

00:00

(This is Nancy Freeman. It is October 6th, 2005. I am interviewing Gary Looney at the Boise state office, or the Idaho State office in Boise. This is CD #1. We'll just get started, Gary. Can you tell me a little about your education background?)

High school, then I got a two-year associate degree in agribusiness from CSI.

(What is CSI?)

College of Southern Idaho in DePaul.

(Where did you grow up?)

As a small child, in Donnelley-McCall, and then we moved to southern Idaho, Acequia, a little town near Rupert.

(What is the last one? How do you spell—?)

Acequia, a little town near Rupert.

(Oh, OK. And that's in southern Idaho?)

Yeah.

(Did you grow up hunting, trapping?)

Yes. My dad trapped from the time he was young. I started trapping with him when I was about 11 years old.

(Did you-all live on a farm?)

Yes.

(What did you start out trapping at 11?)

01:33

My first catch was a skunk.

(Really?)

When I first set traps, I wanted to catch whatever would get in there. Then I targeted muskrats, raccoons, mink, along the Snake River. I graduated to coyotes when I was about 14 or 15.

(So your dad taught you?)

He got me started, and then I went from there.

(When you graduated from high school, did you go right to the two years?)

No, I didn't. I worked around, ranch work, that summer, trapped that fall, until some time in November, then joined the army. That was in 1968. There was a lot of footage on the news about what the army was doin', and it looked exciting, so I joined the army.

(Did you serve in Vietnam?)

I went there for a year, and then I extended for another six months so I could get an early out from the army. Anyone gettin' out of the army then with less than five months left, if they came back from Vietnam with less than five months, they were released.

03:02

(So you were in the army two years?)

Two years, seven months, 24 days.

(We have that down. [laughs] And after you got out of the service, what did you do?)

Cowboy. I went to Nevada and worked primarily in Nevada, worked on ranches, as a buckaroo, that's what they called it in Nevada. I [pause] worked primarily in northern Nevada, southeast Oregon, a little bit in Idaho. When the fur market came up, I trapped fur during the fur season. You could always make much more money trappin' fur than I did workin' on ranches.

(Was that during the fur boom period?)

Mm-hmm. I went to college from 1975 through the spring of 1977. And, ah, college left me plenty of time to trap on the side, so when I finished college, I just continued on trappin' during the first season. I had been trappin' during the first season the year before I went to college, also, and [pause] continued doing that until 1980, and went to work for the Brand Department as a brand inspector, as a livestock brand inspector. And even then I trapped on the side. Brand Department was the most boring place I'd ever worked, but since it was a bit more lucrative job than I'd had before, I decided to try it for five years before I quit. At the end of the five years, I took off, went back to trappin'.

05:14

(So that would have been about what time?)

1980 through '85. And [pause] when I left the Brand Department, I trapped through that season, first season, '85 and '86. In 1986, in the spring, I took a temporary job trappin' for the government near Boise, Idaho. And that was mid-May through mid-September. Then that first season I fur-trapped again, and the following May of 1987 I returned to Dubois, that's where my duty station was, the temporary. Worked until July, I think 20th, the 20th of July as a temporary at Dubois and then moved on to northern Idaho at a full-time position. Been workin' full-time ever since with ADC.

(Where in northern Idaho?)

Originally I was gonna be along the Clearwater River from Idaho County up to Benewah County, or through Benewah County, and I was there about a month. A fellow north of me died, so they hired a replacement and he went there for about a week, decided he didn't—couldn't find a place to live and didn't want to move up there, and he showed up at my place in Peck with the government pickup and all his stuff loaded in there. I called Mike Worthen, who was the district supervisor for there then, as well as the assistant state director, and told him that Barry was going to quit. He was a bit distressed because that area hadn't had anybody working it full-time ever since the fellow that Barry replaced had been sick. And I told him I'd go ahead and move up there and Barry could take my area there on the Clearwater, because he already lived in that area. So I moved on up to north of Sandpoint and worked the area from Plumber-St. Mary's up to the Canadian border.

(Which is even further north than Dubois?)

Mm-hmm. Dubois is on the eastern side of the state, about the central part of Idaho on the eastern side of the state. I went from there to the Clearwater River, which would be probably the bottom part of north Idaho, and went on up to the furthest north area.

08:06

(And that was full-time as a trapper?)

Mm-hmm.

(Boy, that's a lot of area, isn't it?)

It is, but it's not as big as the area I have now, I don't think. It may be, but there's no range livestock industry up there. It's all small farms, ranches in the valleys, so there's a tremendous amount of that area that is irrelevant to the job.

(And what did you trap up there?)

Primarily coyotes. Occasionally mountain lion. Surprisingly, we didn't have very much bear problem up there at all at that time.

(Why was that? No bear?)

There's plenty of bear. They just, their habitat's so rich, I think they just never get into botherin' livestock to any extent. [Pause] It's a rich habitat with a lot of moisture, so that the forbs and things that they eat on, vegetables that they eat on, stay soft and nice until the berries come on. They have a rich habitat, whereas the bear down here have a little tougher go.

(So how long were you up there?)

Three years.

09:27

(And that would be from—up to '87, '88?)

I came back down here in spring of 1990, [pause] a move I've always regretted.

(Really?)

Well, not for a while. I like the range industry. I grew up on the desert around the sheep outfits and cow outfits. I liked workin' in the mountains with the pack horses and mules. So I wanted to be where the range bands were and spend a lot of time in camp. But by the time I left there, north Idaho, I'd gotten where I liked it. I was claustrophobic at first, because it's so, so thickly timbered, you can only see about 15 feet in the summertime. I was claustrophobic for the first year I was up there, and of course I'd asked to come back to southern Idaho whenever, an opportunity presented itself. So I got my request, but by the time that happened, I'd got where I liked it in north Idaho. My wife's from St. Mary's so she'd like to go back. I expect when I retire, that's where we'll be.

10:51

(Now, in northern Idaho, did you do any packing in, with animals?)

No.

('Cause it's all timber?)

It's all timber, and the livestock are all on the farms and the valleys. So we'd just drive out in the pickup and get out and walk around the small places and set traps.

(The main work you did up there was coyotes?)

Coyotes and ravens.

(Oh!)

They had a real problem, they still do, I guess. When ravens would migrate in in the spring, they'd kill lambs and calves by peckin' their eyes out. And then once they peck their eyes out, then of course the calf or lamb is helpless, they're newborn, and then they feed on them. [Pause] And then often a cow will drop her own calf tryin' to fight the ravens off. It was a real problem. So I did a lot of raven work in the spring [pause] poisonin' ravens with DRC 1339. And a little bit of raven work for McArthur Lake Wildlife Refuge. They didn't get any goose production in their nests, because the ravens would eat the eggs. The year before I went up there, the fellow who died started a program of just before the nesting season, he'd make false nests with hard-boiled eggs [pause] that had been poisoned, and that took out the egg-eatin' ravens. Of course their goose production went way up. I believe that's still continuing today every year there. But other than that it was pretty much coyotes.

(And a mountain lion or two?)

Occasionally.

12:56

(And then when you came back south, what area is that?)

In 1989, Chuck Carpenter was the trapper in the area I have now and he became a supervisor. Things were pretty slow where I was, so I came down and worked for two months, through the summer, in the mountains in Chuck's area. Then I went back to my own area in the fall. And then at the end of March in 1990, I moved down to Bruneau, Idaho, which is the area that I have now. It's the southwestern part of the state. [Pause] And been there ever since.

(How many counties is that?)

It's most of Owyhee County, all of Elmore County, a little bit of Ada County, and actually I do slop over into Camas County a little bit, and Gooding County, although that's actually out of my district.

(Who is your supervisor?)

Chuck Carpenter.

(The district supervisor?)

Mm-hmm. The area that I have was always in the western district, but when Chuck became a supervisor, since he was intimately familiar with the area and its cooperators, they put me under his supervision, and I stayed there. So had that not happened, I would be workin' under Todd as a western district.

(Oh, I see. And your supervisor then, is further east?)

Mm-hmm, in Gooding.

14:43

(OK. So in the area—you came in '90 to this area, so you've been there for 15 years. What work do you do in this area?)

It's primarily coyotes. In the summertime, we have bear problems, mountain lion problems occasionally, not as many mountain lion problems as you might imagine, considering the potential. And now wolf problems.

(Oh! And that's new?)

Just the last few years. [Pause] And I do a little bit of starling work, but not much compared to the areas around me.

(Oh, they do more?)

There's two dairies that I routinely do starling work on, whereas to the east and up in this area, they have a lot more dairies and a lot more problems with starlings.

(So these guys up here near Boise do a lot more starling work?)

Yes, they do, and near Twin Falls, that area, there's a tremendous amount of stalling work.

(More dairies again?)

Mm-hmm.

15:59

(And in the area where you work now, the southern area, is it primarily livestock production?)

