

Part 1  
00:00

(This is October 4th, Tuesday, Nancy Freeman interviewing Rick Phillips in his home near Teton, Wyoming.)

Idaho, please. [laughs]

(Idaho, I'm sorry. I'm close to Wyoming! [laughs])

Yeah, it's only about two miles. [laughs]

([laughs] Sorry! We'll just get started. Can you tell me a little bit about your educational background, Rick?)

Well, I went to school here, grade school and high school here in Teton Basin. Then I went for quite a long time, I had the opportunity to go back to college and actually, just took coursework to satisfy the GS 486 requirement that we needed in order to be on that registry, so I didn't actually get a college degree.

(Where did you go to college?)

To college? Idaho State University in Pocatello.

01:21

(Ok. And where did you grow up?)

Grew up right here in Teton Basin in Idaho [pause] raised on a cattle ranch dry farm combination.

(Did you grow up trapping, hunting, and fishing?)

Oh, yeah. Yeah. My dad used to pay me a bounty on ground squirrels and rock chucks that was eatin' his crops. I got a nickel a tail for squirrels and 15 cents for rock chucks. 'Course badgers dug a lot of holes around, he was worried about his horses steppin' in, so he gave me a dollar apiece for badgers. That was the big money thing. And when I was about nine years old I started fur trappin', I was trappin' muskrats. I had a couple of relatives that did quite a lot of trappin', and they kind of got me started at it. And, so that was pretty well my source of boyhood income, was what I could get from the furs in the fall and what I made off the bounty.

02:32

(Did someone show you how to trap?)

Oh, yeah, my dad kind of showed me how to trap muskrats, and my grandfather was quite an old mountain man, and he showed me how to trap beaver. I had an uncle and an older second cousin that both trapped for the government, and I used to think it was the greatest thing I could possibly do to follow them around and watch what they were doin'. And so they kind of got me started trappin' coyotes and that sort of thing.

(And did they work here, in this area?)

Yes, they did. Both of 'em did. The way they had their trapper districts divided at that time, one of those guys kind of went south from here and the other one went north, and they also went quite a ways west out here onto the desert. [pause] So it was quite a lot of fun. Both of them—actually, one of those guys was still around after I went to work for the government, and I was workin' in some of the same area that he had been, so he was invaluable to me. He told me all sorts of things about trails and where to find sheep camps and all that sort of thing.

04:05

My uncle had been killed in a logging accident before that, so he wasn't around at that time. He tried very hard to dissuade me from goin' to work for the government, because he was pretty discouraged with 'em. At that time, I think he made about probably \$300, \$350 a month, and he had asked 'em for a raise of 25 bucks a month, and they told him no, and he said, "Well, I'll have to quit if you don't," and they said, "Fine, go ahead." So he did and went to be a logger and it wasn't very long after that he got underneath a tree, and that was the end of that. But he'd got pretty discouraged with the overbearing way the sheep men treated him and things like that, so he tried to talk me out of it. My dad and mom both tried to talk me out of workin' for the government, too, because my Dad wanted me to stay here on the farm and help him, and I frankly didn't have any interest in it. All I could think about was trappin'. So. [chuckles] Anyway, that's more or less how I got started.

05:29

(So then after high school, it was almost normal or natural because you wanted to, that you just applied, and did you get it?)

Well, first time I applied, I was 21. And [pause] they decided I think I was too young and green, and I think they was probably right. But the next time I come around, I was 24 by that time, and I don't know whether it was just, they decided to give me a try and shut me up or what, but anyway, I finally got an opportunity to have a temporary appointment when I was 24.

(What year was that?)

1969.

(And that was—it was known then as the Bureau of Predator and Rodent Control?)

They called it [pause] the Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife, Wildlife, yeah. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife [pause] Wildlife Services, I think, at that time. I think we went full circle by the time we got through.

06:55

(What district did you start out in? This one?)

Well, it was in the eastern district in Idaho, the place that I started trapping was in, was in far southeastern Idaho, down by Montpelier, Bear Lake and Bannock counties, Caribou County a little bit. What they did at that time, and I, I actually they did it for quite a while, was that most of the sheep men that came into that area in the summertime actually wintered their sheep over in

south central Idaho, and so the funding situation allowed us [pause] just to have a limited amount of help down here. They had two trappers that worked down in that corner, and then in the summertime they would hire a temporary and just put him kind of in between these two guys to take the pressure off in the summer, when all the sheep came onto the forest. And 'course then when the sheep left, they didn't have a need for this guy any more, so they'd lay him off. And that was the job that I got, was this temporary position.

(And so you lived there? You must have lived in southeast Idaho then?)

I moved down there with a sheep camp. At the time I was livin' here in Teton Basin, and I had a little sheep wagon that I'd used for a camp while I was loggin'. And so I took that down there and I parked it on my uncle's ranch. I had an uncle that lived down in that neck of the woods, and he had a herd of sheep and a bunch of cattle and that sort of thing. So he agreed to take my telephone messages for me, and I just camped there on his place.

09:05

And [pause] the, well, I don't know where you want to go from here. [laughs]

(You can just—I'm curious as to a couple of things. You lived there, and then it was a temp position, so what happened in the winter? Did you keep living, working? Or did you move back? Did they rehire you?)

Well, like I say, it was a temporary position. I went to work in the first week of July and worked up until, oh, the early part of September. And Milt Robinson was the supervisor then. He was an old-time guy that had been in the outfit for years and years and years and years and was one of the pioneer pilots for aerial hunting and all this sort of thing. And, Milt came to me that fall and he said, "Well, you've done a good job and we'd like to kind of keep you around for next summer, but we can't hire you to trap for the summer, we don't have any money. So we got you a job in the Pocatello supply depot for the winter if you want it."

(Oh!)

10:14

And I said, "Well, that's great," because I'd really been sweatin' about what I was gonna do for a job in the winter, because in this particular area, there's quite a lot of work if you're not afraid to sweat in the summer, but there's no winter work.

(In southeast Idaho?)

Well, in this area here, where I live, in Teton Basin. So I was excited, because he had found me a job for the winter. So at that point I moved my family to McCannon, which is about 20 miles south of Pocatello and we lived there for the winter and I commuted back and forth to the depot and worked there. I remember at that time they had a gas war goin' on, and I could buy gas for 25 cents a gallon, which is a little different from this \$3 stuff we're havin' to buy now. But. [laughs]

It was quite an adjustment for me to work in that warehouse, because everything was done on an assembly-line-type system. It was boring to the extreme.

(Really?)

For instance, one of the first things they put me to work doin' was workin' on the assembly line makin' ejector units for the M44. And I'd sit there all day long with a—in front of a grindstone with a big barrel of M44 triggers on one side of me and I'd just take one of those out of there, stick it in a little jig, grind a flat spot on that trigger, and toss it in a barrel on the other side, do that all day long.

