

ERS History

CHRONOLOG: A serial narration of the functional, organizational and cultural evolution of Seattle District's environmental conscience - the Environmental Resources Section (a.k.a. "ERS"). Our thanks go to recent retiree Mike McNeely, who worked in ERS from 1971 until 2001, for compiling the Chronolog for us.

- [Installment 1.](#)
[The pre-NEPA era \(1965-1970\)](#)
- [Installment 2.](#)
[Richard Nixon: Republican, Disgraced President...Environmentalist? \(1971 -1972\)](#)
- [Installment 3.](#)
[Staffing Up, Getting Down - ERS Comes of Age \(1973-1978\)](#)
- [Installment 4.](#)
[Growing Up, Moving Out - ERS Exports the Message \(1979-1985\)](#)
- [Installment 5.](#)
[The End of an Era and a New Chief \(1986-1992\)](#)

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?: Catching up with some luminaries from ERS past who have gone on, building on their ERS training and experience to greater or different achievement

- [Dr. Fred Weinmann](#)
- [Dr. David Kehoe](#)
- [Merri Martz](#)

Chronolog Installment 1. The pre-NEPA era (1965-1969)

In the beginning . . . there was no ERS. By 1965, however, the District had seen the need for a fishery biologist to establish relationships with counterparts in Montana and Washington resource agencies to coordinate issues associated with respectively, Libby Dam

and Lake Koochanusa and Wynoochee Dam and Lake. Two were eventually hired, Bob Ayers and Art Gerlach. They were recruited from state resource agencies and became the first extension of the District staff dedicated to environmental issues, which was pretty much defined at that time as "fish and wildlife".

Ayers and Gerlach were placed with planners (engineers) in the "Conservation Section" of Planning Branch. Slightly later, landscape architects were brought into the group to deal with aesthetic, visual and restorative aspects of construction at Libby and Wynoochee.

About 1968 Conservation Section was reorganized within planning, with its chief, Pete Denny, moving on to small projects (navigation); and re-named the Environmental Resources Section. Ayers became its first Chief.

This was a time of great turmoil in our Nation with the Vietnam War in the news daily; war protestors taking over campuses; the assassinations of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King; and . . . the "green" revolution. Within the Seattle District there were three large construction projects either underway or in advanced engineering and design that needed to react in some way to this new climate: Libby, Wynoochee and Additional Units at Chief Joseph Dam. The Puget Sound and Adjacent Waters Study and the Ben Franklin Dam (Hanford Reach of the Columbia River) were the major planning initiatives during this period. All of these programs were beginning to be influenced by a recognition that a shift to a higher level of environmental awareness and consideration were a necessary part of the Corps' mission. The "driver" of this relatively proactive approach was an increasing general concern and awareness of environmental values, rather than a specific mandate. Aside from the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (FWCA), there were few major statutes in force during the 1965 - 1970 ERS formative years. While the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was enacted in 1969, the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Clean Water Act (CWA) and

others were still in the (not too distant) future. Seattle District ERS was already beginning to prepare to deal with them.

Chronolog Installment 2.

Richard Nixon: Republican, Disgraced President...Environmental? (1971 -1972)

Most folks consider these years as the "start of ERS" as we know it today. With the passage of NEPA in 1969, to become effective in January 1970, the Corps was faced with interpreting and reacting to something entirely new - an "umbrella" environmental statute that required an interdisciplinary analysis of the impacts of Federal actions. This statute, as well as the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act which followed in 1973, were initiated by a host of mostly Democratic legislators (Washington's own Senator Henry Jackson was a key player in passage of NEPA). However, they were supported and signed into law by the embattled Republican President Richard M. Nixon. It is also worth noting the first "Earth Day" occurred during his administration. Whatever else Nixon is noted or notorious for, facilitating a shift in our nation's culture regarding the environment is legitimately an aspect of his legacy.

Seattle District needed new people with a different way of looking at things to make sense of, comply with, and surrender to the cascade of environmental statutes and their implementing directives and regulations. Ayers initiated and worked through personnel actions to get assistance with the major construction underway at Libby and Wynoochee, and about to begin at Chief Joseph. In the short time he remained in the District, Ayers (who departed in late 1971 for a job in North Central Division) wasn't able to come to grips with all that NEPA really was or would become. But he did hire a few people to "write EIS's." Mike McNeely, who remained in ERS until his retirement in 2001, was one of these.

In 1971, the most critical environmental issues facing ERS (i.e., those needing immediate attention under NEPA) were mitigation

at Libby (willing lands, the westslope cutthroat troutery, and landscaping) and Wynoochee (fish passage and elk). The District was in advanced planning for the Chief Joseph Additional Units project as well. On the Navigation side, maintenance dredging of Grays Harbor and Willapa Navigation channels was a source of controversy, particularly with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "First generation" EIS's were underway for all these projects by early 1971.