Mm-hmm. Cattle and sheep. Sheep seem to decrease more as time goes on. And it's made up of both winter and summer range, so unlike some areas, I don't really have a slow season. [Pause] Sheep go on the winter range in October, November, December. [Pause] And also there'll be fall calving cows on the winter range, and in spring calving cows on the winter range and some of them calve all winter. So, and then in the spring, about late May, I'll go to the mountains and pretty much stay there through September.

(Really! And you pack in?)

Sometimes. I set up a base camp along the south fork of the Boise River and work out of there, but oftentimes sheep will be quite a ways from the road and I'll use a pack mule.

(Mule?)

Ride a horse, pack a mule.

([laughs] Do you go up for, like, five days and come back?)

Usually, although [pause] if it's a wolf problem, I'll usually be there on the weekend as well. If I'm not having any serious problems with wolves or bear, usually I'll spend about one day a week down in the lower country doin' coyote problems in corn or melons or whatever. When there's serious wolf or bear problems goin' on, it's seven days a week.

(Back up in the mountains?)

Mm-hmm.

18:00

(Did trapping methods—when you were way up north as opposed to where you are now, did the same kind of methods for coyote or mountain lion?)

Same kind, but coyotes are a lot easier to catch up there. So [pause] just adaptation to the different habitat is really still a coyote. The habitat up there is very rich, so the coyotes have smaller areas, and [pause] actually it's more like trappin' fox.

(Really! How so?)

Smaller areas, and I've never moved a coyote up there, I don't believe I've ever moved coyotes by oversettin'. I've never seen a circle-shy coyote in northern Idaho, like, have coyotes that shy

away from a trap circle where a previous catch has been made. I never had that problem in northern Idaho. [Pause] Since it's smaller areas, you catch 'em quicker. [Pause] Rich habitat, easy livin', they don't seem to be as wary.

(So that's why they're easier?)

I think so. [Pause] And in, say, from the Salmon River to the Clearwater River, there's lots of grain fields. [Pause] There'll be what they call scab patches, little draws full of timber and brush, things like that. Coyotes live in there. You set the edge of the grain fields, and the coyotes come and get caught comin' out of those little scab patches. Further north, you catch 'em around the edge of the field by skid roads, where they've logged in the timber and they've got little trails, skid roads, goin' [pause] back in there, you catch 'em along the skid roads as well as the edge of the fields. So those are pretty easily defined places to catch your coyotes. It's not like bein' out in the big desert or the Owyhee Desert. Coyotes go about anywhere. They don't have anything that restricts their travel. So it's all terrain features, and some features are pretty slight that determine where a coyote might go.

(Down here in the south?)

Mm-hmm. And the coyotes here of course cover a lot more terrain. So your coyote might not come back to your set location for a while, whereas up there, if you just leave it, the same night or the next day he's back there sniffin' around.

(Really? Wow. Is there any difference with the mountain lion, to catch, up in the north areas as opposed to here?)

21:01

Pretty much the same type of animal here as there. Like here, the mountain lions are not very hard to catch, if they come back, they're just so undependable. They may come back to a kill or they may not. [Pause] They're just bein' cats. If they show up, they're not too bad to catch. It's just a matter of whether they're gonna come back or not. Most of the problems with mountain lions, the calls I received in north Idaho, would be the mountain lion killin' somebody's dog off the porch, and of course we didn't do anything about that.

(And in the south I would assume it would be livestock?)

It would be livestock. But there again, we don't have very much mountain lion problems. For as many mountain lions as there are here, the potential for conflict, it just isn't that big of a problem. When it is a problem, it's usually a big problem. But it doesn't happen that often.

(I wonder why that is. Because in my mind, if there were a lot of them, and livestock, you'd have a bigger problem than it sounds like there is.)

You would think, but I guess there's still enough deer to keep 'em satisfied. When you do have a problem with mountain lions, it can be pretty bad. They can kill a lot of sheep. [Pause] The biggest single kill that I have experienced here was 19 in one night. But some of the other guys have had bigger problems than that.

(By one mountain lion?)

Mm-hmm. And they're funny. They can go through, like, bed ground, killin' sheep, and it looks like the sheep never got up and left, never got off the bed ground, just slept through their killin'. Whereas if a bear gets into 'em, it causes a big commotion.

23:06

(Did you use dogs? Do you use dogs for mountain lions?)

I don't. I, traps and snares. I have a good friend who has good dogs, and I'll get him. He's a volunteer, and he'll run a mountain lion for us. At one point I had hounds, but they take up a lot of time. Unless a guy really wants to spend all his time after trappin' coyotes out chasin' his dogs around at night, which I don't.

([laughs] Not if you've got a friend who has good dogs. So you usually use snares or traps?)

Snares and traps, yes.

(So tell me a little bit about bear out here.)

24:00

When the sheep get in the mountains, some years we'll have a lot of bear problems, some years hardly any. And, at times I think it's because the hotter, drier years should produce more bear problems, and as a rule it does, but not always. I've had hot years that didn't have bear problems. The reasoning behind that is that the forbs and other succulent plants that they eat dry up quicker and have less berries. This year there was a fair amount of bear problems in one area, just one particular area, but it was different bear. It's not like one bear was causin' all the problems. In one particular area near Rocky Park, it seemed like they had bear problems. Everywhere they'd move to, they had a new bear. And one other year, the same allotment, the same type of deal, they had bear problems, and I'd take the bear and pop the kill, and then when they'd move camp again, it seemed like they'd be into a whole new bear, so I wound up doin' that seven times in that area. [Pause] This year it was four times. Each time they'd move, they'd be into another bear. They'd kill that bear, and a few days later, here would come another one, after they'd move again.

(So it wasn't just one problem bear, it was—)

No, several. And why that would be, there'd be that many problems in one band and nobody else is havin' much bear problems, I don't know.

(Are they increasing?)

They are increasing. [Pause] They have a reduced season on bear. By the time the snow leaves some of that country, the bear season, the spring bear season is over. Whereas in years past, the season stayed open longer and the hound hunters would go up and hunt bear out of some of that other country up there that there's still snow now, when the season closes. And we were a little tougher on bear years ago than what we are now, too.

26:26

(Really, how so?)

Just killed more of 'em. And now, [pause] there's so many people in the mountains now that we, we're a little more reserved about what we do. [Pause] We try not to have bears tied up on the pack trails and things like that. [Pause] In the old days, if a band of sheep was havin' bear problems, we might kill every bear we could around that band, as long as within a reasonable time period. [Pause] Set more snares, we catch more bear. [Pause] That was quite a while back, but now, if we have bear problems, we get a bear on that kill, we're probably gonna pull all our snares right away and see if that takes care of it. If they have problems and the sheep move out of that area, probably give 'em a few days to make sure the bear isn't followin' 'em. Where when I first started workin' here, if they had a bear problem at night and they moved across the ridge tomorrow, I'm still gonna kill that bear. And now I don't do that.

(So that's a difference from the early '90s to now?)

Mm-hmm.

(And you think that's because of more people in the area?)

More people and more of an awareness of the necessity of defensible behavior.

(Selectivity?)

Mm-hmm. [Pause] And a different attitude [pause] both on our part and the sheep producers' part. Well, maybe forced on the sheep producer, but [pause] whereas years ago, if the sheep producer lost sheep, he wanted to kill a bear. Now, if he lost sheep and he gets out of there, and there's nothing following him, then he'll probably just let it go, just drop it.

(And wait to see, I assume?)

Mm-hmm. [pause] But in the past, it was—you know, if you had a band of sheep here and you lost—a bear killed one of 'em, well, maybe you left, you moved that band a few miles, instead of waitin' to see if he was gonna follow you, they'd just kill a bear where that sheep was. And now I don't do that. In those days, it was considered takin' care of the problem, because even if he didn't follow them, he'd still be there next year. Now it would be looked at as revenge, which we don't do.

(So it's been quite a change in attitude and behavior?)

It's a real change in attitude. Incrementally, it's not noticed, but when you look back at 20 years ago, or 15 years ago, even, and the way that we work today, it is quite a change.

29:54

(Sounds like it. And speaking of changes, tell me about wolves. When you came down in 1990, were wolves in your area?)

No, we didn't have wolves then. [Pause] When they introduced wolves into the state, it seemed like they took off really quick. My area's one of the furthest areas that they moved into, so it's just been the last, say, four years that we've had wolf problems in my area, three or four years.

(Where did they introduce them first in the state?)

Along the Salmon River.

(And they've just moved-

Mm-hmm.

(West?)

West, west, south, and north. They've increased quite a lot, from 30-some wolves, I think it was 30-some wolves they introduced, and like, some 500 wolves are here now that they know about, and there's a lot more they don't know about. But when wolves come into an area new[*pause*] my impression—years ago I read somethin' about coyotes in Arizona in areas where sheep hadn't been grazing, the same thing happened there. When they first encounter the sheep, they don't really bother them too much. It seems like every year then it gets worse. So the Steel Mountain pack [*pause*] which is in my area, when they first showed up, they didn't bother the sheep that year. I think the next year they killed a couple sheep, but it wasn't any big deal. They kill a guard dog. And every year they've killed more sheep, and this year it was somethin' like 63 confirmed kills. And a guard dog. They kill a guard dog there every year. So every year it seems like a pack of wolves that gets established will kill, become more and more accustomed to killin' sheep or get into it a little better.