(Wow.)

It was an education.

12:13

I had an opportunity to learn an awful lot about toxicants that I would have probably never learned otherwise. We went through bottlin' 1080 and makin' cyanide shells and makin' shells for the old coyote-getters and porcupine blocks and rodent grain baits and all sorts of stuff, you know, that I learned how to do. But I couldn't wait to get out of there. [chuckles]

(Very different than trapping, very different!)

[chuckles] Oh, yeah.

(Like night and day! [chuckles])

One time the boss came in and needed to get a truckload of sawdust to put in the gas cartridges, and he was lookin' for somebody to go to a saw mill and shovel up a load of sawdust. And most of the guys was all lookin' for a place to hide, and I was sayin', "Hey, I'll go! I'll go!" [laughs] I wanted to get outside and breathe some air outside, you know? [chuckles]

13:21

Milt retired that winter, and Duane Rubink was the guy that came in to take his place. He'd come out of Montana. We got along pretty well. And, oh, about February, I guess, that spring he figured out how to get me out of there and back into the field, and I was really excited to get out. So that spring I spent a lot of time puttin' out strychnine baits for coyotes. I had a little snow machine that I thought quite a lot of, and I'd put out draw stations and then put baits around that and then I used to take an inner tube and cut it in two and then I'd fill it up with blood and fish meal and then tie the ends of the inner tube together with a rope and hang it behind the snow machine, and then as I'd go down [pause] the trail of fat, why, I had little slits cut in the inner tube and that'd dribble out a little blood and stuff on the trail, and then every once in a while I'd just drop off a strychnine bait. The coyotes'd hit that and follow it along until they found one of my baits. So I put in quite a lot of time doin' that.

14:57

Worked there up until [pause] ah, well, I suppose it must have been August and it started lookin' like I wasn't gonna have a winter job comin' up for that year.

(Because you were still temporary?)

I was still temporary. And so I started applyin' to different states lookin' for a job.

(Still with Fish and Wildlife?)

Mm-hmm. And I applied to Utah and Montana and Oregon and Washington and Wyoming. Fred Christensen was the state director in Wyoming at that time, and he called me and told me that they'd put me to work in Baggs, Wyoming. So we loaded everything up and moved the whole kit 'n caboodle to Baggs.

(What year was that?)

That would have been fall of 1970.

16:01

(What was your job there in Baggs?)

I was a trapper. They had a kind of a different system in Wyoming than they did in Idaho. Each county has their own predatory animal board, and in Wyoming, those counties have the legislative authority to conduct predator control, and they can choose to do it themselves or cooperate with the government or whatever they want to do. Some of 'em hire their own trappers and have a bounty system. Some of 'em cooperate with Wildlife Services. Carbon County at that time was cooperating with the government. [pause] But all the paychecks came through the county PAB, which complicated things badly when I got around to tryin' to retire, because they wouldn't let me count that time that I spent workin' there in Carbon County.

(Even though you were technically employed by the U.S. government?)

Oh, yeah, I had government supervision. I had government equipment. I used government toxicants. I worked under government regulation. But because I got my paycheck through the county, they said, "You're not actually a federal employee." [laughs]

(Ooh!)

17:17

Wyoming was a great place to work for me, because it was wide-open country. It was 100% range. I could go anywhere I wanted, trap anywhere I wanted. Everybody was glad to see me. It was just fun.

(Now, how was that different than what you experienced for the two summers in Idaho?)

In Idaho you was workin' an awful lot of private land. And 'course you had to run around and get control agreements signed any place that you wanted to work on private property. I had a lot of situations where maybe I'd have a herd of sheep here that was getting' hit on with the coyotes and they was comin' from somebody else's property over the fence, and you'd go there and you'd say, "Hey, I would like to trap the coyotes over here because they're killin' your neighbor's sheep," and that guy'd say, "Well, that his problem. I don't want you here." So it kind of complicated things, you know.

18:51

There was a lot more people here in Idaho. You had a lot more worries about people stealin' your traps or runnin' into a conflict with dogs or somethin' like that. In Wyoming, like I say, you could go wherever and it was all sheep range. I had one M44 line there that was better than 250 miles long.

(Wow.)

It'd take me over two days to run it, and I'd never seen another man from the time I left home until the time I got back. I'd never have to open a gate. I'd just go, you know? [laughs] There was nothin' out there but me and the critters, and I just loved that. [laughs]

(In what area is Baggs?)

Baggs is in south-central Wyoming. It's right north of Craig, Colorado, probably two or three miles north of the Colorado line. It's on—the Little Snake River that comes down through there. And [pause] things have changed considerably over there since, but it was sure nice then.

(I bet. How long were you there?)

20:06

I was there for about eight or nine months. We had a—as I say, the county was cooperating with the government when I got there [pause] and through the course of the winter, they got into a beef with the government over the amount of poison that we could put out. They would allow us to put out two 1080 stations per township. It seemed to me like we was usin' an awful lot of toxicants there, because Wyoming at that time was in a different region for Fish and Wildlife than Idaho was, and we was only usin' one bait per township in Idaho. But they allowed 'em two in Wyoming. And in addition to that, we was usin' a lot of strychnine drop baits. They used to make those things by the bushel down in the Rock Springs office. Somebody, I don't know who, in research figured out this formula where they'd mix this beef suet and pork cracklin's, I think it was, half and half, and run it through a big grinder, and they'd mix the strychnine right in with it, along with some bicarbonate of soda or whatever they had to keep 'em from burpin' it back up, and then they'd roll these things in fish meal and send 'em to you in them garbage bags. And then they'd give you one of these small garbage bags full of strychnine bags and say, "Go put 'em out.

(For coyote control?)

Yeah. Kind of a funny thing about those things, there was somethin' about that dang fish meal that'd make you hungry.

([laughs])

Smellin' it, you know. I'd be ridin' along and have a sack full of those baits sittin' in my pickup seat and every time you'd cross a wash some place that had a few coyote tracks in it, you'd pitch out four or five of those baits, and then you'd put out draw stations and you'd salt 'em down with these baits out around. 'Course, the perishable baits were made with the idea that as soon as the weather got warm, they'd melt, and that way, you didn't have to try to go back and pick 'em up.

It was an effort to keep from killin' non-target things and havin' somethin' layin' around that somebody's dog might pick up later or somethin' like that. But doggone, you know, I'd be ridin' along there and the belly would start to growl and you'd have to resist gettin' into your own bait box! So I started packin' two lunches with me so I could have a little somethin' [chuckles] to keep the hunger pangs down through the course of the day. [laughs]

([laughs] That's good! [laughs] You were there about eight or nine months. What caused you to leave?)

