4-20-2015

**Man Made Paradise: The Boise Water Project**

Heidi Coon  
*Boise State University*

Cheryl Oestreicher  
*Boise State University*
**Research Methodology**

- Assembled a fundamental understanding of the growth of the Boise Valley through primary source documents such as: engineering reports and Bureau of Reclamation documents about the Boise Project/Boise Valley, which assisted in finding other sources.
- Used primary documents from the Idaho Archives- Letters in Governor Hunts Paper’s 1901-1902 and Boise State Special Collections, promotional pamphlet from 1919.
- Used the Idaho Statesman Historical Archive Database, contains articles from July 1864-December, 1942. Narrowing down search terms and dates resulted in fewer articles (most of the time) that made it easier to go through one at a time.

**Abstract** - The Boise Valley area now a lush, thriving economic region, once had a harsh unforgiving landscape that was only transformed by the introduction of water. The development and economic growth of the Boise Valley was made possible by the efforts of private citizens and the Bureau of Reclamation that culminated in the creation of the Boise Water Project.

**The Boise Project**, stemmed from the Carrey Act passed on August 18, 1894. The purpose of the Act was to facilitate states in reclaiming arid areas within the United States by allowing them to enter into contracts with private construction companies to build irrigation systems. D.W. Ross spoke before the Committee on Irrigation of Arid Lands in the House of Representatives about the Boise Project and on March 27th, 1905, the Boise Project was authorized and became the largest single irrigation project in Idaho. The first three parts of the Boise Project consisted of the Deer Flat Reservoir near Nampa, the New York Canal and Diversion Dam near the city of Boise with the Arrowrock Dam and Reservoir being added to the project in 1911 and completed in 1915.

**Results** - Research into historical documents published in The Idaho Statesman and from the Bureau of Land Reclamation revealed that the Boise Project’s creation can be attributed to three contributing factors.

- **Gold Mining**
  Owyhee County, became densely populated following the discovery of gold in the 1860’s. This put greater emphasis on agricultural development which necessitated irrigation.
  “The Boise Valley must be the storehouse and kitchen garden for all these…” 1

- **Private Industry**
  Prior to the existence of the Boise Project, the Boise Valley depended upon the irrigation schemes of private individuals and companies such as William B. Morris who built the Ridenbaugh Canal.
  Private industry also attracted land speculation. Failed water projects often left land owners high and dry.

- **Reclamation Act of 1902**
  Shortly after Roosevelt signed the Act, Reclamation Engineers did surveys of the Canals in the Boise Valley and found most had structural issues.
  Engineers also completed a large portion of mapping geographical locations for possible water projects.

**Discussion**
Telling the story of the Boise Valley through irrigation and the establishment of the Boise Project helps illustrate the effect that irrigation has had on the Boise Valley, and in the west. It is not a new story and it has been told many times, but that is because it is important. Understanding the effect we have on the land and natural resources will make for smarter growth decisions.

**References**

1. “News,” Idaho Statesman, August 2, 1864

**Contact Information**
Heidi Coon
Email: heidicoon@u.boisestate.edu

Cheryl Oestreicher
Email: cheryloestreicher@boisestate.edu

[Figure 1: Passenger Department of Oregon Short Line R.R. The Man with the Hoe in Idaho. Chicago: Poole Bros, 1902. McCain Collection for Western Ie. Boise State University Albertsons Library Special Collections.]

[Figure 2: Sign on Ranch in Canyon County, Idaho. Water for this ranch will be furnished by the Black Canyon Project, Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division Washington, DC 20540 http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print]

[Figure 3: Photo of the construction of Arrowrock Dam, Albertsons Library Special Collections]