32:06

There's a new bunch of wolves—I believe there's a new bunch of wolves near Rocky Park[*pause*] the area where we were havin' bear problems, and they never did bother the sheep. In fact, it seemed like they went out of their way to avoid 'em. But every place we went, there were wolf tracks. The one time that they moved the sheep camp into an area, and it was a wolf rendezvous site. There were two wolves there when they moved in there. Well, they left. By contrast, the Steel Mountain pack, they've had, like, four exposure to sheep, they were just waitin' for the sheep, when they got up there, it seemed like, and I suppose the Rocky Park wolves will be doin' the same thing in a few years. [*laughs*]

(*[laughs]* So can you-all trap wolves?)

We can[*pause*] uh, what we do, if we confirm kills, we can go ahead and set traps, but we won't know if we can kill any wolves. We always had to get ahold of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and then they would tell us what would could do, if we could remove any wolves, kill 'em, collar 'em, turn 'em loose, leave 'em alone, whatever. We do what they allowed us to do. Now that's been turned over to the Idaho Fish and Game department. But we still have the same, same situation, where we can confirm the kills but they determine what we can do about it, if anything.

(So the process is, you confirm the kill, let Idaho Fish and Game know, and then they let you know what if anything they want you to do?)

Yes, and that's new. Like I say, it was Fish and Wildlife Service before. But I [pause] think September 8th or somethin' like that, Mark had a meeting with Idaho Fish and Game, Mark and Todd, and they were—that was part of the discussion, was the protocol on handling predation. I haven't had anything to do with wolves since Fish and Game took over management.

(Which has been fairly recent, it sounds like?)

Yes.

34:16

(Frequently, did they ask you to trap them, or move them, or what was their usual—?)

Either it would, it would be trapping them, but then we'd either collar one and turn it loose outside or be allowed to, authorized to take one or two or whatever wolves, but no wolf pups, or they wouldn't want the collared ones killed or, naturally we didn't, either. Oftentimes they wouldn't want the alpha pair killed, male and female. So in many instances, 40% of the wolf pack, if you caught one, you'd have to turn it loose anyway, because it'd be pups, collared wolves, or alpha female and male. The reasoning behind not wantin' the alpha pair killed, is they wanted the pups to survive, and they figured they had a lower pup survival rate if the alpha pair were killed.

(How do you tell an alpha pair?)

Well, the female would be the one that had pups, and the male, I guess he's the biggest and ugliest.

(Laughs)

But usually—not usually, I suppose, but in a lot of instances, the alpha pair would be collared. In the Steel Mountain pack, the alpha male is collared. The female isn't, but then she'd be easy to recognize anyway.

(How so?)

She's the old female that had pups. [Laughs]

(Laughs)

35:56

(So in the last four years you've seen quite an increase in wolf?)

Tremendous increase in wolves.

(Interesting. And back to bears, how do you catch bears?)

We use foot snares, and we use the carcass of their kill for bait. And when I first started, I'd build elaborate little log cabin cubbies for them to go in. Now I just make it out of brush or find a

trail through the chaparral brush and set a snare on each end, put the carcass in the middle and a snare on each side of it—anything to keep from havin' to build much of a cubby.

(Laughs)

Then [pause] usually—some places, it's hard to find a place to build a set, and other places it's really easy. If they're down in the willows, it's easy, because where they go is gonna be well-defined. But I do have a lot of trail sets now, rather than cubbies.

(Is that because cubbies are kind of labor-intensive?)

Mm-hmm. I still do some cubbies. Sometimes you have no choice. But there are a lot simpler cubbies than the little log cabins I built when I first started workin'.

(Laughs)

Had they been larger, I'm sure someone could have lived in there through the winter.

([laughs] That's good. [pause] Have you done any work with the research center?)

37:37

I did, with Bob Phillips and Ken Gruver several years ago, I think it was 1993. They were doin' a project testin' traps. I'd trapped some coyotes for 'em, freeze the foot and leg [pause] sent 'em off, and they had a veterinarian named Beth Williams in Wyoming that was acropsy in the foot. The first year I trapped coyotes for them using a Northwoods modified #3 trap, and then I trapped some more coyotes for them the second year. One of the guys that was usin' Sterling traps didn't catch any coyotes, or not very many, or didn't send 'em in, or whatever, and they needed more coyotes with Sterling traps. So I trapped some coyotes the second year with Sterling traps. And then, I don't remember what year it was, I worked usin' snare locks, DWRC breakaway snare lock.

(What animals did you use those for?)

Coyotes.

(Coyotes?)

But I intentionally set those snares where I'd have non-target catches, just so I could know if they worked. I don't know how else you'd test 'em.

([laughs] I just thought of another question. You've seen quite a few changes in terms of wolf predation and then the differences between the north and the south. Have you seen any other changes, like, more or less, with coyotes or mountain lions?)

A real change with coyotes. [Pause] When I first came to this area, in '90, we howl a lot [pause]

(Howl-is that what you said?)

Howl for coyotes, and coyotes were real aggressive in those days. It really worked well. You still get coyotes by howlin', but they're not aggressive like they were. We used callin' dogs, and almost every year somebody, one or two guys'd have a dog killed by coyotes. The coyotes were really aggressive. But those aggressive coyotes are the easiest ones to come because when you howl, they come and they're all buzzed up, they want to fight, so they get killed. The ones that howl the most, either you call 'em in and kill 'em or you're out howlin' under the airplane and the coyote howls back at you and you send the airplane over there and he kills them.

40:36

After a period of years in the same area, and I'm just speakin' of my own area here, we don't have the aggressive coyotes that we used to have. I haven't heard of a good coyote-dog fight—well, I don't know from whose point of view it would be “good,” but I haven't heard of a real scrappy coyote-dog fight for a long time, and I don't know of any dogs bein' killed by coyotes recently, in recent years, whereas it was common 15 years ago. The coyotes that do come to a howl don't come in like they used to, they don't, their attitude's different. In this area we do a lot of aerial huntin', and those good aggressive coyotes, they're easy to kill, and eventually you wind up with a wimpier coyote population. They still kill the livestock, but they don't respond to a howl or to your dogs as aggressively as they once did.

(So your thought is that because the more aggressive ones were killed 10, 15 years ago, as you said, they're getting wimpier?)

Mm-hmm. And for 10 years before I came into this area, Chuck Carpenter was doin' the same thing, howlin' and usin' callin' dogs and gettin' 'em to howl back so that the airplane could kill 'em, howlin' so they'd come chargin' in so we could shoot 'em, and after a period of time. And we worked the sheep range pretty hard, and the winter calving range[pause] so eventually you run out of those good aggressive coyotes. And I suppose if you didn't do that for several years, then the coyotes that came out of Nevada or wherever else, fillin' in, you might get aggressive coyotes again, but I don't know.

42:39

(Interesting. Did someone teach you to call?)

I started callin' coyotes when I went to work for the Brand Department, 'cause I didn't have time to run as many traps as I wanted to. But when I was out doin' my work with the Brand Department, I could almost always pull over and run over the hill and call for 15 minutes or somethin' like that. And then, to call, you don't have to have regular time. To run very many traps, you have to have a lot of time that you know you're gonna have. So that's when I started callin'. I knew an ex-government trapper that got me started howlin'. So when I went to work for the government, I was already howlin' at coyotes and doin' a lot of callin'. But then when I went to work for the government, I got started associatin' with a bunch of people that had been doin' a lot of it. So that I learned a lot from some of these guys.

(Did you use your voice or some-?)

Both. I don't voice howl as good as a lot of the trappers do, but it still works better for coyotes than any mechanical call I've used, as far as howlin'. A mechanical howler that you blow through doesn't get as good a response as a voice howl does, in my experience.

44:08

(Have you done any aerial gunning? You mentioned the planes.)

When I first moved to this area, we did a lot. All the trappers used to do quite a bit of gunning. For several years now, all the gunning, most of it's been done by full-time gunners. A.J. Kriwox, out of Gooding, the plane that's out of Gooding, Kelly Parker with a plane that's based in Caldwell, Kevin Brown with a plane that's based in Ricksburg.

(In Ricksburg?)

Mm-hmm.

(So they're professional gunners, basically?)

They do it all the time, and they trap in the summertime. And since they do it every day, or every day that they're flyin', they're better at it than the guy that goes out aerial gunnin' this week and maybe two times next week and then doesn't do it for three weeks and goes out again for another day. I really enjoyed it when I first started doin' it, but after a period of years, it gets to where it's bein' bored in a cramped space.

([laughs] How long did you do it?)

