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(This is a sound check. I want to make sure that you're picking everything up here. So why don't you go ahead and say something so I can hear your voice.)

OK, I'm Larry Sanders, Wildlife Services.

(OK. This is Diana Dwyer and I'm interviewing Larry Sanders, Wildlife Services. It's September 28, Thursday. I'm in Craig, Colorado. [pause] I was just gonna go through the biographical thing. It said that you were born in Oklahoma when you filled out the thing.)

Yes.

(How did you end up in Colorado?)

I came here for the hunting...

(Yeah?)

Elk and deer hunting, back when I was a young man. With all the public land to hunt on, it was a real plus, so here we are.

(Definitely. So I you lived in Mancos first?)

Yes.

(And then you moved up here?)

We made several—we moved to Pagosa Springs once, from there to Missouri, from Missouri back to Oklahoma, and then Oklahoma to Mancos. We've been up and back a time or two. But then at Mancos, I was there for a while doing carpentry work and house painting. I've always hunted coyotes, and I got acquainted with a rancher there that had some coyote depredation, and he asked if I could maybe help him, so I did. I went and killed some coyotes, and then in—that was in '79. Then in '80, they started the program up again here, Jim Worthen came up here to be state director, and this rancher told me that there were doing that, so I sent an application in, and with that rancher's recommendation, Worthen hired me.

0:01:44.1

(Cool. And you hunted and fished when you were younger. Did you trap when you were younger, too?)

Not so much growing up, not fur trap or with steel traps. I had rabbit traps, bird traps as a kid growin' up, I did all that. Prior to havin' this job, I had got into bird trapping some.

(Did your father teach you, an uncle or anything?)

No, actually pretty much self-taught, I guess. I read everything I could get my hands on, but I had no family members that hunted. I'm the only black sheep, I guess.

(Oh, that's unusual. [laughs])

Yeah. My brother, he golfs.

([laughs] That's quite a different lifestyle.)

Exactly.

0:02:31.0

(So you started out in 1980 with Wildlife Services?)

Yes.

(Was the majority of the work trapping or was it mainly—I don't know if you got into aerial gunning? Or was it...)

I didn't. I tried the aerial gunning, but I had motion sickness and I couldn't do it, couldn't handle it. So—and even today, I'm the ground crew when we aerial hunt. When I first started, it was traps and snares and some calling and shooting. Of course, all that's changed over the years with the passage of Amendment 14.

(You can't do much in Colorado any more.)

There's very little you can do. I still run my snare line every spring on the lambing grounds, but for 30 days. That's not enough. Anyway, our job has changed from trapping and snaring equipment use, it's changed to a little more of calling and decoy dog use.

(Do you use toxicants at all, M44s?)

Occasionally, yeah. Mm-hmm.

(What about your snares, when you put them out, what kind of lures do you use?)

Particularly on the snares, I don't use any lures. I just have sets under fences, for the coyotes coming under the fence, with no lure attractant at all, just a snare, a blind set thing.

0:03:51.5

(Have you had—you're using coyotes. Is there anything else out here that you ever get phone calls on?)

Oh, bear and mountain lion.

(Mountain lion?)

Mm-hmm.

(We had a mountain lion by the Research Center recently.)

I've been getting emails about all the stuff in, like, Glenwood Springs and all around there.

(There's a lot of young cats, it seems like.)

That's what it looks to me like.

(Is that—you get a phone call from a rancher and they'll say, "I've got a problem", directly?)

Yes. [pause] For whatever—they don't always know what killed it, they suspect it was a lion or a bear or a coyote, but they call me and I investigate and see what needs to be done.

0:04:32.6

(Do you pretty much have to—is it all year long problems?)

No—well, it is to a certain degree. The main problems—the biggest problem we have is during the lambing time, which starts probably late April and we have trouble—coyotes are killin' lambs somewhere in my district from late April till they put 'em on the truck in the fall and get 'em out of here. Our program here, there's three of us here, three full-time positions. Used to be five, but with the—it gets expensive with the cost increases we've had. By having only three guys, our districts are really too large. You just do the best you can, hit the high spots, and you don't really have the opportunity to go in and really clean up a mess of coyotes. You do just enough to stop depredation because you've got five other places you need to go to. And as a result of that, sometimes when they come back through, those same coyotes'll start hittin' again.