23:17

As I say, the county got dissatisfied. They thought we should be puttin' out more poison than we were. And of course we were regulated about that, we could only use so much. And so the county says, "Fine, we'll do it ourselves." And so they was gonna kick the government out, and they came to me and said, "Hey, we want you to stay here," and I told 'em, "I don't know. I want to try to stay with a government program if I can." And in the meantime, Fred Christianson had come to me and he'd told me that he had two or three areas in Wyoming that he could move me to and Idaho had contacted me also. The guy that was workin' this area here, where I'm living, had been killed in a plane wreck not too long before. He had flown into the side of a hill out here huntin' coyotes, so they needed a trapper for that area.

And I told the guys in Carbon County that, so they started uppin' the ante on the wages. They kept tryin' to give me more money to get me to stay, but the only hitch was that PAB was gonna continue to pay me the \$450 a month that they'd been payin' me.

(The county?)

24:46

Yeah. And the rest of it would have come from private donations from the various sheep men. And I thought that would put me into a position where I'd be runnin' around tryin' to collect my wages, and I didn't want to get into that deal. Comin' back here to Idaho gave me the opportunity to get back into the federal program for sure, plus my family was here, my wife's family was here, I thought it'd be good to let the kids have a chance to know who Grandma and Grandpa was. So we moved back here to Idaho.

(To the Teton Valley area?)

Mm-hmm.

(And when you started, were you again a trapper, or were you a district person by that time?)

No, no, I was a trapper. Only thing was, when I'd been in Idaho to start with, I was a temporary, and now I was full-time.

(Permanent, I assume?)

Yeah. Well, as permanent as you could be workin' for that outfit. I had a job one year at a time for 30 years because you never knew what was gonna happen with the budget. Every year you'd get a new budget. Workin' for the Fish and Wildlife Service, they used to submit our budget as

zero, because we was an embarrassment to ‘em, and then all of our cooperators would have to go back to Congress and get it turned around. It was, you know, Fish and Wildlife was preserving, perpetuating, and protecting, and we were out there killin’ stuff. So that was kind of an embarrassment to ‘em. [laughs]

26:36

(So when you moved back here, you started trapping, that was your job. How was it different here in this valley than in Wyoming?)

Wyoming was pretty open country. You could do about everything you needed to with a pickup over there. This country is mountainous, and there’s an awful lot of sheep ranches in the mountains, or there were at that time. And so all the summer work was done on horseback.

(In the mountain areas?)

Yes. The sheep typically in this area would go into the mountains about the 1st of July, and they’d come out about mid-September. Then they’d go into fields for probably, oh, maybe up until about the 1st of December. Then they’d go to the desert for the winter. And some of ‘em was lambled on the desert, but most of ‘em, they’d pull ‘em in when the snow got too deep, they’d take ‘em in the feed ‘em and then lamb ‘em in sheds. As soon as the grass greened up a little bit in the spring, they’d kick ‘em back out in the desert again. Then they’d be there from, oh, I’d say maybe from early April until July again. So there was an awful lot of work that got done on the deserts in the spring. In the wintertime you’d do a lot of work out there, just preventive work, trying to thin the coyotes out so there wouldn’t be as many to greet the lambs when they came out of the lambin’ shed. But summertime, they’d move ‘em into that high country, and you didn’t go anywhere with a truck up there. I could haul my horses to a trailhead some place, but then I’d have to ride for a day, maybe two days, getting’ into where the sheep were, set out a line of traps, try to take care of the problem, and then ride back out and go somewhere else.

28:53

(And I assume that you had to pack in and probably camp?)

Oh, yes, yeah. Yeah, there was some places that you could go and get back out in a day, but not very many. So I’d have—I had three head of horses, and I’d keep ‘em all rode down [pause] all summer long. I had to keep ‘em full of grain and pray none of ‘em got lame or sick. I’d take a horse and a pack horse out and leave one of ‘em home to rest this trip, and when I’d come back, the next trip, I’d drop off one of the others and pick up the one that had been restin’ and take him. When I’d come back, then I’d drop off the other one, so they’d all get a rest every third trip.

(I assume, then, from what you just said, too, that sometimes you could come in and out, but you were probably gone for maybe four or five days at a time?)

Oh, yeah.

(For your work week. I mean, you would probably go out and then come back at the end of the week?)



29:59

At one time, I counted up and I was workin' 69 summer bands of sheep. And so if you think about that, if you went to every one of 'em, a new band every day, it'd take you a month to get back to 'em. [laughs] You know? I guess two months, actually, to get back to the first band again. So there's actually no time to do anything but try to put out the fire. You'd go where there was a problem, and the ol' sayin' about the squeaking wheel got the grease. They'd be callin' me on the phone, "I've got troubles here!" "I got troubles here!" And you'd just have to go in the order that they came in. I'd maybe sometimes be a couple of weeks behind gettin' to trouble calls.

The bear problems was a lot easier to take care of, ordinarily, than coyotes, because you'd usually take a problem bear in a couple days. But the coyotes, sometimes it'd take quite a while to stop the killin'. Like I say, you were on the go. You'd go in and you'd set a trap line and you'd just pray that you'd got it in the right place to stop it, because you didn't have time to stay with 'em.

31:19

(When did you move back here? Start back again?)

In 1971.

(And [pause] you mentioned—so the main control that you did was coyotes and bears?)

Mm-hmm.

(Was that the same in the winter, too?)

Well, no bears in the winter. [laughs]

(Sure.)

[Chuckles]

(The minute I said that—yeah. So mainly just coyotes then?)

Yeah, coyotes. Once in a while we'd have a little bobcat trouble. There was not very many lions in this country at that time. A lion problem was somethin' that happened occasionally, but not often. It's got a lot more prevalent, now, where the lion population has increased a lot in the last 10, 15 years.

(But when you were working in the early '70s here, there just wasn't much? How did you capture a bear?)

By the foot. [laughs]

(Snare?)

[laughs] Yes. Yeah, we used foot snares. ‘Course, when I first went to work, they had just decided at that time that they was gonna quit usin’ the bear traps.

(I wondered, because of your timing.)

Yeah, we had—oh, I can remember when my uncle was trappin’, he used an old #15 Newhouse, and that was the standard thing that they used for bears at that time. And [pause] but by the time that I started trappin’ bears, they was usin’ the Aldridge foot snare, and it was a whole lot better, as far as I was concerned, than the traps, because you could carry ‘em a lot easier and you didn’t have to worry about people gettin’ hurt with ‘em and that sort of thing. So that was the tool that I used all of my career.

33:39

([pause] Did you have any special techniques that you used with the snare?)