I think off and on for about six or seven years, five years, six years, something like that, and gradually did less and less of it, as there was always, there was always a full-time gunner available. They had regular gunners before that, but they also had districts, they were doin' other things, so it seemed like a lot of the time the trapper was doin' his own gunnin'.

(And I assume you mean fixed-wing?)

Mm-hmm.

(Over here.)

I haven't had a helicopter in my area for probably 10 years or longer.

(And what would the reasoning be to get a helicopter over here in your area?)

Flew up in the mountains a couple of times lookin' for coyotes. One year it was out here by Mayfield, in those bunch of mountains at the Boise riverfront, a bunch of coyotes in there. We went out one day, took a helicopter out one day and killed some of those coyotes. [Pause] It was quite cold that morning, I remember it was one degree below zero here. They didn't have a shooting door for the helicopter, so they took the doors off, at least the door on my side, and the supervisor that was here then, Lane Bangerter, he was in the back seat and his door was off as well. And we got up, flew 110 miles an hour out to Mayfield, started huntin', hunted a couple

hours and came back, and I frostbit my leg here where it was stickin' out from the edge of the helicopter, and Lane got so cold he got sick and had to go home.

(Oh, my gosh!)

It was pretty chilly that day. Normally helicopters have a shootin' door, so they can close the door [laughs] when you're not shootin' at a coyote. But this day it was open all the time. [Pause] And one other time, up in my spring range, Bennett Mountain, Deer Heaven Mountain, spent a couple of hours helicopter huntin' in that area, and that was the last time I used a helicopter in my area.

(So it's more fixed wing?)

Mm-hmm.

47:39

(In the winter, of course. Did you do any kind of aerial gunning up north?)

No.

(No?)

No, that's pretty much a rainforest up in the northern part of the state. They use an airplane a little bit now in the next area down from where I was, it would have been the first area I had when I went up there. They didn't do any airplane aerial huntin' there at that time, now they do a little bit, but not much. They just don't have the area for it. One time, when I was up north, Barry Elam and Lee Rogers went up with the helicopter to Dworshak Reservoir and they killed coyotes that were on the ice for Fish and Game. The coyotes were killin' white-tailed deer out on the ice, on the lake. And I believe they killed 50-some coyotes out there. But they killed, they counted over 250 deer kills that the coyotes had killed, the white-tailed deer out on the ice. They were havin' a real problem that winter. And during the time I worked north Idaho, that was the only aerial huntin' conducted in north Idaho. [Pause] Apparently, George Hanson was in that area before I was, and he went with a helicopter a couple times for the Fish and Game down in what they called the Wah Wahs, the mountain range that drains down into the Snake River. And they had bighorn sheep they were gettin' goin' in there, and they were killin' coyotes for the benefit of the bighorn sheep. I don't know if they did that just one year or if they did it more than one year. I wasn't there then. He was tellin' me that he did that.

49:29

(In the time that you did aerial gunning, did you have any close calls?)

The only time I can remember ever havin' what could be considered a close call, we were huntin' coyotes near Bruneau, Idaho, near the Snake River arm of C. J. Strike Reservoir, the big platte area above the rim. Jeff Ashmead was flyin', and we was on some coyotes. We shot—made a pass and shot one. There was two or three other coyotes there. Went out over the Snake River, turned around to come back and the airplane dropped quite a ways. So we was just lookin' at the rim as we was coming back. Well, he was pullin' up, climbin' as much as he could, to clear the rim when we came back up over it. But he started makin' this noise, like, "Mmm,

mmm, mmm, mmm!" So we did make it up and didn't hit the rim. But when we got to the top, I told him if he thought we was gonna die, be quiet about it, because I could die in peace, and he didn't need to make those noises! [Laughs]

([laughs] Did he say what was wrong?)

Just the air over that rim, it's just like, he didn't have the lift and just the airplane, when we come around to come back towards the coyotes, it just dropped like that, and then here's the rim, so he's pullin' up over like that. [Pause] But I would not have realized that we were in any particular danger if he hadn't made those noises. And then we had a pilot named Chris Christenson, I'm sure he had a different first name, I don't remember what it was, and he routinely scared people because he'd get in little side canyons and things like that. He had a regular gunner, Sam Kocherhans, he's a pilot now. [Pause] But I flew with Chris more than any other pilot, of the gunning that I did. And a lot of times I'd see coyotes and I wouldn't say anything about it because I didn't want him to go down there after 'em. And Sam told me the same thing. So Chris would scare you on an almost daily basis if you were flyin' with him, if he had any place to scare you at.

(Was it intentional or-?)

No, he just didn't—well, his flyin' career came to an end because he had a couple of plane wrecks in a couple of years. One time, as an example of Chris, he'd fly in any kind of conditions. So Jeff Ashmead was gunnin', and Chris was flyin'. He went down by the Bruneau sand dunes, and the wind was really screamin'. Normally, I don't even know anybody now that would even be out flyin' and huntin' coyotes in that kind of wind. But they were. And some big bluffs there, they went flyin' up hill, and when they got to the top where the wind broke over it, it blew 'em over. So the airplane was fallin' down out of the sky, but it was fallin' downhill. And somehow or other, and it had to be circumstantially, because Chris said he didn't know of anything he did to get it straightened out because he didn't know what to do, but anyway, it got leveled out before they hit the ground. But they did tick the sagebrush a little bit.

53:02

So they, they decided to give up there and they went over the Bruneau and landed on this little dirt strip over at Bruneau, and it wasn't blowin' as bad over there, so they could hunt over there a little bit. When I got over there, they was standin' outside the airplane, and they both were really religious, at that time. And I'd never noticed them bein' real religious before.

(What were they doing?)

Oh, they both thought that God was in there with 'em, else they'd never of got out, and I said I bet that's the last time he rides with you guys. But that was—without an airplane bein' wrecked, that's probably the closest I know about. And it would have been a bad deal for 'em if they would have hit the ground, of course. Scared 'em both really bad, but it scared Jeff worse than it did Chris, because Jeff was careful for years after that, and still is, and Chris went on to a couple of airplane wrecks in the next few years. Now he's drivin' a school bus, I believe.

([laughs] Did you enjoy the aerial gunning?)

At first I did, it was a lot of fun. Then like I say, it was eventually, go get in the airplane in the morning and sit in a cramped space for a while. And then when you're chasin' a coyote of course, it's fun, but the rest of the time I have a hard time stayin' awake.

(Just flyin' around.)

Mm-hmm. [Pause] I would prefer just to be on the ground trappin'.

54:41

(It sounds like now, like you said, they pretty much have guys that just do that.)

They do. And that's the best—that way you have a consistently better gunner, because he's doin' it all the time, and then the trapper's free to act as a ground crew, and that's a good safety measure. One of the things, years ago, it wasn't required to have a ground crew.

(Even when you started, in '90?)

Well, a lot of times if Chris was—was say he'd been up at Emmett huntin' or some place, or he'd been up to Boise for some reason or other in the pickup. I lived at Bruneau then, and that little dirt strip was only about two miles from my house, so he'd call me, say he was gonna be at Bruneau in 20 minutes or whatever, and I'd meet him at the airport and I'd jump in and we'd go hunt coyotes till dark. And Chris would hunt right up until you couldn't see a coyote on the ground, either, and then he'd go home. Now, it's pretty much policy to always have a ground crew and be in contact with somebody. At that time, we didn't worry about it too much. The ground crew, the only reason for a ground crew then was to locate coyotes for the airplane. We never thought about it as a safety measure. Some people may have.

(So that's one change you've seen in the last 15 years in terms of safety.)

Hm-hmm.

(Have there been any other ones besides the ground crew?)

56:13

Well, there have. A few years ago, there were a few wrecks and two or three crashes. So there was a big study on what we could do to improve aircraft safety. You know, it's inherently dangerous anyway, so I'd think you'd have to expect a few crashes. [Pause] But there was a whole policy change and ground crews were required and fat people weren't supposed to be gunnin' and different things like that. [pause] I think a lot of that is because people are expected to make changes when something happens. It's still gonna be dangerous. I don't think you can shoot coyotes out of an airplane or helicopter without it being dangerous, so just accept that and go on, is my own feeling. [pause] A ground crew is a good policy, though. It's good to have somebody see the smoke come up when you go into a hole in the ground, I suppose. [chuckles]

([laughs] What do you like best about your work?)

Freedom. I like—I always liked trappin', I always liked huntin'. But this job provides a level of freedom that's almost unheard of in this day and age. Of course you have to do your work but,

cooperators call and say what's the problem, and the trapper decides how he's gonna handle it, when he can handle it. Of course you're gonna do it as soon as you can [pause] but you just have a freedom that you don't have in any job where you punch a time clock. We may be leavin' in the dark one morning to get out to call a coyote, next morning we don't have anything goin' on, we may not leave till 8 o'clock and go check traps or somethin' like that. We may work 16 hours today but only two tomorrow. You know, you just don't have that kind of freedom in any other line of work that I know of.

(And you like that?)