Anyway, it's—the depredation of the lambs doesn't stop until they get 'em on the truck.

(I'm gonna close the door because I'm picking up your wind chimes. [pause] I talked to somebody that did interviews with a lady in another project, and she had parakeets [laughs]

[laughs]

And they kept picking up parakeets everywhere on the recording. [laughs] So pretty much it's lamb predation?)

0:06:08.1

That's the biggest part of the predation. Then in the wintertime, in this part of the country, coyotes kill adult sheep in the winter out on the desert. And that, we usually handle that with an airplane. In the winter we're workin' the airplane anyway, and we take care of that usually that way.

(What about bear? Are they coming into ranches?)

Most of the bear—in the summertime in this country, most of the sheep go to Forest Service grazing, Forest land grazing permits. That's where most of the bear problems are. Some of the ranchers have some high-country private land, and they have bear trouble on their private land as well. The private land bear trouble, if we haven't already used the 30-day exemption, we can do that and set a foot snare for a bear or a lion. Forest Service, there's nothin' we can do with

equipment after Amendment 14, so our only option is to get a hound man. We have a couple of good ones we get up here and try to catch the bear.

(That's what they were doing in California. They're worried about the cougar issue right now without a management plan going out there. They're worried about that. The guy that used the hounds, I'd never talked to someone before who'd done that. He had 11 dogs. But you hire someone to come in and do that?)

No, our hound guy works for Wildlife Services.

(Oh, ok.)

He's an employee of Wildlife Services. He just doesn't have a district to work coyotes in, like we do. He travels around with his hounds. But yes, he works for Wildlife Services.

0:07:48.2

(I didn't realize that. I'll have to look into it. I know it's changed a lot since the 1980s when you first started. What do you see as the biggest difference? I know that trap laws caused a lot of problems. What do you think is the biggest difference between when you first started and now?)

Well, aside from not being able to trap, aside from that, I think two things, probably. One is the use of guard dogs, and the other is hunting, deer and elk hunting. All the ranches, they have their ranch leased to an outfitter, and that's a big business now. It's a big part of their income, and they don't want us on there messing around during the hunting season. So that has slowed things down a little bit in the latter part of the fall season. But the guard dog use, I have accepted a lot better than some of the guys, but it definitely affects how well we can take coyotes, because when you howl to locate coyotes, the guard dog starts barkin' to you and coyotes don't bark then, and when coyotes that are living near a herd of sheep with guard dogs—guard dogs being a bigger predator in their eyes, when you're trying to call 'em, they're a little more sly about coming in. They've gone running in and found a guard there a time or two and he got after them, so they are a little more apt to circle downwind of you, and in the brushy country, that makes it very difficult.

0:09:29.0

(Have you had any coyotes that you've been trying to get that you really had a hard time getting this one particular coyote?)

I've had some that I never got. [laughs]

([laughs])

I don't think a guy can get every coyote out there. Some of 'em that get really smart, they're very, very difficult. One of the ranches I work on, they've decided to handle their own hunting, and instead of having it leased to an outfitter, they hired a guy to be their outfitter. He's a nice young man, and he thinks he's helping. He loves to call coyotes, so he's been trying to call coyotes on that ranch. And he's killed a few, probably, but he has educated so many coyotes that I had a very difficult time this year, and there's some of 'em I never got. And they had a lot higher lamb losses than they should have had because of that. But he doesn't understand it and

neither does the rancher. Most ranchers think the more people you can get out there huntin' coyotes, the better off you are.

(But they just get really aware of the people out there and they're not gonna move?)

They get—yeah. If they move—if they come at all, they'll come way around you, out of range, smell you, and leave, and in that brushy country, you never even know they were there.

0:10:44.0

(What about fox or anything like that, have you had any problems with them?)

Very seldom, but we do have some—when lambs are really small, early on, a fox can kill 'em. When we're running the airplane, we take care of foxes as well as coyotes, on lambing grounds.

(How difficult is it? I've always been told it's difficult to track lions. I didn't know if that—I guess if you have lion dogs, trained dogs?)