Other events in the very early 1970's: The Corps was being urged to "do something about" erosion at Cape Shoalwater; the CAP program was inundated with 205 flood studies of lake outlets (a HQ policy decision later determined this to be not an area of Corps interest, and we haven't done any since about 1974); Mud Mountain Dam was accumulating sediments whenever the tunnels were closed for repair, as they frequently were; and, with the Port of Seattle, we were looking at widening and deepening the Duwamish navigation channel. All of these projects and programs, as well as others, were beginning to come under influence of a "green" awakening in our Nation and would need to be dealt with from that perspective more than ever before.

In early 1972, Seattle District was visited by an Institute for Water Resources team working on a pilot project for developing "Environmental Atlases" for each of the 50 states. The prototype four were Virginia, the Carolinas and Washington. Team leader for the Washington effort was Dr. Steven Dice, a recently discharged Army captain with a varied background in environmental work. Washington was probably selected as one of the four states because Dice had earned his doctorate in forestry at the University of Washington and he wanted to return to pursue his post-military career here. In short order, he had successfully competed for the Chief of ERS position vacated by Ayers and moved here, bringing the "Washington Environmental Atlas" project with him.

Chronolog Installment 3.

Staffing Up, Getting Down - ERS Comes of Age (1973-1978)

Steve Dice brought challenges with him (e.g., the Washington Environmental Atlas, which wasn't completed until 1975, but is now somewhat of a collector's item); encountered them here in the form major construction at three projects; and initiated new ones for an engineering culture that hadn't yet bought into the emerging environmental ethic as applied to Corps business. Steve had participated, at the Corps' Institute for Water Resources (IWR), in formulation of the Corps' implementing regulations for NEPA and other environmental adventures so he had definite ideas about the way things should be. Bureaucratic clash, inevitable in any case, was encouraged and actually entered into with zeal. While this approach would eventually strain its usefulness Steve was, as the Corps is fond of saying these days, "the right guy for the right job at the right time."

NEPA called for interdisciplinary environmental consideration of Corps actions and major new laws (ESA, CWA) , Executive Orders (Flood Plain Management) and directives provided ample justification to staff up with a broader array of environmental experts. During the early 70's a lot of new people joined ERS, several of whom are still around, working their environmental magic and miracles throughout the District. All of the following are a few who "got their start" in ERS during this period and are still influencing our work every day: Bob Rawson; Paul Cooke; Karen Northup; Ron Bush; Fred Weinmann; Lawr Salo; Jonathan Maas; Steve Martin; Dave Rice; and Ken Brunner. Oh yeah, and [Morris the Moose](#)

, too!

During the mid-seventies the U.S. experienced an OPEC-generated energy crisis, complete with long gas lines in 1973; Watergate; the resignation of President Nixon; and the end of the war in Viet Nam. In Washington, this era saw the recovery

from the "Boeing recession" and re-newed statewide interest in National parks, wilderness areas and a broad array of environmental issues and amenities. Then, as now, many considered Washington the most progressive of states in the environmental arena. Seattle District moved from Pier 37 to Federal Center South. ERS expanded and became proactive (before anyone used that term or knew what it meant - the buzzwords of the time seemed to be "fishbowl planning") in new disciplines.

Wetlands, cultural resources and water quality joined fish and wildlife as key areas of concern when ERS pushed its role while the District completed Libby, Wynoochee and Chief Joseph Additional Units and explored new operation scenarios at our operating projects (notably Lake Washington Ship Canal and Howard Hanson Dam) and navigation channels (Willapa). In planning, we revisited the same challenging studies as before and since (Skagit, Chehalis, Grays Harbor, and others) but tried to put to work some of the emerging environmental principles into study alternatives. ERS was at the center of the District's unsuccessful legal defense of the Libby Additional Units and Reregulating Dam, and was a leader in the de-authorization studies for Willapa Navigation Channel.

This era was an intense and tumultuous period as ERS muscled into the Seattle District culture. There was a lot of learning going on.

Chronolog Installment 4. Growing Up, Moving Out - ERS Exports the Message (1979-1985)

The unsuccessful defense of the Libby Additional Units and Reregulating Dam (LAURD) was a key event in the evolvment and maturation of ERS. Here, the environmental office functioned as a key player--even leader--in a major District team. This was the first time,

by and large, ERS was accepted as such. ERS competence was recognized, and some of the environmental sensitivities were beginning to be embraced here and there across the District (and the wider Corps, as well). At the same time, it became clear that new responsibilities came along with this acceptance--a "corporate" view became increasingly necessary long before this term came into vogue. So ERS's aggressive, sometimes confrontational, approach began to moderate. This adjustment came as the era of big dam construction was ending and the District became more focused on navigation and regulatory issues.