I do like that. [pause] I just—I guess I'm just an unstructured person.

(What do you like least about your work?)

58:56

In many cases [pause] it's more important to satisfy the cooperators and the public than it is to actually—you still have to do the job, but the main part is makin' somebody happy, [pause] instead of—it's a lot easier to deal with coyotes than it is to deal with people. [pause] Maybe I don't always want to be nice to somebody. [chuckles]

([chuckles] So you find that the hardest part?)

Dealin' with people is much harder than dealin' with animals. It's a skill [chuckles] an acquired skill.

([laughs])

Hopefully acquired.

59:59

(Some people talk about—you know, I'm gonna back up. In your 15 years, have you seen the need to make people happy increase?)

Well, let's say not necessarily make 'em happy, but keep 'em from bein' mad, yeah. It has increased simply because there's more people. There are more agencies that—not more agencies, there are more groups that are, are constantly watchin' us, and [pause] years ago we might have not really cared if they was watchin' us or not. Now we have to make sure that we don't give 'em any ammunition to attack us with, or keep it as little as possible. [pause] Usually—when I went to work for this outfit, everyone that was hired was either a trapper—almost everybody had been a trapper, at least semi-professional trapper. And everyone else either was a cowboy, a logger, a packer, or some combination of those three occupations.

(When you first started?)

Mm-hmm. They hired outdoor people. Well, a lot of the people—most individuals from those groups, if they're walkin' down this hall [pause] and here's some environmentalist wants to rant at him, they're just gonna hit him on top of the head and walk on. Well, you can't do that. [chuckles]

([laughs])

So it goes against the nature of people like me to get along. [laughs]

([laughs])

And so fortunately I've had years to build up gradual, to learn to get along. Well, also, it was a good thing that I worked for the Brand Department before I worked for Wildlife Services.

(Did that give you some people skills?)

Mm-hmm. Because outdoor-oriented people, cowboys, loggers, packers, don't generally have a lot of patience with dealin' with people. It's not in our nature. So it's a learned skill. It's difficult.

(Laughs)

It's a different world. Even in the last 15, 20 years, it's a different world.

(In terms of the people to be dealt with?)

In terms of the people to be dealt with, in terms of the number of people you encounter doin' your work, and certainly in the number of people that are standin' over your shoulder tellin' you what not to do. Not within our agency, but people outside of our agency, public groups that don't like what we do [pause] some that do want us to do things for 'em, but they want to tell us how to do it. [Pause] So it's a—there's a lot more—you have to be a lot more politic than you used to do.

63:22

When I first started workin' for this outfit, the old-timers'd sit around and bitch about the same thing. So I don't know what it was like when they first went to work. [Pause] But it does evolve.

(The other thing that I've heard people talk about in terms of what they like least is paperwork. Have you seen that increase in the last 15 years?)

The paperwork really got bad, and then when we got our laptop computers, it got good.
[chuckles]

(Really!)

Yeah.

(When did you get the laptops?)

Last year, in January.

(And how did it change?)

We don't have to sit around fillin' out those little bubble sheets, MIS.

(Management Information System.)

Mm-hmm. When I first started, we, we had a—I can't remember what they call them, but it had seven little lines on there and you'd do a short description of what you did that day. And then we started doin' the little bubble sheets with MIS, and I hated those. And [pasue] they just got worse and worse, because as you get older, your eyeballs don't like doin' that kind of thing. [chuckles] And the, with the laptops, everything got easier, because the MIS system, as we do it now through the computer, is simple and works amazingly well. There's a few wrinkles, and Jim would know more about that than I do, he's the one that has to deal with them. It just made our life a lot easier. I can do all my reports in a half hour a week as far as MIS, usually, whereas before I'd spend a half hour trying to sharpen my pencils and find my forms and things like that.

(So you really like the laptop?)

I do. I do. It makes this job easier. And I can't help but think more efficiently, too, because if I do my reports on Sunday evening, Monday they've got anything they want to know.

65:44

(Plus if you don't mind doing it so badly, then it's easier on you.)

Well, I haven't gotten behind since, and I used to get behind frequently. [Chuckles]

(Really? [laughs] So everybody kind of benefits.)

Well, there's some people that cuss it, but I don't know why. I think it's just, you know, most of us always cuss anything different anyway. Some people feel they're expected to cuss it. But in my case, I like it so good that I've relinquished my bitchin' rights on it.

([laughs] What do you find the most challenging?)

Wolves.

(Really, out of all the animals?)

Mm-hmm. Partly because I'm not as familiar with wolves as I am with the other animals, but mostly because we don't have the flexibility to deal with 'em as we see fit, and everybody that—seems like half the people in the United States is lookin' down our neck while we're doin' it. So you have to—you've got the environmental groups, the wolf advocacy groups, you've got the Fish and Game, you've got the Fish and Wildlife Service, you've got the Nez Perce tribes, you're dealin' with all these people. And you can't just walk along and scowl at 'em and give 'em an obscene gesture, you have to deal with 'em [pause] responsibly, I guess.

(And so wolves are your most challenging?)

Mm-hmm, because of the political ramifications.

(Speaking of that, that gets to the next question: what's the most difficult social or political situation you've found yourself in, and how did you resolve that?)

67:46

Hmm. [pause] Probably the most difficult is [pause] with one of the cooperators that's outside my area but runs some sheep in my area, and it never has been resolved. We still don't like each other.

Really?)

As far as the public, don't have a lot of problems with the public. [pause] I just explain what I'm doin', why I'm doin' it, and they either accept it or they don't accept it. [Pause] You know, I really don't have a lot of problems.

(Do you find that most people accept what you're doing, or want you to do it because they've called you?)

The people that I work for, yes, they do. The people that don't accept it are not people I have a lot to do with anyway. At one point I was president of the Idaho Trappers Association, so any time negative editorials cropped up in the *Idaho Statesman*, I'd often respond to 'em. I spent a lot of time talkin' to people on the phone [pause] that were against trappin' for one reason or another. And [pause] there again, my people skills that I acquired as a brand inspector came in handy. I don't really have a big problem with that. The people that don't like—that are against us are always gonna be against us. I don't try to convert 'em. The people that are not against us, I'll give 'em the whole spiel about how trappin's good, trappin's this, trappin's that. [Pause] But I don't have a lot of problem with either faction.

70:06

(Now, does your district supervisor sometimes deal with that more than you do?)

I suppose he probably does. [Pause] How he handles it, I couldn't say. When I was the Idaho Trappers Association president, I dealt with more of it than he did. [chuckles] [pause] If someone doesn't understand or is askin' questions trying to understand what we're doin' and why, I've got all the patience in the world. If it takes me all day to explain somethin' to 'em, I will. If somebody obviously has their mind made up that they don't like us, and you know when that's the case, I'm not gonna waste any time arguin' with 'em. I won't argue with 'em. [Pause] I got other things to do so it doesn't bother me that they don't like us. We expect that. What bothers me about anti-trappin' or anti-huntin' or anti-anything people is, there's a lot of things I don't like that other people do, but I keep my mouth shut about it because [pause] it's part of livin' in a free society. You have the freedom to pursue your different interests, as long as it's not illegal, as long as it's not takin' advantage of someone else. And I don't like it that, that people try to stop someone else from doing something that doesn't concern them that's not hurtin' anything. You know, I don't like people ridin' motorcycles out in the desert, but I don't go down to the BLM and jump up on their desk and screech about it.

72:03

(What's one of the funniest things that has happened while you were capturing or handling animals?)

[pause] I'd have to think about that. [laughs] I can't think of anything.

[[laughs]]

I'm sure there have been funny things happen, but I don't remember any of them.

(Well, you can keep thinking about it, because sometimes I've found that as the interview goes on, people will, "Oh, yeah! I remember that." Do you have a scary moment?)

Only thing scares me is rattlesnakes.

(Have you encountered any of them?)

Every year.

(Every year?)

[Pause] Crawl in' along through the bush, crawl in' up into a crawl in' position or somethin' like that, run into a rattlesnake, it'll scare me and then I'm not any good for the rest of the day. Rattlesnakes and lightning's about the only thing that scares me the worst.

(Have you had any animals that you thought were dead or sedated or knocked out or something and then they—?)

I picked up a coyote by the tail after I shot it one time and it turned around and bit me. I thought it was dead. [Pause] My wife—in fact, it was where we lived in Little Valley, south of Bruneau. [Pause] My wife said there was a coyote out in the field and she wanted me to shoot it 'cause it'd kill her chickens and whatnot. And then the guy we rented the house from, a cattleman, he camped there. Anyway, I ran outside with a rifle. I shot this coyote and he went down. So I went over there and grabbed him by the tail and turned him over to pick him up like that and he spun around and bit me, because he wasn't dead. Didn't bite me very hard, anyway.