Yeah, you've got to have some really good dogs, because the time of year that lions are the biggest problem is when it's dry, no snow on the ground, and it takes a very good dog to trail a lion in dry conditions. Dry-ground dogs, they call 'em. Most of the lion hunters hunt in the winter when they're on snow, and that's a different ball game. But yeah, it's very difficult for the dogs to trail a lion. That's the only way now that we can take a lion that's effective. I've tried calling a time or two, a lion, but have not been successful. You've got to be—they've got to hear you. They cover such a large area, and with hounds you can put a hound on the trail where they kill. [pause] If they're good, they'll put 'em up a tree.

(Yeah, if they can find them. Have you done any work with the Research Center, some people have, on projects?)

When I first started, in 1980, they were still doing what they were calling a scent survey.

(I've seen the reports.)

Where we brushed a three-foot circle and had a little scent capsule and determined what critters had been there during the night, we'd check it every day for a week, had to keep a record and all that. Did that for one year and then they—I guess they discontinued it after that. One or two years, I think just one. One year here and then two years in Steamboat. When I first went to work here, I was at Mancos, so I had that—west of Mancos, they had a scent line there, and then over at Steamboat, I think I did that one two years, and then I guess that was the end of their project.

0:13:02.7

I haven't actually—other than that, the only thing I've actually worked with the research department, I had some ideas that through my state director, Craig Coolahan, at the time, sent to the research department and then I communicated some with Stewart Breck. It's been on the breakaway snare with the telemetry device.

(Yeah, he's been doing a lot of work on that.)

Yeah. That was one of my ideas to help us on bear, in the forest. They did a lot of research on that, and I'm a little disappointed that it didn't pan out the way they wanted to for bear. They are usin' it, I hear, though, on wolves.

(Wolves.)

And I talked to Stewart several times, and several things they're doing, it sounds like it's working pretty good for them on the wolves. I'm not sure, I think they tested that in Oregon, maybe Nolte—

(Dale Nolte.)

Dale Nolte, I think, but I'm not certain. I think he was probably trying to catch bears that were doing damage to timber. That would be a lot more difficult, to catch a bear like that, then it would—our use—what I had in mind for it here in Colorado, I'm confident that I could catch a bear in a breakaway snare, because I've got a bear that has killed a lamb or a ewe, and he's comin' back that next night to eat 'em. I used to catch 'em all the time in a foot snare, and I can catch 'em in a neck snare as well and have that device on his neck. Whether or not they'll allow us to do that in Colorado with Amendment 14, I don't know. Someone might have to make that determination, because it's not—it's still a snare, but it's not a capture device any more.

0:14:55.3

(What exactly does Amendment 14 say you can and can't do?)

You know, I'm not certain of the wording on it, but I know we can't use traps or snares as capture devices in the forest or anywhere outside of a 30-day exemption on private land. So the way I look at it, that wouldn't be a capture device, that's a radio tagging device.

(I was gonna say, like it could be for research, like putting—they still catch them and put collars on 'em, don't they? Or a radio [can't understand word band? I don't know how they catch 'em.]

I think, yeah, for certain research projects you can get sort of an exemption to do whatever you need to do. But for just damage control, for livestock, it's not—I don't—you can't get an exemption for that, because that's what we did all the time. We didn't catch a bear unless he was killin' livestock. So then we'd try to do that. The thing is, if some judge had to rule on whether or not that was in compliance, he might rule against us on that, because the end result of that bear is gonna be the same. He's gonna die.

(Moving him's not gonna do any good?)

No. Before, if I could use a foot snare, I'd catch him in a foot snare, I'd go check the snare, there's the bear, and we—that's our policy. The bear dies. If I put a radio collar transmitter on a neck snare, a breakaway snare, and he leaves with that, I'm gonna find him with a signal and I'm still gonna kill him. So if their intent of that was that no bears be killed, then we couldn't do that either.

(If you were just tracking for research or something—)

That would be different. So maybe it wouldn't work for us anyway, but that was my original thinking, and Coolahan thought it was a good idea, so he passed it along to Shivik, I think, and he started it and then—

(And John and Stewart works for him?)

Yeah. And then now Stewart—last time I talked to him Stewart's pretty much taken the ball and gone with that.

