

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT ROADS – PART I

AN OFFICE FOR MAINTAINING TIMBER ROADS IS ESTABLISHED IN THE OREGON DIVISION

FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH BILL MALTBY, SEPTEMBER 2010

From the 1950's to the 1970's, the Federal Highway Administration was involved in the maintenance of timber roads on lands belonging to the Bureau of Land Management. Federal retiree William E. Maltby led that program from 1969 until it was handed off to the BLM.



Photo from WFLHD Archives.

When you look at the facilities that house the Western Federal Lands Highway Program today, you would never know there had once been a row of maintenance shops and equipment garages extending a block or more to the west. The building that now houses the Right-of-Way and Survey sections (at the left in the above 1932 photo taken during building construction) was forfeited piece by piece, first to the construction of Interstate 5 and later to the widening of the freeway. An administration building that fronted on Fifth Street in the area now given over to a parking lot (at right in the photo) was lost in its entirety. Until the late 1960's and early 1970's those buildings stretched westward to Reserve Street and the garages and maintenance shops were home to the Equipment Depot for the **Western Oregon Road Maintenance Program**.

William E. Maltby was the program's Chief from 1969 until the program was transferred to the Bureau of Land Management in 1976. "We called ourselves the WORMs," he said. During a visit to the WFLHD office in September 2010, he described the development of the program from its beginnings in the **Bureau of Public Roads** Division Office in Salem to its reassignment into the Federal Lands Program to its eventual hand-off to the **Bureau of Land Management**.

ORIGINS OF THE PROGRAM

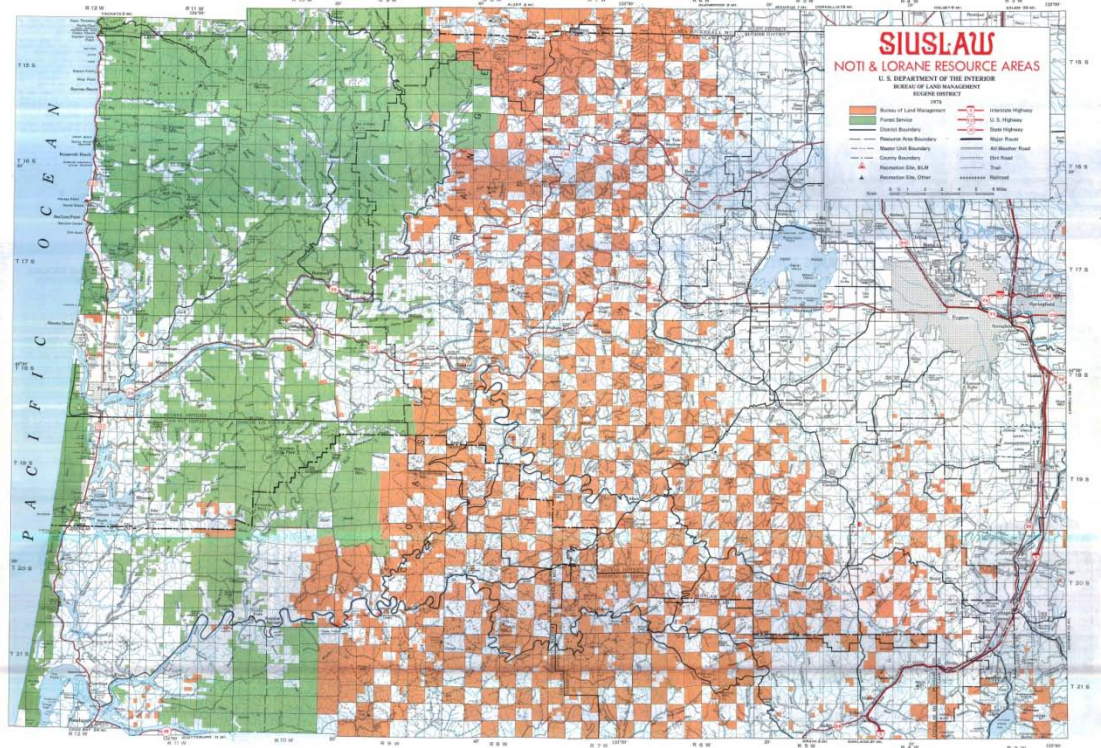
“Some of this has been given to me from other sources, but my understanding,” Bill said, was that the BPR was “chartered to do all the road construction and maintenance on the federal lands roads....In the case of this BLM program, it started sometime in the late 1950’s or early 1960’s....The initial program started in the Salem BLM district on a road called the Quartzville Road.”