74:10

Another thing, I suppose some people found it funny [pause] I'd been over to Black Foot at the state fair with my supervisor, Chuck Carpenter. We'd been over there two, three days. We got back in the middle of the night, or late at night, and—no, it was in the afternoon. And we had a temporary state director named Dwayne Rubink. Dwayne had got ahold of some—he was kind of a gadget hound. He got ahold of some night vision stuff and he wanted to try it out. So Dwayne and Roger Woodruff [pause] came to my house and Chuck Carpenter and I were gonna go night huntin' for coyotes with this night vision stuff. I hadn't seen my wife for several days, and she was—she got a job drivin' a potato truck durin' the potato harvest. So while we was standin' there gettin' all the stuff put together in the back of this—I had it in the back of my Bronco and we was puttin' all this stuff together, she came home, jumped on me about the coyotes killin' her chickens. This was the first time I had met Dwayne Rubink, he was the new state director, temporary. So here's my boss, the state boss, and Roger Woodruff, who was a biologist down at the Boise office, standin' there watchin' my wife chew me out [laughs] about the coyotes killin' her chickens. I said, "I'll take care of it in the morning."

75:50

So we went on, and we hunted coyotes all night around there and never seen any coyotes. We got home about 3:30 or somethin' like that. Chuck stayed at my house. The next morning my wife had got up and went to work. The little dog was barkin'. Finally I couldn't take it any more. I went out to the door, opened the door to tell it to shut up, and there was two coyotes there huntin' chickens. So I run back in the house, got my rifle, and I shot both of the coyotes. And [pause] but one of 'em I could tell wasn't completely dead, but I just got out of bed and ran out there, so I didn't have any clothes on, and here come the neighbor's wife bailin' hay, coming around the corner with a hay bailer goin' ka-chunk, ka-chunk, ka-chunk. I had to run back in the house, and Chuck was lookin' out the window from his bedroom and said, "One of your coyotes is leavin'."

([laughs])

I said, "I know, but I can't do anything about it 'cause Kathy's comin' bailin' hay." But I did take care of her problem in the morning, like I told her I would.

(But one got away.)

Yeah, but it probably died later. [chuckles]

([laughs] We are at the end of CD #1, so we will stop here.

77:17 End file 1

File 2

00:00

(This is CD #2 of the interview with Gary Looney. We stopped at the question, scariest thing. Did you think of any other funny things?)

No, I don't. But I know that there are some, they just don't come to mind right now.

(And I assume we can say it on tape, Rick Phillips, who I interviewed two days ago, said to ask you—oh, maybe it wasn't you, sorry, it was another one. [both laugh] Sorry about that. What is your favorite lure recipe?)

Of the lure I make myself, just a basic gland lure, probably similar to the old Montana gland recipe. And then I have another lure that I make using seal oil and beaver castor and some other things. It works really well.

(What's the Montana recipe?)

It's just an old-time coyote gland recipe. That's just what they call it, I don't know why. It's just a basic coyote gland recipe.

(So it has coyote glands in it?)

Coyote glands, oh, glands and—I haven't made any for a while, so I don't have it memorized. I have this stuff written down at home. I made—I had a couple of really good M-44 recipes that I developed in north Idaho, but I haven't used M-44s for a long time. I don't have 'em memorized. [Pause] I make pretty basic lures.

(Do you buy lures?)

I do buy some. I buy some lures—Craig O'Gorman makes a couple lures, one of 'em is called A-1, that's not available to the general public, it's available to government trappers and a few other people. That's probably the best coyote lure I've ever used. So I buy that and I use it when I'm workin' on complaints. If I'm doin' preventive trappin', then I'll use other lures and keep my best lures for actual takin' care of problems rather than preventative trappin', so when I come back in there again I've got somethin' different.

(You mentioned the M-44. Did you use more of those in the north area?)

I did, yes. In northern Idaho in November it starts rainin' and then it goes to snow. It's very difficult to trap up there because they get so much moisture. So until it dries up in the spring, except for a little—there's a little bit of an area right near the Canadian border that's kind of a banana belt. You can keep a few traps goin' all year there, but for most of that part of the country in the wintertime it's snares and M-44s. [Pause] And after I moved down to southern Idaho, Boise BLM doesn't want us usin' them 44s. All the ranchers down here seem to have a lot of dogs, so I just got away from usin' 'em down here.

04:02

(What's your favorite trap to use?)

For coyotes I like Sterling MJ600s.

(Why do you like them?)

It does a really good job. [chuckles] My next favorite with be the 3N of the government traps. When I was fur trappin' I liked the old Montgomery #3 dogless trap, 'cause it was very efficient and effective. [pause] I like a trap with at least 22 inches of chain, because I don't like to have the hunker down to reset 'em once they're staked. I like a trap that I can just bend over and reset. Now I use more drags than stakes. I eventually got tired of drivin' stakes in the ground. These drags use either rocks or hooks. The MJ600 comes up through the dirt cover better. It doesn't have a big spring stickin' out. It's faster. It's got a good, wide jaw thickness. It's just an excellent trap. I haven't used any padded jaw traps that I like, even though that may be what comes. The Victor padded jaw trap is a very poor trap in my opinion.

05:33

(How so?)

They're slow. They're— [pause] they're not as fast. They're not as strong. They don't do as good a job. You have to be more careful how you set 'em because of that. It's not a very well-built trap, either.

(And you're not required to use those?)

Unh-huh. Not in my area at this time.

(Is that coming?)

Possibly. [chuckles]

(Really? [laughs])

Possibly. Right now I can still use good coyote traps.

06:15

(In terms of snares, is there just one snare out there, kind of thing?)

No. I like snarin' a lot. Snared coyotes are the most inexpensive coyotes that I get in terms of time and effort and money spent. And fence snares, I use the DWRC lock and seven feet of cable, 3/32nds cable. For trail snares, I use snare whose total length is about 10 or 12 feet. The loop end is made of stiff 1/16 cable, cam lock, 110-pound breakaway S-hook, and a 50-pound tension spring. You have a swivel, and then the balance there is 3/32nds cable. [pause] And that snare kills coyotes really quickly. [pause] It's so efficient that a lot of times they don't even tear up the vegetation, you reset it at the same place again. When they hit the end of that snare, if they hit it very hard, that 50-pound tension spring keeps such tension on their neck that they die very quickly. Oftentimes with the old traditional snares that we used, their heads would swell up from lymph. These snares will kill 'em so quickly that their heads usually don't swell up. That's my favorite snares for coyotes.

08:20

(Some trappers modify traps that they buy. Do you do any of that?)

If—we'll go as an example, if you were usin' Bridger traps, which is a common, popular brand of trap, or now John Graham's marketin' a clone of the imitation of the Montgomery #3 dogless, if I were a fur trapper, I probably wouldn't do much modification to those traps. If I were usin' 'em for ADC work, if I were Wildlife Services buyin' those traps, then I would modify 'em. I'd laminate the jaws so that they would be thicker. I don't know that I'd put or coil 'em, 'cause they have good springs anyway. I might. I think with the Northwoods traps—or the Bridger traps, I would, with the ones that John Graham's sellin', the Montana traps, I probably wouldn't the first year, but I might the second year. The reason that I'd modify 'em for ADC work is because we don't check our traps every three days. We're not required to check our traps every three days. Sometimes we do. But our workload determines whether or not we will, and oftentimes we check 'em once a week. With a fur trapper that's checkin' his traps every three days in this state, the traps as they come out of the box, they're completely adequate. If you leave that coyote in there longer, and every coyote isn't gonna be in there for the full three days anyway, in fact, none of 'em are, but the longer a coyote's stays in there, the more important the modifications become. So as a Wildlife Services trapper, checkin' traps possibly only once a week, I'd want the modifications. As a fur trapper, since the modifications cost money and they're not gonna make you any money, I'd leave 'em as is.

10:26

(And there's the difference in the time, not checking?)

There is.

(So currently, as a Wildlife Services worker, you get traps issued to you.

Mm-hmm

(And the ones that you use, you don't modify?)

No, the Sterling trap—the last coyote traps that I've got have always been Sterlings, and we haven't—I don't think they've bought any new coyote traps for a while, but the last ones were Sterlings, and they already have a wide jaw, and they already have a lot of spring power. They've got everything that the people who modify stock traps are tryin' to get in the first place.

(It sounds like it.)

They have a very wide, smooth jaw. They already have four springs. They have everything that the people who are modifying Bridgers are tryin' to achieve, so you don't have to modify those. With the old 3Ns, you could probably—it might be to your advantage to put—weld some #9 wire on the jaws to make 'em wider, but then when you do that, you slow up that trap, and that trap can't afford to be slowed up much. If you were gonna do that, then you'd have to scour around and find some #4 springs to put there to accommodate the wider jaws, so they're best left alone. And that's the reason that I would consider puttin' more springs on a trap anyway would be, if you put more weight on the jaws and more width, then you need to have more power to get it to close quicker. And once they're closed and the springs're locked up, the lever's locked up, they're not goin' anywhere anyway, because, ah, it's, it's the design of the trap. In fact, if the levers have the jaws closed, it holds 'em in there, more so than the power of the springs themselves. Within reason. You can't have little milksop springs, or they will get out, but any spring that's adequate to close that trap quickly is gonna hold it closed. So to put the extra springs on there, I would put 'em on there to accommodate the extra width and weight of the jaws rather than to put more pressure on the foot.