0:17:03.4

(Yeah, he's doing some amazing things. He's working with—in Yosemite with bears that break into cars, working on scare devices and they're trying—and also with the wolves in Idaho, they're trying to use scare devices around lambing and also livestock pens, that kind of area. They're trying all kinds of things. They said if they can—all these electronic toys that are out for kids, there surely must be some way we can use that same technology out in the wild.

Mm-hmm.

(It sounds like some of your stuff's been kind of challenging. You've had to outthink coyotes, plot your way through how you're gonna catch something. What do you find most challenging about what your work is?)

As far as the species, coyotes would be the most challenging for me. Trying to take enough coyotes out to stop depredation without the use of equipment has been very challenging. As a result, most of us now have some decoy dogs that are pretty good. We've bred for that, selected traits, you know, and now we have some pretty good decoy dogs. I'd love to have traps and snares back, but the decoy dogs are working pretty good.

(What kind of dogs are they?)

Mountain curs is what I use, that's what most of the guys here use.

(I've never seen one.)

I'll show you some in a little while. [laughs]

([laughs])

I've got five new puppies down there.

(Oh, you're kidding, I'm glad my husband's not with me! [laughs])

He'd want to take one back?

(I've got a little schnauzer, and he wants to get a real dog.)

Well, he would like one of these.

(Yeah, I bet he would. When I was in Texas, they were talking about the houndsmen. They were people who apparently run packs of hounds, and they had a lot of problems with them destroying their trap lines or stealing their traps because they didn't—they were cutting fences and letting the dogs run across private land, even though the somebody had asked them to—the guy—the specialty man had put some trap lines down. It became really confrontational. Have you ever had to deal with anything like that?)

0:19:16.6

Well, I have, actually. In 1988, I transferred from Mancos to Oklahoma and worked there till 1991, when I came back here. And while in Oklahoma, I was in western Oklahoma, in Frederick, and there were a lot of those guys there that ran the sight dogs, is what they were—

(Is that what they call them?)

Yeah, they're greyhounds or stag hound mixed, crossbreeds. And they did just like you were saying, they just cut a fence or bust through it with a truck. They've got big grill bars on the front, and they just bust through one after a coyote. And anyway, there were a lot of coyotes in that county, and there was a sportsmen's group there that wanted to raise pheasants and release 'em, try to get a pheasant population started. Well, they weren't havin' much luck, so there realized they need to get rid of a few predators to ever get the pheasants started, so they contacted the—back then it was called ADC, but anyway, they started a new program there, and I had had an application in to go back to Oklahoma, because my parents were gettin' old and I wanted to get back down there. Anyway, I got that job, and there were so many coyotes there, and the coyotes in that particular area were real easy to catch.

([laughs])

These up here are a lot tougher to catch. I don't know what the difference is. I think down there they were a little bit more of a scavenger-type coyote than what we've got here. There's a lot of different sub-species of coyotes anyway.

0:20:54.8

I went down there and I ran a lot of M44's and for three winters in a row, I killed over 300 coyotes a year, just on that. And then a few more the rest of the year, but well over 300 a year for three years. Well, all those guys that were—I heard through the grapevine they were complaining, they at one time within five miles of town they could have their dogs wore out from chasin' coyotes, there were so many coyotes. They didn't have to drive very far. By then they were havin' to really drive and look and hunt and they weren't very pleased with me for killin' all those coyotes. Through the grapevine there was threats they were gonna do all kinds of things, burn my house, catch me out somewhere.

(Sounds like the stuff they [can't understand rest of sentence.]

Exactly, same thing. I had a guy that claimed to be my friend, I don't know how much of a friend he was, but he would tell them what I said and tell me what they said, back and forth, you know. They were—their plan—you know, they said they were gonna—any traps of mine they were gonna take on and one old boy was gonna catch me out somewhere and whip my butt and all that. But I told him, so that he would tell them, I knew he would, I told him that those traps,

that's federal property. If they steal some of those traps or any of my equipment, there'll be a U.S. marshal down here in a heartbeat to investigate, and I don't think they want that.

0:22:33.6

(Most of them probably have records to begin with.)

