

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,