These years saw an emigration of ERS talent to other Corps offices and the environmental organizations of numerous other local, state and Federal agencies. While some exceptional people were brought on board (John Wakeman in 1982 and Ann Uhrich in 1984, for examples), an exodus rivaled only by the current one to the private sector occurred. Environmental staffs of EPA, Washington Department of Ecology, King County, Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife, and USFWS were notably influenced by talent from the Corps' premier environmental team, ERS. A few universities also benefited from the real-world experience ERS alums brought to them.

In May 1980, Mt. St. Helens erupted and Jimmy Carter, after wondering "how many megatons it would be," asked Governor Dixy Lee Ray, not a noted environmental activist, how he could help. Her response: "m-o-n-e-y." Ronald Reagan became President of the U.S. in 1981 and brought with him challenging sensitivities (who, old enough to remember, can forget "plastic trees" and "if you've seen one tree, you've seen them all"?). During this era we won the cold war with the USSR and the Sonics captured the only major league sport championship Seattle has ever had. But it was to be a tough eight years for environmentalists. They had to await the nominal rescue by George ("No Net Loss of Wetlands!") Bush.

Chronolog Installment 5.

The End of an Era and a New Chief (1986-1992)

Coming soon!

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Dr. Fred Weinmann

Fred began his career in the Washington Department of Natural Resources in 1972. He came to ERS in 1974 as an environmental planner and wetland ecologist; moved up in our ranks to supervisor of the Estuarine Management Unit in 1978; and became Chief of ERS in 1987. In 1990, he moved on to the Environmental Protection Agency to become a Regional, and then National Wetland Ecologist earning recognition and awards for a variety of wetland related work including his contribution to the President's Westside Forest Plan for the Pacific Northwest. He retired from EPA in 1998 to pursue personal, teaching and community service interests.

In 1998, Seattle District nominated Fred to serve on the Chief of Engineer's Environmental Advisory Board (EAB), a panel of nine regionally or nationally recognized experts that systematically examines Corps environmental programs and issues and delivers recommendations directly to the Chief. The nomination was finally approved at the Secretary of Army in late 1999. General Flowers has given high priority to re-vitalizing and making use of an active EAB. Fred attended the first meeting of this new group in Washington D.C. on April 24, 2001.

Dr. David Kehoe

Dave Kehoe came to us in 1979, via a short detour with Shapiro and Associates, after completing work for his B.S. degree in biology at the University of Washington. His effort in ERS working on Grays Harbor, Quillayute and Centralia projects (some things never change) was usually the second major investment of his time each day: Dave, a world class rower, trained every morning for the 1980 Olympics heavyweight four with coxswain event. In a major disappointment to him, however, President Carter withdrew the US from the Olympics to register displeasure with the USSR invasion of Afghanistan.

Dave left Seattle District in the early 1980's to finish his master's degree at Halifax, Nova Scotia; from there to Tokyo for a little over a year doing some microbiology/molecular biology work; then to UCLA for his PhD in molecular biology. After THAT he completed National Science Foundation post-doctoral fellowship studies at the Carnegie Institution at Stanford University. He is now an assistant professor in the Biology Department at Indiana University in Bloomington. He was married (to Bettina) in 1995 and has a daughter, Ivy.

A funny guy, Dave. He was well known for his poetry, having penned the infamous "A Day in the Life" tribute to the Word Processing Center we had during his tour here. Humor is still one of his drivers. When explaining it would be nice to be considered for "Where Are They Now" he said he fit right in because he often wondered where he was and needed to read it somewhere.

Merri Martz

Merri Martz is from central California wine country. In 1991 she began as a temporary in ERS while still working on her Masters degree in the University of Washington's Marine Affairs Program. Her thesis was complete in 1993, but she remained "St. Merri the Temporary" until 1996 when she made career status. Merri participated as ERS representative to District teams on increasingly complex and responsible planning projects including Bear Creek, Cedar River Flood Control and Spawning Channel, and Porter Levee on the Green River, among others. Her contributions in the technical study arena are just as notable (a principal investigator and author for the interagency study of Lake Washington sockeye; water quality studies on the Sammamish River and longfin smelt surveys in the Cedar River and other Lake Washington tributaries are examples) and earned her two nominations, winning once, for the Seattle District Scientist of the Year Award. In Vienna, Austria Merri represented the District at an International Conference focusing on riverine restoration. In a relatively short Corps career Merri became recognized both within the Corps and the interagency community as one of the most professional and accomplished restoration scientists in the region.

Merri decided to move on in 2000 when she accepted a position with Tetra Tech. She is now a senior biologist in Portland, Oregon, where she effectively runs Tetra Tech's Portland office. Much of her activity these days is ... doing the Corps' environmental planning! Seattle, Portland, Sacramento and Los Angeles Districts have all been clients in her short time with Tetra Tech.

Point of Contact: Mike Scuderi Phone: 206-764-7205 Email: MICHAEL.R.SCUDERI@USACE.ARMY.MIL