Yeah, a lot of 'em do. And I said, "As far as jumpin' on me and whippin' my ass, if they want to start that, they'd better really be dedicated, because one of 'em is gonna die. I've got a gun, and I'm not gonna take a whipping." So I never really had any trouble with them.

(Just threats?)

Yeah. I—they just didn't like me because I killed the coyotes. But I was just doing my jobs. The sportsmen, the ones that were raising the pheasants, they were very pleased. [laughs]

([laughs] Somebody—one of the gentlemen from Oklahoma, I think it was James Pitts, said that at one point in his career down there he had the keys to over a thousand ranches, because the way he worked with the ranchers, they'd just call up and say, "I've got a problem," and he'd head out and they'd be out there usually working, you know, on the field, so he'd just show up and go out and get a horse if he needed one, go out and ride it. Is that more of the old-time way of trapping now? You don't work that way anymore, probably?)

0:23:46.6

Well, I did some in Oklahoma like that, like you're talking about.

(It's a different kind of—different, how is Oklahoma different from Colorado? I guess that's it.)

Well, Oklahoma for the most part down there, the sheep weren't what they called migratory bands of sheep. They didn't go from the winter range lambing ground, high country grazing, and back again. They just stayed on the ranch. And it was a little different because right there on the ranch, you could kill the coyotes that were on the ranch and adjoining the ranch and for the most part be done with that for the year. Where up here, the same number of sheep, they're here for the while, and then they move into a new bunch of coyotes and you're busy there, and then they move into a third bunch up in the high country. So fewer sheep here keep you busier than it did down there.

(You moved with the sheep? Your wife said when you guys were younger, you used to go out all summer long?)

Yes, yeah. When all the sheep—I do it the same way now, except she's been working all these years and hasn't gone with me much. This last summer she retired and goes with me some and will more next year. But when they leave the lambing grounds and go to the grazing permits on the forest, I pull my camp, the one you saw right out there, I pull that up and set it up and I camp up there all summer. From a central location, my summer district is what I call it. So I work on all the grazing permits, wherever I'm needed up there, try to stay ahead of the sheep if I can and kill few coyotes before they get into there.

0:25:37.6

(You must see some beautiful country.)

Beautiful country. I love to ride horses.

([chuckles] That was my next question: Do you take horses with you?)

I do, yeah. In the summer, every day I work on horseback. My district is one that you can't work from a truck or a four-wheeler. It's all horseback.

(I'm sure it's a lot of work, but it sounds wonderful. [chuckles])

It is wonderful. It's the kind of thing I'd do if I didn't have to work. Only I'm gettin' paid for it.

(It's amazing. I was gonna ask you about the guard dogs and other guard animals. Do you think they work? Do you think they work at all?)

You know, guard dogs I think work to some degree. I've never seen llamas or donkeys or anything else that I felt like was actually working. Some guard dogs don't work at all, but some are pretty good. And in different parts of the country, you may have to have more guard dogs with a herd of sheep to actually do some good because of the aggressiveness of the coyotes. In this country here, from five to seven guard dogs with a herd of sheep is really what you need. Two guard dogs may or may not do it, usually not. Coyotes seem to have figured out—I don't know if they do it on purpose or whether it just happens, but when they—I've seen it several times, heard it and actually once watched with binoculars, but one coyote will howl or start barking, and however many guard dogs is in the bunch [chuckles] all run to that coyote barking to chase it off. He yelps and yaps at 'em, lures 'em further and further from the herd, and then the other coyote—it's usually the male that calls 'em away, and the female goes in and kills a lamb. I've seen that happen—I've heard where it's happening, seen tracks and evidence, and then one day I watched it all happen and we had the airplane out. This wasn't lambs, this was adult sheep out on the winter range. I pulled up to a spot to have, to try to locate for the airplane, and I stepped out of my truck and I heard a coyote barkin' over there.

0:27:49.1

So I got to watchin'. He was yappin' and the guard dogs were goin' to him, and I watched as he just teased 'em, got 'em further and further, so I called the airplane n told 'em, and the direction they were comin' from, they had to come right across the other edge of the sheep, they were spread out pretty good. I said, "The coyotes is on the north side of the sheep up here and the guard dogs are nearby." They said, "We'll swing around the south side and come around and take your line." They come—you know how they do that?

(I'm not sure, why don't you explain it?)