Well, the way they taught me to do it in the first place was to [pause] use a cubby pen. You would take the kill that the bear had made, because you knew he was gonna come back to that, and build a kind of a V out of poles and just use some standing trees, usually, to kind of prop it up and then you’d set the, the snare in the entrance to this thing with the bait in the back and supposedly catch him when he came in to get it. That worked pretty good, but it was a time-consuming, labor-intensive thing, and it was always a lot better if you had a couple shepherders to help you carry things [chuckles] to build a bear pen, but usually you didn’t. It was never expedient to have a chain saw with you, so you’d use an axe. It would get to be an awful lot of work.

I decided that there ought to be a better way. There was a guy named Earl Seyler in Montana that had developed a set with a piece of sprinkler pipe, where you’d bury that thing down in the ground and put a little bait in the bottom and set the loop around the top of it, and he’d trigger it reachin’ into the pipe for the bait that was in there. I tried that for a while, and I didn’t have really good luck with it, because the pipe was about four inches in diameter, and there was some of these ol’ bears that couldn’t get their foot in it, and so they’d dig it up. Or you’d, if you wasn’t really careful about how you set the loop around the top, the pipe had straight sides on it, and when it fired, the thing would jerk the loop shut on top of the pipe and wouldn’t let it slip up around the animal’s leg.

35:53

So I thought about that quite a lot, and I finally hit on the idea of usin’ a 10-gallon can, just an old milk can. There used to be a bunch of them lyin’ around everybody’s place. And I’d cut the neck off the top of the can and that left me a nice tapered top on it. Some of the cans were narrow necks, which was the ones that I used, and they were about probably seven-inch diameter on top for a hole. And then I figured out how to mount the throw arm on the side of that can and cut a hole in it so the trigger would go inside and you’d bury that thing and it worked.”

(And you’d put a little bait in there?)

Yeah, you’d put the bait, a piece of the kill or whatever down in there. Then I stumbled onto some old DeLaval milker buckets. They were shorter. They wasn’t as long as the old 10-gallon can was, and [pause] nice stainless steel things. So I made three or four bear traps out of them,

and they were pretty effective. It would—the bear would try to stick his nose in there first, and I caught a couple of small black bear by the neck that way. They was able to trigger the thing with their nose. But most of the time, they'd stick their leg down in there and it'd put the loop on their leg clear up to their elbow. It's a pretty good deal.

37:40

(And much less labor-intensive to rig up, it sounds like.)

Oh yeah, oh yeah, you could string the bait up into a tree or cover it up with brush and just make it a little awkward for 'em to get to it and set this other thing nearby it, and they'd stop off to work on it and you'd catch 'em a whole lot easier. I remember after I was district supervisor, I had a new trapper that was goin' to work for me, and I was showin' him how to catch a bear. We had a kill there, and we built a pen, and he put in a long time, settin' the snare, getting' everything just right. So I decided, well, just for backup, I set one of my buckets there and baited it with an apple and some Dorito chips out of my lunch. And we came back the next morning and I had the bear in the bucket. Oh, he was mad!

([laughs])

He had gone to all that labor and then I caught the bear with the apple [chuckles].

([laughs])

So— [laughs].

38:54

(Did your new way to snare kind of catch on then in this area?)

I don't know. I don't think that it really caught on all that well. There was several of the guys that did it, but I think most of the guys just kept doin' their own way. There was a guy that worked next to me down here for quite a long time named Dennis Lindsey [?]. Dennis rigged himself up a couple of snares like that and used it quite a lot. He had good luck at it.

([pause] Tell me about coyote trappin'. You said sometimes it would take you longer to catch a problem coyote than a problem bear?)

There's an awful lot of difference between fur trappin' and damage control trapping, because the fur trappers go out and they'll set a trap line and they'll catch as many as they can in a short period of time, when, when it kind of drops off, they pick 'em up and go somewhere else. The ones that are hard to catch they just leave for seed. That's just good business.

With damage control, you've got to kill a coyote out there. You don't have that luxury. You've got to hang with it till you catch *him*. And so consequently, you need to develop methods that will target a particular animal in the population rather than just catchin' coyotes. And it's kind of hard to describe to people. I don't know really even how to explain it. It's somethin' that you just kind of learn after a while.

40:47

And after I was a supervisor, I used to try to explain this to people, and it got real tricky. They'd say, "How do you know?" I'd say, "I don't know, I just know," [chuckles] you know? [chuckles] But [pause] the thing that you would ordinarily do if you've got coyotes killin' in a particular area, you know where the herd of sheep is. So you'll go down around it some place and you try to figure out where the coyotes are likely to be livin' and where they're gonna be travelin' and how they're accessing this herd of sheep. If they're in a pasture it makes it a lot easier because they're probably gonna be goin' through a fence some place. Then you just have to set up so that you can try to intercept 'em. [pause] Sometimes you'll get lucky and stop and kill 'em and catch the first coyote. Sometimes you have to get eight or ten of 'em. It just depends how your luck's runnin', I guess.

(In Wyoming, I assume you didn't trap bears? Or did you?)

Mm-hmm.

(It was mainly coyotes?)

Yeah, see I went there in September and I left the following spring, and I was just there through the winter. There was one actually, I had one bear complaint in the fall, where I first got there.

(In Wyoming?)

And it was kind of funny, because I went up to the camp and the herder wasn't at the camp, and I could hear the sheep up on the mountainside. So I drove up there and found the herder, and he said, "Come on back down to camp and we'll have dinner and I'll go show you where the kill's at." So he got in my truck and led his horse out the window and we drove back down to camp. Well, we got there, and a lot of those camps had a kind of a Dutch door with a top half and a bottom half, and both halves of the door was open. I noticed that and I thought, "Well, that's funny, 'cause the top half was open but the bottom was closed about the time I was here." The herder looked and he said, "What's that door doin' open?"

43:17

So I just pulled the truck up across where we could look into the camp, and the bear was in the camp. Those sheep wagons have got grub boxes under the benches on either side, and he was in there rootin' around for groceries. He looked up and saw us and rather than come back out the door, 'course there's a bunk in the back of the sheep wagon, and most of 'em had canvas tops, and it had a little window about probably a foot and a half square in the back. And that bear went right up over that bed and tried to go out through that window. Well, he took the whole back out of that camp when he went, and the last we saw of him, he was runnin' down through the trees with that window frame around his neck.

([laughs] That was your bear complaint in Wyoming?)

[Chuckles] That was the one bear complaint out there. I don't know, we must have scared him bad enough that he never came back, because we never did catch a bear there. [laughs]

44:29

(It sounds like in both places it was mainly control for sheep?)

Yeah. We had a little bit of coyote problems with calves, and there was a number of times when bears would kill cattle, usually grizzly bears.

(Here?)

Mm-hmm. Yeah. There were—it's a kind of a sobering thing to walk up to a big old cow that the bear's killed and look at that and think about, you know, if that was you instead. [laughs] But grizzlies are extremely efficient predators. They can kill cattle if they want to.

