

## Archive Archaeology

Dust bowl. New Deal. Depression. Bread lines. Drought. When people think of the 1930s, these are the likely images that pop into the average American's mind. But other, less well-known events and the resulting policies of the 1930s had significant, far-reaching impacts on the country.

SHRA's research has taken us deep into this history-altering decade. What has struck us is that many experimental, short-lived programs of the New Deal era, including the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), had more than just economic consequences; they altered the natural environment with long-lasting impacts that can easily be seen today.

President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policy makers – his "Brains Trust" – were renowned for their passion for economic, natural resource, and social planning. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which remains in existence today, was aimed at spurring economic development across the southern states by developing a comprehensive program of fertilizer development, electrification of the rural south, and flood control and navigation improvements. The National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), conceived with the same planning enthusiasm as the TVA, was created under the NIRA in 1933. Though the Supreme Court struck down the bulk of the NIRA in 1935, the NRPB survived the 1930s through clever bureaucratic maneuvering. Despite the latter's short life, the Board's impact was significant. Its scientists studied issues like population trends, river basins, agricultural lands, oil and gas, and social economics, collecting an immense amount of data in many areas where there had been a vacuum of information.

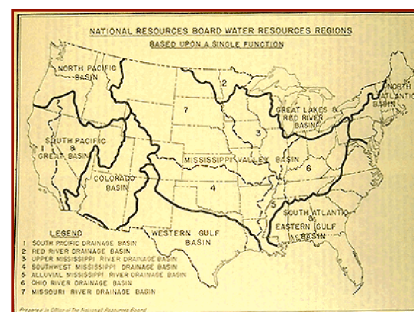


Image from "Call it Home," by K. Easterling and R. Prelinger, via [www.columbia.edu](http://www.columbia.edu)

The NRPB was attractive to policy makers in part because of its reliance on scientists to determine and explain facts and then devise solutions. For example, when a series of devastating flood events across the country from the Missouri River to the Boise River ended the long drought, government agencies asked scientists and engineers to determine how to make dams serve as flood control structures, dams that had been previously designed and authorized strictly for irrigation storage. The change in thinking about dams had major and permanent effects on natural resource management across the country.

Scientists also studied how to restore Midwestern grasslands devastated by the lengthy drought. Through the Agricultural Adjustment Act, another short-lived program, the federal government bought lands back from private landowners who had converted many of the region's pristine grasslands to farms or pastures. Having plowed or grazed the grasslands under, the federal government converted this ecosystem back to a more natural state. As a result, there are several National Grasslands that are today administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Although there aren't many people alive today who remember the 1930s, the decade looms large in the American imagination. Historians at SHRA are always looking for and appreciating all the historical record offers in order to contextualize this significant period in our history.

- Jennifer Stevens

***We've moved! SHRA's new home is the Belgravia Building, constructed in 1904 with local sandstone. You can find us at 445 W. Main Street, Boise, ID 83702 or at (208) 426-0206.***



### **Illuminating History**

In 2015 and 2016, museums and utilities across the U.S. are celebrating the electricity that runs our country. 100 years ago, electric utility companies jockeyed for position to be your primary provider. For many of these companies, 2015 and 2016 are landmark operational anniversaries. A number of exhibitions highlight this history, including historians William Deverell and Greg Hise's collaborative project that used the expansive Southern California Edison archival collection to show how electricity altered the landscape of the Los Angeles Basin. Designed for a web audience, their work is on display at [pstp-edison.com](http://pstp-edison.com). The Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American History is also observing the history of electricity with its "Lighting a Revolution" exhibit. SHRA is excited to be taking part in the nation-wide events by consulting with the Idaho Power Company as it celebrates its centennial in 2016.

### **Idaho Power's Centennial**

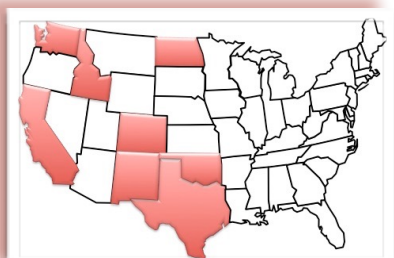
SHRA's historical reports are usually only seen by our clients or in courts of law. Our current project with the Idaho Power Company is a review and celebration of the corporation's history. This time, our products are intended for a wide and varied audience. We are putting together a cookbook with historically themed narratives, an hour-long documentary chronicling the company's history, a museum exhibit complete with historic artifacts from Idaho Power's corporate archive, an online exhibit to complement the museum exhibit, and an extensive social media feed featuring historic tidbits and stories. The museum exhibit, with content created by SHRA, will travel through southern Idaho and eastern Oregon in 2016.



[www.facebook.com/SHRABoise](http://www.facebook.com/SHRABoise)



@PastForwardSHRA



Map courtesy of [ppt-toolkit.com](http://ppt-toolkit.com)

**SHRA is currently working in:**

California, New Mexico,  
Colorado, Washington, Texas,  
Oklahoma, North Dakota and  
Idaho

### **History in the Making**

- \* SHRA's history of Boise River operations for the water users in Idaho's Basin 63 contributed to a favorable decision recently handed down by the special master in the Snake River Basin Adjudication.
- \* We are finishing up research and copy for the Idaho Power museum exhibit.
- \* Dr. Stevens will present some of our research at the American Society for Environmental History conference in March and will also be on a panel about the business of history at the National Council on Public History's conference in April.
- \* SHRA is conducting historical research on: national grasslands, ferry travel on the Snake River, pollution at CERCLA sites (including legacy smelters and polluted waterways), historic navigability of several western rivers, historic Indian trails and highways, and water use in the American Southwest.

**SHRA is currently combing the records of the:**

Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Civilian Conservation Corps, National Resources Planning Board, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Idaho State Engineer and more!