

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

# Introduction to the Next Edition

With Ron Scherler and Don Buhler

2009



CADASTRAL SURVEY

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>>*R. Scherler:*

Hello. I am Ron Scherler, your host for this introduction to the 2009 Manual of Surveying Instructions. I began my surveying career in 1970 and currently work in BLM's Oregon State Office.

During the course of this presentation, we are providing an introduction and overview of the 2009 Manual. The adoption of this edition of the Manual really is an historic event. The Manual is built on the foundation of over 200 years of legislation, case law, and instruction to surveyors.

Beginning with those issued by the Surveyor General of the various surveying districts, followed by the Manual of Surveying Instruction issued by the Commissioners of the General Land Office. In the 36 years since the 1973 Manual was issued, Congress has continued to pass laws.

Courts and the Department of the Interior have rendered new decisions, technology marches on and the management and use of lands have changed and the value of land has escalated. This has resulted in the need to update the information contained in the manual.

Of course, the Manual is official policy instruction for the Bureau of Land Management, but it contains information that has the potential to affect every land parcel carved from land surveyed in the Public Land Survey System. Here with me today is Mr. Don Buhler, Chief Cadastral Surveyor of the United States.

Welcome Don and thank you for being here today.

>>*D. Buhler:*

Thank you Ron and it is a great pleasure to be here at this introduction of the Manual.

>>*R. Scherler:*

Well first Don, tell me a little bit about your job and your responsibilities as the Chief Cadastral Surveyor of the United States.

>>*D. Buhler:*

Yes, Ron back in Washington, we are primarily a policy group. We look at how the policies that are within the federal laws impact the survey of federal lands. We interpret these laws and policies and we also look at the Manual of Surveying Instructions itself to see how it is being interpreted by our various state offices.

One area that we are working on rather extensively in the last few years since the last Manual was published is digital data. The graphic portrayal of the Public Land Survey System. You may have heard of the Geographic Coordinate Database, that is one of our major programs.

As the chair of the Cadastral Subcommittee of the Federal Geographic Data Committee, we have implemented standards that are being used throughout the country.

We are also looking at legislation whether it is proposed legislation or legislation that does become law. We look at that and see how it impacts surveys and the management of our public lands. One other thing we are looking at is litigation and how a particular litigation may impact policy on a national level.

We also do a tremendous amount of coordination with other federal agencies, tribal governments, state governments, county governments and the private sector. We also are doing a considerable amount of work with international groups since Washington is an international city we receive many foreign visitors who want to know how they can improve their cadastral systems. And many times we send our cadastral surveyors to these foreign countries. And also Ron, my least favorite is we do budget and the formulation of budget and the planning of that.

>>*R. Scherler:*

That is never the favorite job of any cadastral surveyor.

>>*D. Buhler:*

That's correct.

>>*R. Scherler:*

Ok so talk a little bit about the history of the public land survey system.

>>*D. Buhler:*

Sure Ron. The Public Land Survey System or rectangular land survey system has its roots in the foundation of this great country. It is the checkerboard nature of the U.S. Land Tenure System of private lands and the ownership of these lands.

The PLSS was a design that was hotly debated by the founding fathers of this country. There were many proposals however Thomas Jefferson is credited with the design of the concept of the rectangular survey system. The leaders from New England however refined Jefferson's concept to what we have today. The PLSS enables the fledgling nation of 13 former colonies to promote the orderly settlement of the vast tracts of western lands.

The original surveys began in Ohio and continue today with the major efforts in the western U.S. There are many areas of federal land that need management and need to be transferred and without the surveys; they could not be done efficiently. But the PLSS forms the basis for the land tenure system of approximately 80% of the United States.

>>*R. Scherler:*

So it was your decision to update the 1973 Manual. How did you come to that decision?

>>*D. Buhler:*

Well first of all the last Manual is over 36 years old as you have indicated. It is dated, we wanted to look at it and decide how we could reflect some of the changes that we have seen. You know there have been some technology changes of course in 36 years. We also wanted to look at the court decisions and many of the other previous manuals and instructions that are out here are always periodically updated. We have nine manuals or surveying instructions and these are done on a regular basis. So it was really a time that we had to look at. The time had come that we should do this.

>>*R. Scherler:*

Ok, so once the decision was made how did you decide how you were going to do it?

>>*D. Buhler:*

Well in Washington, we usually like to bring a group of people together and look at the various ways of dealing with this. So we formed a committee a Manual Committee to look at it and the recommendation from that Manual Committee after extensive study was that we would select a chief editor who would oversee this effort and that editor was Robert Dahl or as many people know him as Bob Dahl.

>>*R. Scherler:*

Ok so Don, what do you see as the purpose really of this presentation and overview? What are we trying to accomplish in what we are doing here today?

>>*D. Buhler:*

Sure Ron, what I think the purpose of this is we are trying to highlight what significant points of interest are important to the reader of the new Manual.

>>*R. Scherler:*

Well I want to switch gears just a little bit here and ask you about another program. The BLM in cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Office of Special Trustee for American Indians has recently launched the certified federal surveyor program. Tell us a little about that.

>>*D. Buhler:*

Yes Ron, this is a very exciting program that we are very proud of. It is a program that has its roots in trust reform within the Department of Interior. We have a relationship with the American Indian and managing their trust assets, and part of that is to survey trust lands. The Secretary of the Interior approved a process where we would create a certification program on the nuances of surveying Indian

lands. We decided that we would implement this through modern technologies.

We are using distance-learning module that captures all of the, many of the advanced survey topics that impact trust lands and Indian country. I would like to point out that this certification is not a license. It is a certification of knowledge and we are hoping that we will be able to partner with the private sector in improving the surveys not only on Indian lands, but also on federal lands and lands that are adjacent to both of these.

>>*R. Scherler:*

Thanks Don, do you have any other comments, just general comments that you would like to close with?

>>*D. Buhler:*

Yes Ron. I would like to say that the publication of the Manual is of significant moment in the history of boundary surveys. Everyone who draws upon the principles contained in this book becomes a part of history of the land tenure system of the United States. I would like to express my appreciation to each of you who has contributed to this manual. I would like to especially to thank Bob Dahl, the Chief Editor of the 2009 Manual.

>>*R. Scherler:*

Well thank you Don for your time. Hopefully for all of you out there, this presentation will get you started in understanding and becoming acquainted with this next edition of the Manual.



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