OK. When I howl coyotes up, I point my truck right to where they are, and the airplane comes around and he flies right straight over my truck.

(I didn't know that.)

And he goes right straight out, and I can watch and I can tell him on the radio, "OK, a little bit to your left, a little more, right there," you know, and I'll guide him right over the coyotes.

(I had no idea how it worked.)

And they're watching, they'll say, "OK, we've got 'em spotted," and then they'll go to work. Well, they were gonna come around and take my line. Well, when they came across the south side of the sheep, they said, "Here's a coyote right here in the sheep." So they swung around and killed it, and then they got the other one. That's what was goin' on right there.

(Smart.)

Yeah, they are.

0:28:58.1

(I think wolves, don't they hunt in packs? They try and tease an elk calf out, they cut it out or something, they work as a team.)

Yeah, they work as a team, chase 'em and cut some off, I think.

(You think there's any wolves in Colorado?)

I don't know at the present for certain, but I know there was last winter.

(The female that was killed?)

No, besides that one. There was that one, obviously. It wasn't last winter, it was the winter before, I guess. I found—Bruce Inness, one of the other guys here, he found the track. Actually, he didn't find the track. An outfitter found the track, called Bruce, Bruce went and looked at it and said, "I think that's a wolf, but I'm gonna call Larry and let's get a second opinion here." So I went up and looked at it, and it was obviously a wolf track. It was a wolf, and it was goin' back north, toward Wyoming. We never saw it, never heard from it, no damage here that we know of, but it was a wolf.

0:29:55.4

(That's gonna be a challenge if they move in here. They may not even start killing livestock, you never know. They stay away.)

I—I think they will kill livestock. Everywhere else that they've been around livestock, they have killed.

(It's easier than—?)

Yeah, it's so much easier than elk. [pause] It'll be somethin' else to do, I guess.

([laughs])

Since I don't have any livestock, I guess it's OK with me. [laughs]

([laughs] I guess it's whose ox is being gored!)

Exactly!

(I saw some in Yellowstone, and I was floored. They're just amazing. You had said that—I asked you about the most challenging. What's the best thing about your work?)

0:30:41.0

[pause] There's so many good things about my work, it's hard to pick what's best. I think probably overall just bein' able to do what you love to do and that's what you do for a living, what you love to do. And that involves hunting. I love to hunt, I grew up hunting. Hunting, horseback riding, bein' in the outdoors, the fresh air, the wind in the quaky trees, leaves, everything about it is great.

(It's spectacular, you're lucky. What's the worst—the things you like least about your work?)

Oh, probably the least thing is mostly in the spring, when all the ranchers are lambing, the ranchers here, we say they get into a "lambing frenzy." They're just—oh, they're goin' from daylight to dark or later, and they're stressed and wore out, and the coyotes are killin' their lambs, and oh, they're hard to deal with sometimes. You've got to really be careful how you deal with 'em. There's so much expected of a guy that there's a certain amount of stress on a trapper, too. They all expect you to work miracles with fewer tools than you had before to do it.

(There are dollar signs goin' around.)

Exactly.

(I've talked to a couple of ranchers who said it's like watchin' your kids' college fund go down the tubes. [chuckles])

Yeah. I sympathize with 'em, I understand. But you know, so far I get along really good with the ranchers I work for, and I pretty much just level with 'em. I tell 'em, "I'll do the best I can. My job is to see that you take as many lambs as possible to market. I want to keep you in business 'cause that'll keep me in business. I'm gonna do the best I can. But I can only do so much." They usually calm down and they're OK with it by the time we're through talkin'. [laughs]

([laughs] You've talked a lot about the sheep out here. I've seen sheep while I was driving up. What about cattle? Do a lot of people raise cattle or anything else?)

0:33:01.0

A lot of cattle in this country, there sure are. But the cattlemen here don't participate in our program. There's a very few that do. Some of those, actually one of the better ones, passed away, and his son took over the operation, and he doesn't think they need any predator control. But coyotes will definitely kill baby calves. I've seen it many, many times. And so often some of the big ranches maybe don't know that that's what happened to the calf, it's just a dry cow, there wasn't no calf. But [pause] they don't—I guess they don't want to turn loose the money for predator control, maybe they don't feel like it's profitable.