(How long were you in this area as a trapper?)

Oh, probably about 15 years.

(So 1971 until—?)

About 1986.

(And were you a supervisor some of that time?)

No. I—my supervisor through all that time, his name was Rich Wonacott. [time out for spelling of name] Rich was a good hand. He was a good trapper, and he was a good boss. But he was getting' ready to retire. He wanted to bail, and so I knew that he was gonna retire and I at that time was lookin' for maybe a little bit better job so that I could support my kids a little better. By that time my wife and I had six kids, and they was gettin' older and we needed more money to educate 'em and all this sort of thing. And so I decided I'd see if I couldn't wiggle into Rich's job.

(As the district supervisor?)

As the district supervisor. Joe Packham was our state director at that time, and I asked him about it. I knew I was kind of maybe stickin' my neck out, because I had been told that you couldn't have a supervisor position without a college degree and of course all I had was high school. And I asked him about it, and he said, "Well," he said, "I don't know, we might think about it. I'll talk to you more about it when Rich retires."

47:28

So just shortly before Rich got ready to retire, Joe came over one day and rode around with me and talked to me about the possibilities of maybe applyin' for the position. He told me that there were several other guys in the state that was interested in it, too. 'Course there was always the possibility of somebody that was already in a supervisory position that might want to transfer here. But he was gonna run the applications and see. So, he had me give him an application and everything went quiet for quite a long time.

Finally one day he called me back and he said, "Well, I've looked all those applications over that we got the first round, and I think I'm gonna do it again. In the meantime, he said, Rich is gettin' ready to go, and we need somebody to take that position down there in the interim. So I'm gonna

have you be a supervisory DFA.” We was all called District Field Assistants at that point. He said, “I want you to come down. We’ll have you stay in Pocatello for a few days of the week and then go back and run your trap line in your own district again for the rest of the week. You’ll have to take care of both jobs.”

So I went to Pocatello and Rich was due to go in two weeks. So I had two weeks to learn how to be a supervisor. That first morning I walked in there and ol’ Rich jumped up from behind his desk and he come and grabbed me by the hand and led me over and sat me down in the chair. He said, “Now, OK, I’m sure glad to see you. I’ve been lookin’ for you for years. He said, “Tell you what? The next couple of weeks I want you to be awful careful gettin’ in and out of the bathtub. Look both ways before you cross the street.” He said, “ I don’t want anything to happen to you. After I’m gone, I don’t give a damn what happens to you, but for the next two weeks, you take care of yourself.”

([laughs])

[laughs] So [pause] but anyway, that was kind of how I got into supervision. The thing went through and they kept me in that position for, oh, I guess 120 days, probably, and then they had me reapply and I got the job.

(And the district was what district?)

This was the eastern district in Idaho. That would have taken in about a third of the state at that time.

(Where did you live?)

I lived in Pocatello.

50:32

(You had that who area? How many trappers under you?)

[pause] I’d have to count ‘em up. I don’t remember. [chuckles] Let’s see, one, two, three, four, five—five trappers, I think. No, seven, there’s two more. There were seven guys.

(That would have been when that you started it?)

19....well, I went down there in December of ’85, I think it was, when I started that, and then it was spring of ’86 when I got the official position. That was at the same time that they made the switch from Interior to Department of Ag. That was a kind of a change for most of us, because we’d all been Fish and Wildlife forever. I had a heck of a time tryin’ to remember to not answer the phone “Fish and Wildlife Service.” But [pause] none of us had ever heard of APHIS, and all of a sudden we woke up one mornin’ and we was one. So it was kind of a change.

(What was the biggest change?)

Probably just tryin’ to remember who we were, [laughs] because, as far as the job was concerned, same thing. I didn’t see any sweeping changes that happened. Everyone hoped that

things would be a whole lot better under Ag than it was under Interior, and I think maybe in some ways it was, because at least we didn't have to send the cooperators in there to fight for our money quite so hard for a while. But other than that, I think things was pretty much status quo, is the way I remember it, anyway.

52:28

(How long were you a district supervisor?)

From '86 till '92.

(What were your duties?)

Well, I had to supervise the trappers to make sure they got their reports in on time and that they did their work and make a trap line inspection every once in a while, which I enjoyed, because then I could get back out in the field and do what I really wanted to be doin'. You know, once a trapper, you're always a trapper, I guess. And, trainin' new people. I'd have to hire some temporary trappers every spring and take 'em out and kind of show 'em how we did things, teach 'em about the reporting system, all that sort of stuff. I had to manage the aerial hunting budget. The state director would give me so many dollars that I could spend on aerial hunting, and I'd have to try to figure out the smartest way to do it, over the district. [pause] I think another thing that we did an awful lot of was dealing with land managing agencies, the Fish and Game department, that sort of thing, just bein' the interface between the trapper and the \_\_?\_ people. We'd have to negotiate new work plans with the BLM and the Forest Service and the state lands department every spring. There would always be these interagency meetings.

54:36

When I first started, they had been in the habit of havin' this interagency meeting, they called it, every winter, and we'd invite everybody that we dealt with to come in there. There would be representatives from all the different forests, from the BLM districts, the Fish and Game department, the Atomic Energy Commission, the state lands, you name it. You'd get all these people that you had any sort of an interface with into this room and then they'd all beat up on you at once. [laughs]

So [chuckles] after goin' through that one time—

([laughs])

—I said, “We're gonna do this different. [chuckles] I'm gonna meet with these people one on one. We're not gonna let 'em have a chance to tag-team us the way they've been doin'.” So I started just havin' a meeting with each group by theirselves, and that worked out a whole lot better. There was always a certain amount of contention. Fish and Game and ADC had a pretty adversarial relationship at that time, especially in Idaho.

(What was the reasoning for that?)

56:02

I think part of it maybe had to do with professional jealousy, but I think the *big* problem was the fact that the Idaho wool growers had gone to the legislature and said, “Hey, coyotes kill deer just

like they kill sheep or calves. And we want 'em protected. We think Fish and Game should be givin' ADC some money to do that." Well, the legislature says, "Hey, that's a good idea." They made Fish and Game give us I think it was \$50,000 a year out of their budget to do project that would benefit wildlife. Fish and Game, not just in Idaho, I mean, it's pretty general everywhere you go, they don't want to admit that predation has any effect on their big game, because then somebody's gonna make 'em pay for it. They see that as a money pit. They don't want any part of it. So it's pretty common for 'em to say, "Hey, we don't believe this. They evolved together. It just shouldn't be that way." But here the legislature is makin' these guys give us money and identifying projects for us to use it. And they resented that big-time.

Our relationship with Fish and Game was in the tank from then on. So they did everything they could to discredit us and most of the time it backfired on 'em, and that just made 'em madder. [laughs] Hopefully I think things are a little better now. I understand that Mark Collinge here in Idaho has a quite a lot better relationship with Fish and Game than we used to have, so I'm tickled for that.