While the BPR maintenance program was housed in the Oregon Division, “they had small crews that did maintenance...on the federal roads in the Oregon highway units.” Having had experience in both the State and Federal highway agencies, he observed that “in the early days, Oregon would not accept the roads that we constructed” into their maintenance program because of a conflict in construction standards.

Bill recalled that “**Baird French**...was the Regional Administrator at that time, and the chap that initially was on the first maintenance program was a fellow by the name of **Ken Schearer**.” The two had previously worked together when French was Division Engineer in Alaska and Schearer was one of the maintenance foremen. When the Alaska Road Program dissolved, “I guess after Alaska became a state, Schearer was transferred down to the Federal Projects Office,” Bill said. “He was working as a crew member in one of the construction groups when...French picked him” to head up a four-person crew on the first road project of the new maintenance program.

“Sometime along about this same time, the Oregon counties went to the BLM and asked them to increase the timber program.” Bill explained that much of the BLM land was what had originally been called **Oregon and California Railroad Lands**, and he spread out a BLM Resource Map of the Siuslaw area that shows the one-square-mile sections that were known as O&C Lands.

The map includes an historic account from the time that white settlers were coming to Oregon. It noted that “Congress granted alternate sections of land in a strip 60 miles wide to the Oregon and California Railroad Company.” Bill explained that this was “to build railroads from the valley to the coast



This BLM map of the Siuslaw area shows the checkerboard of one square mile sections of land granted to the O&C Railroad, shown in tan. Forest Service lands are shown in green and private lands are white. BLM Siuslaw Map © 1978, courtesy Bill Maltby.

and from the valley into the Cascades at the other side.” He added that the railroad had chosen land along “every stream of any consequence....so practically every stream of any major size had a railroad proposed.”

As the BLM description continues, “the railroad company was to sell the grant lands to bona fide settlers....but the terms of the grant were violated, and in 1916 the remaining grant lands were revested by the Federal government....” In 1937, Congress passed the O&C Act which “provided for multiple use management of the revested lands to produce sustained yields of timber and other resources and to contribute to the economic stability of local communities and industries....”

You might think that the BLM would not have been the agency chosen for managing forests, and indeed, Bill said “at one time the **Forest Service** tried to get these big blocks” of federal real estate. But the BLM was influential in the timber harvest, he said. “Way back in the old days, they had the O&C timber group” which was made up of BLM staff, and it was this group that developed the timber program. Although a portion of the revenue from the timber sales goes directly to the Federal Treasury, the description on the map concludes, some of it is “reinvested in resource management, reforestation, roads, and public recreational facilities,” and another portion is “distributed among the Counties” in which those lands are located. Bill noted that those monies “went to the counties for the roads and schools,” and when those O&C Counties asked for more production, they created a need for more roads.



*Wells Creek-Vincent Road, early 1970's.
Photo courtesy Bill Maltby.*

This triggered an expansion of the road maintenance program, and Ken Schearer became “the foreman of this Western Oregon Road Maintenance Program in its early stages.”

On another map, Bill pointed to several roads that were part of that early program and the BLM district offices responsible for them, including “Galice Creek Road in Medford; the Nestucca Highway in Salem District; the Big River in Coos Bay.” He added that “in Roseburg there was...a road from Glide into the mountains to the timber area. Eugene had one that went from Cottage Grove up into the timber east of it and that was called Big River, too, I think.

“In about 1962 there were somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 people involved,” Bill noted. “The program was headquartered in the Oregon Division,” because that’s where the construction engineers and maintenance program were located at the time.

The District Engineer was **Marv Martin**, but Bill recalled that Martin was ill with cancer for several years and that “Schearer kind of run it by himself.” Then, in light of the steady expansion, “the Regional Office made a review of the program,” and decided to put an engineer in charge. “That’s when I came into the picture.”

Ernie Valach became District Engineer “when Marv passed away....that was just before I got here, probably in 1968.” Bill said he was already well acquainted with the engineers in the Oregon Division “as a result of my work with the **Oregon Highway Department**.”

By the time Bill Maltby took over in 1969, the program had expanded. “There were eleven maintenance units of anywhere from two to four people and they were scattered out in the five BLM districts....The first year I was here, we went up to 60 people, give or take one,” he said, “and we had a lot of timber access roads besides what they called their mainline roads.”

At the time, the BLM was having BPR’s Federal Projects Office in Vancouver build their mainline timber access roads, including the roads mentioned above, as well as Smith River, Siuslaw, and “several of them in the Coos Bay District, (including) Burnt Mountain and Elk Mountain.”