12:39

And as far as spaced jaws in a trap [pause] trap advertisements and trapper propoganda says that's kinder and gentler to the animal, but it's not. It doesn't make any difference, because the trap's still bein' held on the foot by the springs keepin' the levers pushed up. You've still got steel jaws closed as tightly as they can possibly get, as the levers can close it on both sides of the foot. And if you have a 3/16th gap in there, it doesn't make any difference if you've got 5/8 inch of coyote leg in there. It's still the same, whether there's a gap or not. The gap, the old-timers put gaps in there, they wrapped that staple around there, welded somethin' on there, whatever, was, if that old triumph or that old Victor trap that they were usin', or Newhouse or whatever other kind they typically all had narrow jaws, thin jaws. And they didn't necessarily check their traps as often as people are required to now. So if that coyote wore out, the tendons could still hold him in there, if they were in that gap. That was the purpose of the gap in the jaws. It's not that it makes it press any more comfortably on the animal. For some reason, it's used as a space jaw trap is in trapper propoganda as makin' the trap easier on an animal, and anybody that ever

thought about it has to see that that's not the case. So, unless they were required, they probably wouldn't mess with the space jaws, and Nevada requires it, so.

(Oh.)

14:39

But for practical purposes, I don't see where the space jaw makes any difference, 'cause if I were a fur trapper, I'm not gonna have my coyote in there for a week. He's not gonna be comfortable anyway.

(How have your trapping techniques changed over the years?)

Mine, very little. My coyote trapping techniques have changed very little. [pause] I was a professional coyote trapper before I went to work for wildlife services, so they really haven't changed all that much. Other than goin' more to drags and less stakin'. I always used more old-time-type methods than many of the modern trappers, wirin' my traps to rocks and things like that, because I learned from old-time trappers. During the fur boom, there was a lot of—the trappin' methods evolved pretty rapidly during the fur boom of the '70s, and a lot of people got away from a lot of old-time methods that still work quite well. [pause] Trappin' does evolve. If it stays the same, then pretty soon you're not very effective. But basic trappin' methods don't change that much. You get more sets. You use your sets a little different, respond to the animals, actually, more of a response to individual animals has changed than anything else. If a trapper has a sound, sound foundation, then your methods are so fluid that they don't change that much anyway.

16:39

Someone who hasn't trapped all that long may be more by recipe, not lure recipe, but sets. People show 'em how to make three types of sets and they make 'em the same way all the time. Somebody that can't remember when he first made a coyote set looks at the area and everything's either a flat set or a dirt hole set, and your set is built subconsciously according to the way you think a coyote's gonna approach. It doesn't look necessarily like pictures in an instruction book. So they're all different. Well, with that kind of flexibility, you adapt to the different situations, but you don't necessarily change your methods, 'cause you don't really have to.

17:27

(You said during the fur boom, which was in the late '70s, some things evolved. Give me an example of one.)

Coil springs traps came—well, there had always been coil spring traps, but never very good ones. And coil spring traps evolved to where they were really good traps. There was a lot more—a lot of work done on equipment, good drags, like the Wimberly drag was invented, and it was totally different from the old drags that everyone used. There were set methods—the old-timers, they were almost into witchcraft. [chuckles]

([laughs])

A lot of really good sets were standardized, and there were probably some of those guys that had a little more on the ball than the rest who were usin' those sets anyway, but people started writin' about 'em, makin' videos, so knowledge got out quicker. Somebody that wanted to learn how to trap could be a pretty good trapper in a couple of years, where before, if you didn't have somebody teachin' you, you could stumble along for ten years tryin' to learn how to trap coyotes effectively. Whenever you've got a lot of people trappin' and a big fur market, then there's always gonna be a bunch of guys tryin' to come up with ideas how they can sell somethin' and make money. Well, most of that stuff's junk, but every once in a while somethin' turns up that really works good, as advertised. So you have the technology and the materials of trappin'. The J600 trap was invented during that time, I think about 1970—it came on the market I think in 1979, electronic tractors, like squeaker. I can't remember what the guy's name was that came up with that. He was a Texan. He moved to Eagle, Idaho.

19:41

A lot of the tools that make trappin' easier were put on the market. Most of 'em are just a waste of time, but instead of people havin' sifters made with wood sides and hardware cloth bottom you had all metal sifters that you could dig dirt with, things like that. But some good good sets, good trapping methods were made available to the public, more in the way of line management than anything else. A lot of information about coyotes came out. Most of the trappin' books are really, unless you're really a beginner, aren't gonna do you much good. But then there are a few people that really knew what they were doin' and put good information on trappin' coyotes and managing the trap line in books. So that's probably [pause] good information gettin' out to the public was the biggest effect of the fur boom. There were a few people that knew how to do a lot of things well. By 1985, there were a whole lot of people that knew how to do a lot of things well.

20:53

(You said that your trapping techniques for coyotes haven't changed?)

Not that much.

(What about for other animals, like, you've done bear, mountain lion, wolf?)

I didn't have any trappin' techniques for bear and mountain lion before I went to work for the government, and I don't do that much mountain lion work, so that's pretty much the same, just a big bobcat set. With bear, they evolved a lot, like I mentioned, from the little log cabin, the only thing I missed was a bunk and stove inside.

([laughs])

Now I just barely have whatever [chuckles] the least I can get by to direct 'em over the snare. Wolf trappin', the more I do of it, the more I realize how different that it can be from coyote trappin', not in the mechanics of constructing a set, although you do it considerably bigger, but in the different ways that a wolf would use its country. Like, coyotes, the difference between coyote trappin' and fox trappin' mostly is in the amount of terrain that they cover, and that's times ten with a wolf. They cover so much country, and then they have a different social structure so I'm just learnin' that.

(So it's not necessarily the mechanics, it's the animal?)

It's the animal, it's the social structure combined with the amount of terrain that they'll cover. That's how I see it right now. But I'm just learnin' about 'em, too. With any trappin', I think if you—whether it's trappin', huntin', or fishin', it's all the same. It's a matter of knowin' the animal. If you know your tools, which is easy, then it's a matter of knowin' enough about that animal to know what he needs to survive, how he gets what he needs to survive, and then use that knowledge against him to catch him. So basically, that's the formula for any huntin' and trappin' and fishin', really, is learnin' the animal, and I'm still learnin' about wolves. I'm still learnin' about everything, but I've still got a long ways to go to be a good wolf trapper.

(If you had a grandchild who asked you about trapping secrets, because some trappers have secrets, or things that they don't like to let out, what would you tell him?)

The only secret to trappin' is hard work. It's just basics, sound, basic trapping practices applied over and over and over again. For a fur trapper, whoever gets there first with the most gets the most fur, all other things bein' equal. So there's not any real secrets. It's just learnin' the animal, learnin' the tools, which as I said is easy, learn the animal, and then just a lot of effort.

(Did you ever have any secret things you did that you didn't want to tell people?)

No, I don't.

(Not really?)

I don't have any secrets. Now, everyone does things a little bit different, as do I. It's not that it's secret, but I don't—I would never take the local fur trappers out on my coyote trap line with me. Not that I do anything necessarily better or that it's a secret, I just don't want 'em doin' things the same as me [pause] because I don't want the local coyotes habituated to my methods by somebody else. And I do things maybe a little bit different. Not a secret, it's just—I make a wider variety of set appearances than most fur trappers do. I'd rather not have somebody watchin' how I do things and then goin' around and doin' it the same way. [pause] They're not secrets. They're out there. It's just the way, the combination, the way I put my things together. It's the way I do things.

25:20

And if I've got the neighbor kid goin' out and doin' things the same way, then he habituates the coyotes to my methods, and when I have to come get a sheep killer, it could make it more difficult. But I don't think there are any real secrets in trapping, just sound basics applied over and over again. [pause] You can—there's a lot of creativeness, and creativeness isn't distributed equally among all trappers. A good damage control trapper is a very creative individual in his coyote sets. He'll see set opportunities where [pause] another person may not. It comes from workin' on coyotes 12 months a year instead of three months a year.

(And also I would assume dealing with problem coyotes, ones that are more wary, so you have to do things a little differently to get 'em?)

You do. Oftentimes you have to—an ordinary coyote is pretty easy to catch. But if a coyote isn't easy to catch, then you have to do somethin' especially for him, and you have to be able to recognize your opportunities to do that. [pause] My wife's a really good beaver trapper. She's a lot better beaver trapper than I am. I went with her a couple of times when she was trappin' for the irrigation company in Bruneau Valley. She used Conibear traps in ways that I never would have imagined you would use Conibear traps. And she had beaver caught in 'em. And [pause] it's the same—she recognizes opportunities to catch beaver that I don't, and I recognize opportunities to catch coyotes with methods that the fur trapper, the ordinary fur trapper probably wouldn't recognize those opportunities and certainly wouldn't use their set types the way I do. And it's not secrets, it's just the way I do things. The only thing that would make it a secret is that I don't want everybody else doin' it the same way. I can't say that's it a secret set or anything like that, because it's not.