58:12

(I want to come back to aerial gunning before we move on from your district supervision career. When you'd trapped in both Idaho and Wyoming, were you an aerial gunner?)

Not in Wyoming, but I was in Idaho. In fact, that was one of the first things that they did with me when I got back here. Duane came up and he said, "OK, Don Heath's [?] gonna come over next week and teach you how to fly." Don Heath was our bureau pilot at that time.

(For Idaho?)

For Idaho, yeah. So he came over and he stayed at Rexburg and the weather was bad. So he ground-schooled me and everything, showed me all about how to handle a shotgun in the airplane and told me what he expected me to be doin' back there in the back seat. Then we set there and watched the weather for about a week.

([laughs])

I had never been off the ground in my life. I'd never been in an airplane. So I was a little bit apprehensive about this. One day I'd been down there, we sat around the airport and listened to all them guys tell airplane stories for most of the day. I finally decided the heck with it and I went home. At that time I was livin' down at Thornton, a little town just south of Rexburg.

59:47

Well, I'd only been home maybe an hour, and Don called me and he says, "Hey, I think we can get up." So I beat it back down to the airport and we loaded up and took off, and I remember as we lifted off the runway, sittin' there and watchin' all those hangars go by off the side, and I just had this sensation like I was tryin' to stretch my legs out and keep 'em back on the ground, you know? [chuckles]

We went out to the desert out there west of Rexburg a few miles and he dropped down probably, oh, I don't know, it was probably higher than it looked to me, probably between 50 and 100 feet off the ground, I suppose. I know when we'd come to a power line, he'd have to lift up and then



drop down on the other side of it. But [chuckles] he starts goin' up that draw and then back down that draw and dipping and divin' back and forth, lookin' for coyotes. I'm sittin' back in the back tryin' to keep my stomach lined up. Pretty quick, he—Don chewed snooze all the time. He had this big gob in his mouth. All of a sudden he points out the window and he shifts his cud over into his other cheek and here goes this coyote down the draw there. He hollers at me, he says, "Get your window open!"

01:01:24

'Course, those Supercubs, there's not a whole lot of room in the back of those things. And the window on the left side of the airplane would just swing up and clip to the bottom of the wing, and then you'd stick a shotgun out the window. You had to be careful not to shoot the prop. You couldn't shoot the wing struts. You couldn't shoot the wheel. So they just give you this little window that you could shoot, and it was the pilot's job to get the coyote into that spot for you so you could do it. He says, "You ready?" I said, "Yeah." He stands that thing up on one wing and he's watchin' the coyote out through the little window in the top between the two wings, like this. [moves around] He cranks it around and drops onto that coyote and [pause] I forgot to take the safety off. [laughs]

So we [chuckles] I pretty near pulled the back out of the trigger tryin' to shoot. We went by, kerswish! He kind of mumbles under his breath, and then he's lookin' out the window and then back around we come, and the doggone G's are enough that your cheeks feel like they're settin' on your shoulders. Comes back around, dumps onto the coyote again. And that time I got a shot off. I have no clue where I hit. We made four or five passes on this poor coyote before I finally got him shot.

01:03:00

So we went and hunted up another one and I rolled him up first pass. I was just tickled to death. I thought, "Man, that's OK!" And then we couldn't find another coyote. We hunted and hunted and hunted. I all of a sudden realized I was gettin' sick. I was definitely gettin' sick.

(Because by this time, how long had you been up?)

Oh, we'd probably been up for an hour, maybe an hour and a half. I don't know. You're doin' an awful lot of this—

(Loopin' around.)

Yeah, you know, only Don, he'd fly through a little gully some place where it looked like there ought to be a coyote in there, and if he didn't spook somethin' out, he'd turn right around and come back through it with his siren goin'. He had one of those little warbler sirens on the airplane, and he'd come back down with his wheels right in the sagebrush blowin' that doggone siren to see if he could spook a coyote out of there. And [chuckles] all this was a little more acrobatic than my stomach was designed for, and pretty quick I didn't care if we saw another coyote at all. He looked around and he said, "Well, the weather's gettin' bad. We'd better go in." And oh, gosh, I was glad!

01:04:20

He went in and he landed and got out of the airplane and he turned around and looked at me and just roared. I think my face must have been white as a sheet, I don't know. But I didn't dare puke. [laugh] I knew doggone well if I did, I'd be famous through the whole outfit. So [laughs] I just didn't dare. That's all there was to it. [chuckles]

([laughs])

(So that was your first aerial gunning?)

That was my initiation, yeah. But you know, I never had any trouble with gettin' airsick after that. For some reason it was fine.

(Did you have any close calls?)

I actually had a couple that could have been close, I guess. 'Course [pause] it was a kind of a sobering thing for me to fly over the site of this wreck where this other guy had been killed. I did this periodically.

(Your uncle?)

No, it wasn't my uncle.

(Oh, someone else?)

This was a guy named Ken Wilson. He took the place after my uncle had retired.

(That's right.)

Not retired, but he quit. And he and a contract pilot named Dean Frew [?] from Pocatello were out flyin', out north and west of St. Anthony. There's a place they call the Junipers out there, just a big mountain that sticks up in the middle of the desert. They had been out there on coyotes when it was windy, and the best anybody knows, they just hit a down draft while they were in the middle of the pass on a coyote and it sucked them into the ground and killed 'em both. And the wreckage of that airplane laid out there for years. In fact, you can probably still find pieces of it out there. And every time I'd fly over that, I'd think, hmm. [chuckles] But [pause]

01:06:28

Never had a real problem with a fixed-wing airplane. We flew helicopters quite a lot, for a long time. There was one time we were huntin' out by Montevue, which is flat country out there right on the edge of the desert. I had killed a coyote and we'd landed and put him on the basket and got back in. We just got up to altitude, and all of a sudden somethin' back behind went ka-lunk! and that aircraft kind of wiggled in the air and the pilot looked at me like, "What in the devil did you do?" My first thought was that maybe this coyote hadn't been dead after all and that he'd come to and crawled up into the works back behind. So I yanked the window open and started looking and countin' coyotes. About that time, it did it again. So he just quick landed [snapped fingers] and got out and walked around, looked here and looked there, come back and shut it down.

It turned out that it had broken a wristpin, I think he said it was, and it threw it right out through the top of the piston jug. It had a hole about probably the size of a four-bit piece right in the top of the jug. And he told me, he says, “You know, that thing would have—the engine would have seized up in a matter of seconds if we hadn’t gone down.” So I set there and thought about that while we was all fine, but the day before we had been flyin’ over here in the mountains, and if that had happened then, the chances of our bein’ in the place where he could have auto-rotated and set that thing down safely was pretty slim.