(Do they have to pay for guys to go in?)

Yeah. The way we're set up here, the Moffat County Woolgrowers Association, right now they're paying about—I think they're paying 52% or 53% of the cost of this program here, the federal 47% or 48%. So they're payin' over half the cost of the program. They assess themselves a head tax, which is close to three bucks now. That covers three field men and the airplane work. They put in usually about \$20,000 in the airplane and the federal government matches the 20.

(I didn't know how it works.)

Yeah. So that's a—which brings up another point that has not so much in the last few years been a problem, but for most of my career, I've worked in similar situations, where either the woolgrowers associations or the counties pay half of your salary. It seemed every year I didn't know for sure if I'd have a job next year or not.

(I've heard that from other states, other people, too, that you never know what's gonna happen and you go from year to year or even month to month sometimes. It's stressful.)

Well, where I was at Mancos, they were without a program shortly after I left. They'd had one for a period of time, and then they—just not enough livestock people to be influential with the county and pay a head tax. Where I am right here now, in Craig, I think there's probably more sheep in northwest Colorado than anywhere else in the state.

(I saw a lot of them.)

0:35:39.0

So it's a little more secure now, but anything could happen, I suppose. I don't worry so much about that now, I'm close enough to—I could retire if I wanted now. But it's been a problem when I was younger. You've got a family, and it's a concern for a guy. I wish there was somethin' to be done about that for the young guys in this outfit. But you just never know for sure.

(And you're in an agency that depends so much on getting funds in from the outside. We don't charge, like, PPQ, Plant Protection Quarantine, has all these fees and Veterinary Services, they can charge fees, and they always seem to have a lot of money coming in. When we first went into Agriculture from Interior, it seemed like we were the stepchildren of USDA, it seemed that way for a long time. Did you ever find yourself in a political situation or where somebody like an environmental group or animal rights people challenged you?)

No, I never did. That was one of the things that I mentioned.

(That's good.)

No, I've never had a problem like that. Maybe I've been lucky.

([laughs] Do you go to the state fairs? Because some people go to state fairs and have booths.)

No, I haven't been.

(Because you might run into them there. [chuckles])

Absolutely. But no, I haven't. I've not had any problems like that at all.

(That's amazing. You're probably the only one I've talked to so far that hasn't had his traps destroyed or somebody come and get in his face.)

No, I never have. I guess—northwest Colorado is pretty much pro-livestock and fewer, I think, animal rights-type people. I hesitate to use that, even, because I'm all for animal rights.

(Yeah, it's that word. It's like, people who are—I don't know, I think of myself and other people just as conservationists. I think we are. But animal rights people to me are the ones that put the animals first before—)

Exactly. We don't have a lot of that goin' on right here in this part of Colorado. In my earlier years, in Mancos and Oklahoma, there wasn't much of it goin' on anywhere back then. It's a more recent years' development. So yeah, I've been lucky that way, I guess.

(Definitely. Have you ever done any endangered species work?)

0:38:27.0

Well, on the black-footed ferret, we had that project for I'm thinkin' five or six years in a row, where we would go down and take 20 coyotes out and they did blood tests on the coyotes to determine what diseases they might have, plague in particular. We did that for several years. One time I was called down, they had a bobcat that was getting into their pens and killin' the ferrets inside there. I went down with a big cage trap and caught the bobcat. Now they don't—they've discontinued—they've got the ferrets released now, and we're not monitoring the blood samples on coyotes now.

(I don't know how they're doing.)

I don't think they're doing very well.

(You just get one batch of bad—is it distemper that's so dangerous for them, they get sick from it and die?)

Distemper and plague both, yeah. Well, I don't know if a ferret dies from plague. Plague kills the prairie dogs and they have no food, actually. But they want to monitor all that stuff. But distemper probably is the main thing for the ferret itself.

(And they're getting that from domestic dogs. Have you had problems with domestic dogs, feral dogs and cats out here?)

Not so much here. I did when I was at Mancos, there was a couple of farm flocks that I worked on that were near the edge of town, and there were a lot of dog problems there. But there again, that was long enough ago that it wasn't a problem.

(Right, if a dog goes across somebody's land—?)