27:50

(Is there any other animal that you've worked with besides the coyote that can be that wary and that much of a problem to catch? Because I hear that over and over again, in terms of coyotes—)

I think there probably is, and I think one of 'em's a wolf. Beaver can be really tough to catch, because they live in a different habitat. They have an underwater habitat that we don't see. And once you spook a beaver, he can be very hard to get hold of. Bear, if you have a bear that, say, somebody baited him in and stuck an arrow in him and they run off and didn't kill him, and then the next time they had anything to do with somebody, the sheep herder set a snare and it wasn't set very well and the throw arm slapped him in the jaw when he sprung it and he didn't get caught, well, he can be a trial. [pause] Actually, coyotes is my comfort zone. I'm more comfortable with coyotes. I don't worry too much about coyotes, and that might come back to bite me, since I said that out loud. But coyotes are my comfort zone, because that's how I've spent most of my life as a trapper. It's harder for me to come up with a more creative solution for another animal, because most of my experience has been with coyotes. So I was talking about recognizing opportunities to catch a coyote that some people may not. I don't have that ability with wolves, bears, and mountain lions that I do with coyotes. So I just fall back on what I believe are sound trapping practices when I go after them. But coyote is my comfort zone.

29:44

(What will trapping and wildlife management be like in 25, 50 years?)

It'll be more difficult, simply because of the density of the population, people. The biggest challenge over the last few years in the evolving of trapping, the evaluation of trapping, has been to deal with the increased human population and activity. When I first started fur trapping, or when I first started fur trappin' very seriously in the late '70s, you could go through the desert and set all the crossroads, set the stock dams, set all that kind of stuff. Within three years, if you set there, people would steal your stuff, because there's so many people out, and it just keeps goin'. You go out in the desert, and here's a lot of people out there, and you have to wonder, "What are they doin' out there?" Just drivin' around, dinkin' around. Twenty years ago, people didn't do that very much. Thirty years ago, they didn't do it at all. You could go out—one year, one summer when I was workin' for the Rafter Diamond ranch in Deeth, Nevada, I was camped between Deeth and Charleston, Nevada, and we only saw two other people, and they were lost. There was a man and a woman from Castleford, and they didn't even know they was in Nevada, they thought they was still in Idaho. With the exception of a BLM crew that was out there, a

hoola hoop crew, we didn't see anybody else out there at all. And now, you couldn't go out there for a day without gettin' run off the road once, a bunch of picnickers here—well, we did see some duck hunters as fall came along, some hunters. But during the summer, we didn't see anybody else out there. You don't have that now.

31:42

It seems like the price of gasoline would slow 'em up, but it doesn't. I don't know why. People have more free time than they used to, or they choose to spend it differently. [pause] So that's gonna be the challenge, is dealin' with the increase in population, more so probably than the change in attitudes. When you look at the areas that we work, every year it looks more and more like an urban housing development. Of course there are some areas where there won't be big blocks of BLM. But then there are other areas, like between here and Mountain Home, there's dozens of houses are built there every year in areas that we hunt with an airplane, and just the increase in people is gonna be the challenge, workin' around 'em. Not an insurmountable challenge. The fact that the guys here in the Boise office have trapped coyotes, snared coyotes, right here inside Boise, and mountain lions, that proves that it's not insurmountable, but for people like me that have always been out in the desert, or out in the brush, it's somethin' that we're gonna have to learn to deal with better all the time.

(And maybe that goes into my next question, which is, what do you see as the biggest challenges facing people in your line of work?)

33:18

The biggest challenge facin' people in my line of work, I think—the biggest challenge facin' Mark is keepin'— [pause] keepin' us from bein' shut down by opposition groups, keepin' us afloat as far as the budget, findin' the cooperative funding. That's the biggest challenge for all of us, is Mark, or whoever, keepin' the funding comin' and keepin' the door open for us to legally do our work. I think that that's probably gonna be more difficult than adapting to the increased population will for us trappers. We can do that. We've been doin' it, and we'll just keep on doin' it. [pause] Maybe Mark would be more comfortable findin' funding than he would be trappin' in an increasing population, but from the outside lookin' in, I think he has a greater challenge than we do.

(And Mark is the state director?)

Yes.

(So anybody in that position, in your mind, it's finding the funding, keeping you-all going?)

Keepin' the funding goin' and keepin' us from bein' shut down by opposition groups. That's the challenge for us, for our agency, I think. The challenge for the trapper is just adapting to workin' in a more crowded environment. We can do that. We may not know how, all of us, right now. We may have a lot to learn. But as I said, the fact that these guys went and caught coyotes right here in downtown Boise proves that it can be done, and we just have to adapt.

35:13

(Have you seen in your 15 years—and you've been through probably several state directors in that time—have you seen that challenge change? Would you have said that same challenge when you first started?)

Probably not. [pause] The challenge, one of the challenges that they face now that wasn't so—such a—it was there, but not to the extent that it is now, is makin' sure that we don't show up on the headlines of the newspaper. There was an attitude when I first started with the outfit that, "You guys just get the job done. We'll smooth over the water." And that's not there now, because the leeway isn't there now. We're under such a microscope that the trapper has to be just as aware of how delicate our situation is as Mark does. So we can't just go do what we want to and expect the supervisor, the state director, to get it smoothed over. It doesn't work that way now.

(Or your district supervisor, because I think that's always been the first line. I hear guys who've retired say, you know, "I just trapped. It was their job to deal with the people.)

That's right. And they would say, "You just get a kill. You just take care of the problem. We'll take care of the people. You just do whatever it takes. We'll smooth out the wrinkles." Well, that's just not the way it is now. Those wrinkles won't go away.

36:54

(So you-all almost have to be kind of a first-line defense in some ways?)

We are. Because what issues they have to deal with as far as reactionary to a problem that crops up with our methods is caused by us. So we can't go through our daily routine or go about our daily job without havin' in the back of our mind, is there a potential here for a mess? And 20 years ago we could go from one mess to another, and there's— [laughs]

([laughs])

Well, like I mentioned with the bear. If there was a problem with bear 20 years ago, 15 years ago, and I killed a bear here, well, I might just roll that bear back and redo my cubby and catch the next one off of him. But I wouldn't do that now. And the statute of limitations has long since run out, I suppose, or I probably wouldn't mention it now. But [pause] you have to do your job as if the opposition group was right there in the pickup with you now, and it wasn't that way.

38:19

(Do you see that as something that's better or worse, or just a change?)

It's just a change. It's just a change. As a trapper, I'd have to say it's worse, but some other people would say it's better, so let's balance it out and just say it's a change.

(I guess I've heard people say both things. I've heard people say, you know, "We didn't have to worry about that. It's a pain." And then I've heard other people say, "Well, we got more selective as we went on.")

But if the opposition group wasn't there and if there wasn't so many people now, would it matter if you was that selective?

(True.)

Now, next year when the sheep man goes in there and there's seven bear that wasn't there last year, is that better or worse? There's as many points of view. A mistake we've always made, all rural people have made, is thinkin' that those environmentalists or anti-people, that they are stupid, they just don't know what they're talkin' about, they don't know what's goin' on. They know what's goin' on, they just got a different point of view. So from whose point of view is it better or worse? From my point of view it's worse. From Mark's point of view, it's better that we act as if the opposition group was ridin' with us. Those issues can't be smoothed over like they used to be. They don't go away.

40:01

(What other interests or hobbies do you have?)

I like huntin'. Not as much as I used to. I like fishin'. I like waterfowl huntin' a lot. [pause] More traditionally than some guys do, 'cause I carve my own decoys. I like that, everything that goes with it. I like steelhead fishin'. I like most fishin', but primarily steelhead and salmon fishin'. [pause] I like prospectin' for gold, artifacts.

(Well, I've come to the end of my questions. Do you have anything you'd like to add?)

I can't think—I've exhausted my vocabulary.

([laughs] Anything funny come back to you?)

No. [laughs]

(And it will when you're drivin' home. I can guarantee it.)

It will, you know. Some people—well, Rick Phillips is one, my supervisor, Chuck Carpenter's another, they just live to be able to tell a story to somebody.

(laughs)

That's the biggest part of their life. They always have a big list of things to tell people. But I've never been a storyteller [chuckles] and I never think about it, so I don't.

(One of the things that sometimes people end with, or I ask, is, I assume you like your job?)

I do. It's the very best job I could have possibly had. [pause] 'Course, retirement from the day you're born is out of the question, but since I have to have a job, this is really the only one that I would be interested in. The only one.

(Good. All right. This is the end of CD #2 with Gary Looney.)

42:09 End file 2. End of interview.