01:08:19

The other time, we had the same chopper. We was huntin’, and I had wounded a coyote in the bottom of a little deep rocky draw. The pilot would go around and he’d drop into the draw and go up it. I’d think I knew where the coyote was, but by the time we’d get there the bugger had moved a little bit, and so I wouldn’t be able to get a shot at him, and we had to turn around. We made this about three times. The last time we came in, I had the coyote spotted and I was gonna lower the boom on him as soon as I got in range. All of a sudden, the pilot just landed. There was a little spot there in the bottom of that draw that was just big enough for him to set it down on without his rotors hittin’ the hillside. I said, “What the hell’s the matter?” He didn’t answer. We got out and he looked around, behind, and I could hear by that time that the motor was runnin’ real rough. He got back in and he revved the motor and revved the motor and revved the motor.

Finally he told me, he says, “Well, the best I can tell, I’ve fouled both plugs on one piston, so I’ve got one piston that isn’t hittin’.” He said “We can’t fly this thing.” He said “I’ve got to get those plugs cleaned, and I don’t have any tools, so we’ll have to [pause] unload everything out of it and I’ll see if I can fly it back down to the gas truck and fix this and come back and get you.” So we unloaded me and all the ammunition and all of our survival kit and everything we carried. He drained off about half his fuel. And he, I was settin’ up on the ridge above, watchin’ him. He’d wiggle that thing around, pick it up, turn it a little, and set it down, pick it up, turn it a little, set it down. He finally got it back pointed down the draw, and I could just see him swaller hard. He lifted the thing up and headed off, got down the draw a ways, and finally got enough altitude he could pull back up on the flat. It kind of cleared its throat and started runnin’ OK. So he come over and picked me up again and we went back down. He cleaned the plugs up on the chopper and we went ahead and went huntin’ again. But that was just another case where if that had happened in the wrong place, we could have really had trouble.

01:11:07

You might want to ask that same question to Warren Moore. [Long-time Idaho WS employee] He could tell you an interesting story about that. [laughs]

(Usually when I ask people about aerial gunning, I always ask about close calls, because almost all of them have said that. The other question that I always ask is, when you started, and you started a little later, aerial gunning, it sounds like than some of the people that I’ve interviewed that started in the late ‘50s, ‘60s, and you would have started, it sounds like, about the mid-‘70s?)

Probably about ’72, ’71 I guess.

(So you were a little early ‘70s. What kind of safety precautions at that time?)

Well, they gave you a motorcycle helmet. [laughs]

(And that was about it?)

Yeah, that was about it, really. They were bein' more safety-conscious at that time than they had been when my predecessor was killed, because nobody even knew they were gone.

(No radio, I assume?)

Well, the pilot would have had a radio in his airplane, but *we* didn't have a radio system in the airplane at that time. That came along later. Those guys had gone out on a Saturday because they'd been weathered in for quite a while, and I guess they just hit a time when they thought they could go do somethin', so they went out and flew on a Saturday and were killed. The only reason we know that was because one of the sheep men had seen 'em fly over a snow machine race that they was havin' down at St. Anthony that day. Then they'd gone on out and went huntin'. On Sunday, there was another local pilot, in fact, he was the guy that wound up bein' our contract coyote-huntin' pilot for a while, who was out just flyin' around lookin' for elk and run onto to the wreck out there. [pause] But if it hadn't been for that, it's hard to say how long they'd have been out there, because Ken Wilson was a bachelor, he didn't have anybody at home waitin' for him to come back, and Dean, the pilot, had a family, but he was up here camped out flyin'. And they didn't expect him home at any particular time. I suppose that his wife might have got nervous if he didn't call home after a while, but—they made us file flight plans after that.

01:13:59

But as far as [pause] the safety equipment, they didn't even give us Nomex [flame retardant type of material] suits or anything to begin with.

(You probably saw that change through your time with the service?)

Oh, yeah, yeah. There was another accident that happened—oh, I can't remember exactly when it was, but they had a helicopter go down down south of Rockland. Rich Wonacott and Mike Worthen were both in that when it went down. And there again, this was a case where they didn't really have anybody watchin' after 'em all that close, and they had to walk out for several miles to a ranch and call for help. Luckily they got down well enough so nobody was hurt, but they *really* tightened things down after that happened. In fact, they made us what they called "red-line" our districts at that time. We were supposed to look on a map and any place that we didn't think that the helicopter could auto-rotate, we wasn't supposed to go there. We had to draw a red line around all these areas. We definitely wasn't supposed to go there any more.

01:15:29

But, yeah, they got a whole lot more safety-conscious over the years, protective equipment, good helmets. That was noisy, those doggoned old airplanes and helicopters, that's probably one reason I wear these hearing aids. But we got good helmets, good ear protection, good eye protection, Nomex suits, good boots to wear, and carry-on survival kits in the aircraft, makin' sure that somebody's checking in with the people on a regular basis so that they don't lose someone out there.

(We are at the end of tape one so we'll stop here.)  
01:16:03 End part 1.

Part 2  
00:00

(This is CD #2 of the interview with Rick Phillips. Were you going to say something else about aerial gunning?)

Well, I was just gonna follow up on your comment about the fact that some people didn't know where some people were and not necessarily to do with aerial gunning. During the time that I was on the trap line and would be goin' out with a pack string some place [pause] my wife probably had no idea within a day's ride of where I was. And nobody else did, either. Because I'd maybe leave home with the idea of goin' one place and meet a sheep man on the highway that had a hot problem some place else, and I'd go there instead of goin' where I'd figured on. So I could wind up at a totally different end of my district from where I'd planned to go that day, and nobody knew it but me. [chuckles]

(Did that kind of thing change in terms of who knew where you were at what time?)

I don't think so. I think it's pretty much the same today.

(Really?)

The trappers will usually tell their wives where they're going, if they've got a wife, and it seems like the trappers have a pretty big turnover in wives sometimes, but they have to be awfully self-sufficient, able to take care of their problems.

01:52

One time, just to show you how quick things can go to heck on you, it was in June. Things was gettin' hot. I had a trap line out on the desert out here that I wanted to pull because I was gettin' ready to go to the mountains and I didn't want those traps sittin' out there all summer. I went out to pull 'em, and there was a big sand dune that I needed to go over the top of. When there's moisture in the sand, you can travel on 'em pretty good. When it dries out, it gets really tough to go in. Unfortunately, it had dried out to the point to where I bogged down in that sand dune.