Right, and the sheriff backed me up on that, anything that needed to be done, you just did it, took care of it. You don't allow a neighbor's dog to kill livestock. So it never was a problem, but yeah, there were domestic dog problems. Here, there's not so much.

(I guess they don't run loose. What was the scariest thing that ever happened to you when you were out working?)

0:40:33.7

[laughs]

([laughs])

Well, probably the scariest thing was in Oklahoma when I was usin' M44's. I had one fire right in my face.

(You're lucky you're alive!)

I couldn't see. I was out in a field, and there was a lot of—they've got what we call Johnson grass, it was a real tall grass, and a little road was beat down that you drove on, but the grass was high on both sides. I'd set this thing and—back then I set 'em sort of hair-triggered, I thought that was the way to do it. I had had it all completely set and everything, and that Johnson grass, some of that has a real hard stem, it's a real stemmy-type grass, and there was some of that dead, and I had pushed that up around it to sort of camouflage where I had disturbed the dirt and what have you. I needed a little bit more, and I put my hand down near the M44 and reached across over here to get some stuff, and I guess when I did I put it down on a stem of that Johnson grass that was under the edge of the M44 when I put it down and it caused the other end to come up.

That's the only thing I can figure out that happened, because it happened just as I reached over, and pow! right in my face. Both eyes. And I had some water in my truck in a canteen. I washed my eyes out as best I could right there, but I couldn't see. If I squinted my eyes really hard and then opened 'em up, I could see for about a second and a half and it would just go away. But I jumped in the truck and I headed back, but doin' that to try to see and partly drivin' by sound, when I heard too much grass on the left

([laughs])

I'd go to the right a little more, you know, through the grass, and I drove—pulled right up to the guy's yard, the rancher I was workin' for, and fortunately he was at home. I went in and washed my eyes some more in the sink, and then he drove me to the hospital. I called—there we had a lot better radio communication than we do here. I was able to talk on my radio to the state office and told 'em what had happened while he was drivin' me to the hospital. They called the hospital and had 'em all prepared for me as soon as I got there. They put the deals in my eyes and flushed with water for so many hours and all that. It damaged my eyes, I forget now the degree of burn that they called it, it damaged 'em some, but eyes are amazing. They heal, you know? And they're fine now. For several years, dust and wind really bothered my eyes.

0:43:11.6

(I was told that eyes are the fastest-healing organ of the body.)

I believe that.

(They'll immediately start recovering from an injury.)

I believe that. They certainly did.

(You're lucky you didn't get any in your mouth or anything.)

Not that I know of.

(Or the dose may not have been...)

Most of it hit in my eyes, seemed like. Of course, you just immediately start runnin' back, you're doin' this. I washed my eyes, washed my mouth out with water as well. It lowered the oxygen in my blood. They did a blood test. That's how it kills an animal. It lowered the oxygen in my blood some, but they said that fortunately since I wasn't a smoker, I had better oxygen-carrying capacity. So it really wasn't a great danger to me.

(That's scary. Do you remember what the funniest thing was or a funny story?)

0:44:11.5

Sue and I were talking about that. I can't really think of anything dealing with the animals or wildlife that was actually funny. [laughs]

([laughs] It was scary at the time and later on you would think of it as funny? [laughs])

[laughs] Yeah, but no, I can't think of anything that was actually very funny.

(Well, ok, you're probably lucky you didn't get blown away out there by the M44. Did you ever modify the traps that you used? When you were still able to trap, did you have a favorite trap?)

My favorite trap was the Victor 3N, and still is, but we don't use 'em now.

([chuckles])

The only modifications I made was just adjustments to it so that when you set it the pan's flat. When they come out of the box, sometimes it's rared up, but just an adjustment on that. And then of course I would boil 'em, wax 'em, do all that. I really liked the 3N because when you set it, it's a very stable trap. I'd use always a stake instead of a drag. You put the stake up where you want the one loose jaw to set on, and then when you set it, it's like a three-point hook-up sort of a thing. The loose jaw's on the top of the stake at the right level. If it's not right, raise the jaw and tap it a little bit more, set it down, and you get it all level, and then the two springs, they stabilize everything. A coyote can step on the jaw or a springs and the trap doesn't move. It's