As he began to become more familiar with the program and the operations, Bill said, "I could see...their love was kind of between the Field Operations and Regional Office in certain areas of the management of the program, so I immediately started fishing around and talking to the field people."

He found that employees in the field "were being charged with some things that really weren't their fault," and intervened on their behalf with Division Engineer **Bob Simpson**, telling him that "these



*Presentation of 1969 Safety Awards was made in the Oregon Division Office April 21, 1970. From left to right are **R. M. Phillips**, Regional Administrator; Project Engineers **Lyle Hewitt** and **William Ayotte**; WORM Maintenance Foremen **Clyde Williams**, **Stanley Pierce**, **Karel Mansveld**, and **Donald Beck**; and the Regional Representative for the Secretary of Transportation, **Norman Erbe**, from Seattle.*

field people are not the instigators or the cause of it, they're only doing what they're instructed to do." Bill cited an example of procurement allowances being too low and how he had worked with the regional procurement office to give the field engineers more latitude in purchasing. "I had to go to bat for the field people," he said.

"So we had those kinds of things that we had to do, and in the meantime we were gathering more roads. By about 1972 we had some 6,000 miles of roads that were under our care," he said, and were working each year to maintain the roads that had timber moving over them or "that were active timber sale roads." The mainline roads were also on an annual maintenance program, and on those roads "we had about 600 miles of asphalt paving that we had put on at one time or another...."

"In 1972 we had a real nasty winter. We had an awful lot of damage to these roads." He pointed out that the roads were originally "built by the logging companies, and the

construction was minimal," so over time a lot of work had to be put into improving them. Then the BLM would start removing timber in a new area, and additional roads in that area would be added to the program.

"By 1972 we had about 99 people in the five BLM districts. We had graders, trucks, and loaders," he said; "cats and backhoes....all that kind of stuff." With all of the "slide material and sloughing and things that happen during the winter on these roads," he said, "we were moving thousands of yards of dirt a year besides hauling gravel and just everyday maintenance."

Bill pointed out that the maintenance program hired straight from the timber industry. "They were highly qualified people," he added. "We classed them all as equipment operators, because today they'd drive a truck...tomorrow they'd drive a grader, next day they're on a backhoe."

SPLITTING UP THE DISTRICTS

When Bill Maltby arrived Ken Schearer was overseeing all of the western Oregon operations from the Division Office. Within the five BLM Districts, the program had eleven maintenance units, and when he took over program leadership and evaluated their operations, Bill decided that it would be more efficient to split the oversight responsibilities between two general foremen. "We've got the whole...of Western Oregon...and quite a bit scattered," he told the Region Office. "Now, I want two general foremen in the office under me and each one will have half the state."

Evan Wruck joined Ken Schearer as the second General Foreman and the five districts were parceled out "based on the volume of work in those districts....One foreman had Salem, Roseburg, and

Eugene,” he said, adding that “Eugene was moving a lot of timber at that time.” The other foreman “had Medford and Coos Bay...the two biggest.”

This worked well enough, but by 1972, with 99 people working on the program, “I started looking at this thing and said, ‘we could manage this better if we had a foreman in each of these districts in charge of all the units within that district....’

“Each one of the BLM districts had...a district engineer and a maintenance engineer.” Bill believed the FHWA foreman within each of the districts could handle all the coordination that needed to be done: “where the work was going to be done, how much (of) that we would do, the roads that they could expect would need to be opened and those that needed to be maintained.”

“So we made this proposal,” he said. “We took this to the Region Office,” and told them that the BLM was behind the changes, that “they feel that the coordination between us and them would be great.”

Other big changes were also underway however. About the time this redesign took effect, the Western Oregon Roads Maintenance Program was moved into the Federal Projects Office in Vancouver, and in Washington, D.C., Federal Highway Administration was already talking with the Bureau of Land Management about moving the program to the BLM. Bill Maltby would ride out those changes over the next four years.

The next story in this series will look at the WORM operation’s move into the Federal Programs Office in Vancouver, Washington.

Prior to his work in the Western Oregon Road Maintenance Program, Bill Maltby had spent two years in Brazil as part of a Bureau of Public Roads mission to provide engineering assistance. Previous to that he had worked for the Oregon State Highway Commission for 18 years and had overseen the construction of the I-405 Freeway through downtown Portland. The clipping at right is from the Salem Statesman, July 1969, courtesy Bill Maltby.

Stories in this series have been developed by Marili Reilly from interviews and correspondence. Retirees who would like to share their memories may email marili.reilly@dot.gov.

