes. Quite a few of them have went ahead and spent a considerable amount of money putting the land back even greater than what it was before. Otherwise they filled in sloughs and low areas that were not like that before. Some places they were probably justified. But in other places it was just improving their farms beyond what they were originally.

HF: So you feel that the total benefit, maybe, has been an improvement of farm conditions?

JF: On some of the places, I feel like the farms are better off than they were previous to the flood.

HF: Is there any suggestion that the productivity, fertility of the ground, leaching and so forth, has been greatly damaged to the point that it will take years to restore that fertility?

JF: In some areas they had chemical spills where they had a lot of chemical barrels and that, and there were spills, it will take a while for this stuff to wear off. And other places where the soil loss was so great that very little topsoil was left. This is going to greatly damage the land. But generally, just by having the water run over the land and no erosion or deposition occurring, well I don't think that that was a great factor. They did lose nutrients of course, but with fertilizers and a rotation this could be brought back quite rapidly. In fact, I think in many cases, the silt load they received was probably a benefit rather than a loss to them!

HF: Kind of like the old Nile of Egypt, every two or three years the Nile would overflow and leave that residue which helped fertilize the area. You think there may be a little of that?

JF: Yes, when you take a light soil and mix it with a heavier soil, I think that it will probably in a few years improve the condition. Now in the river bottom area, this is where we received a tremendous amount of silt and in some of those areas where there were cattails was also an area where they would collect a lot of silt and I dare say that many of the river bottom farms received as much as twelve to eighteen inches of silt and in these areas. In a few years those will be able to be worked and farmed and planted into pasture and it was definitely an improvement in some of those areas.

HF: Do you know of any instances in order to restore the farmer decided to go out and get topsoil elsewhere and being on his land?

JF: Most generally, they would try to salvage it from within their own farm. I think probably there were some areas before people knew exactly what was going to happen and how it was going to be restored, that they had truckers bring topsoil in and boy, it added up fast and I think that this type of a claim was very expensive. They frowned on this, and maybe in some instances the farmer got stuck with that himself because his lack of interest in finding out what the programs would do.

HF: You don't know of any specific instance where soil was brought in on a farm?

JF: No.

HF: Now, you have been working with our mother in reclaiming her yard in Salem and getting it back to the point where it was productive and lawned established and so forth. Have you had to bring in new soil?

JF: Okay, when you put it this way there was many. Practically every farmstead probably had topsoil up in over their lawns, but not for the agricultural lands.

HF: I wanted to make that distinction there.

JF: Practically every yard, I would imagine, had topsoil brought in to plant their lawns and get their lawns reestablished, because the farmsteads also received this kind of damage. Four or five inches of silt over grass, you are not going to get that grass to come back. So, there was a lot that was brought back this way, but mainly to the farmsteads.

HF: I thank you Jack very much for the interview that you have provided me with this morning. The information and your eyewitness account of how you, with the SCS, participated with the cleaning up the great destruction in the wake of the Teton Dam Disaster.