I thought, "Well, that is just a dang inconvenience, it's gonna take me longer to get out of here than I'd planned on." I had a jack and put stuff under the wheels and stuff and I got out and got my handyman jack and hunted up a rock that I could sit underneath it and jacked the truck up and cut some brush and put under it. About that time I got thirsty. So I went to get a drink. I always carried a gallon water jug in my truck. I had forgotten to fill it that morning, and the darn thing was dry. So I didn't have a drink. [chuckles]

It took me several hours to get out of there. I was finally able to get out of there, which I guess maybe if things had been a little different, maybe I wouldn't have. I don't know. But I don't think I've ever been so thirsty in my life as I was by the time I got out of there. I went to the first place I could find that had water and drank 'til I was almost sick. [laughs] That type of thing, really, a guy could—you know, it could be life-threatening. But I could tell you probably a

number of other close calls that I've had in that respect. The thing is that a trapper has to be pretty self-sufficient and able to take care of problems however they happen.

(Whatever comes up kind of thing?)

Right.

04:18

(Did you do any work with the Research Center?)

Indirectly, mostly. We used to do a little bit of stuff with 'em once in a while. The one thing that I can think of right off the top of my head is, they sent us out a kit one time of coyote lures we was supposed to test. They had, I don't know, eight or ten different lures in there, and they all had numbers on 'em. They gave us a form, and we were supposed to set these things out and see what kind of luck you had with 'em.

[sighs] I have to confess that I didn't give 'em the best test that I could have because I didn't know anything about any of these lures and if I had trouble, I'd want to be able to stop that trouble, and I didn't want to be usin' an unknown to do it with. So I used my own lure to take care of those problems, and then I used the research stuff just on the trap lines where I was just tryin' to catch some coyotes. The main thing that I remember about that is, one of 'em was synthetic fermented egg in an aerosol can. [laughs] I had this stuff stored in my little equipment shed. And one morning I went out there and opened the door, and man! You talk about small! "What in the heck has gone wrong in here?" I looked and looked and looked. It didn't take too long to track it down. That aerosol can, the stuff that they'd had in it had ate a whole in the bottom of the can and it had all just run that stuff out under pressure. It was all soaked into the box that I'd had it in. So I had to get that box to the incinerator pretty fast. [laughs]

06:19

(Wow! [laughs] You were district supervisor for how long?)

From spring of 1986 until spring of 1992.

(And then what did you do?)

Then I got shanghaied to go to Arizona and be a state director.

(How did that happen? [laughs]? Explain the "shanghai"! [laughs])

[laughs] Well— [laughs] [pause] 'Course, I think I need to give you a little background on this. One day, about probably I'm gonna say about 1990, Mike Worthen came into the office and says, "How'd you like to go back to school?"

(We should explain who Mike Worthen is.)

Mike Worthen at that time was the state director for Idaho. He later went on to be the Western regional director. [pause]

(And he came into your office?)

Yeah, he came into the office and asked me how I'd like to go back to school. I said I'd love to go back to school but I can't afford it. He says, "Well, if the government pays for your books and tuition, would you go?" I said, "Heck, yes!" [chuckles] 'Course my district office was in Pocatello, and ISU, Idaho State University, was right there in Pocatello, and it was only, like, three blocks away. So he told me, he said, "If you want to do it, we'll let you pursue this 486 designation and we'll give you an opportunity to maybe go on up the ladder." Because at that point I didn't have a career ladder. I was stuck where I was at with the designation that I had.

(And was that because of your lack of education?)

08:37

Right. I had no, because I wasn't GS. I was still AD.

(Oh, what was the AD?)

Ad stands for "administratively determined." What that is is a kind of, oh, almost all the trappers everywhere at that time were AD. That's a system where you can go out and hire 'em off the street and you can fire 'em out of hand if you want to. You don't have all the things that you have—the hoops that you have to go through with the regular government service. But there was no way for you to officially go on and be—gosh, how do I need to state this? There was not really a connection, so that you could jump the bridge from AD to GS without goin' through and takin' civil service exam and being able to compete for a GS position.

(But if you had some kind of college education, you could make the leap?)

Yes, and then you could qualify for this registry. There's the different designations in government service, you know. You've got one for clerical and one for biologists and another one for computer people or whatever. And the 486 was the biologist registry.

10:16

So anyway, I told him, "Heck, yes, I'd love to do that." He says, "Well, we'll expect you to still do your job, but we'll let you manage your time so that you can attend classes and things like that."

(And pay?)

Yeah. And they paid for the books and the tuition. I didn't figure I could beat that deal with a club, so anyway, I went back to school. It took me two years to satisfy all the requirements, and I remember after I got through with that and decided I was done with my coursework, I was kind of lost. I didn't know what to do with myself because I realized I hadn't been to the bathroom without a textbook for two years. And. [laughs]

(And you'd probably been very busy?)

Oh, I was terribly busy, and I have to really hand it to my wife and my kids, because they supported me all the way through that and had to do without Dad and husband and whatnot because I was either workin' some place or in class or whatever. It was quite a process, really.

11:40

(What classes did you take?)

Oh, you was required to take so many credits of botany and so many of wildlife courses and so many of zoology courses. After you got through with that, why, then coupled with your work experience, they would put you onto this registry. And then about that same time, Joe Packham was deputy administrator.

(Of Wildlife Services?)

Of Wildlife Services, yeah. He had gone from his position there as a state director to be the assistant deputy administrator, and then they—I don't remember what happened with the guy that was the deputy administrator at that time, but he disappeared and Joe took his job, and he kind of took an interest in the thing. He pulled some strings somewhere or another and got me and Craig Maycock, who was the district supervisor in Rock Springs, Wyoming at this time, changed over to where we had a GS designation.

(As district supervisors?)

Mm-hmm. So that pretty well opened the door for me to compete if I wanted to for another position.

13:07

And [pause] then they had another program that come down the pike they called the lead program. I don't know if you're familiar with that. It was a high-intensity leadership training program that APHIS developed. You had to compete to get into this, just like you was competin' for a job. Then if you got into the thing, there was people from all the branches of APHIS who were in this, and they would send you some place like Austin, Texas or Virginia Beach or some place like that and have you all in a hotel there and keep you there for two weeks givin' you all this intensified training.

(For leadership?)

In leadership, yeah. And then they would give you—I think we did this once a quarter for about a year and a half.

(Wow! That's a lot!)

14:21

Before I completed that, they had a shakeup in leadership in Arizona. The state director there was transferred to the Denver office and they needed somebody to go in there. And they detailed Mike Worthen to go down there. Mike was the state director here. So while he was gone, they stuck me in as acting state director.



(Here in Idaho?)

In Idaho, for 120 days. So I would try to run my district and then beat it to Boise and spend three or four days over there. [chuckles] I did this for the 120 days that Mike was down there. Shortly before he was due to come back, I got a phone call from Don Hawthorne, who was the regional director at that time.

(The Western regional director?)

Yes. And he said, “Rick, we’d like you to go to Arizona for a while and try that out down there.” I says, “Don, I’ve heard so dang many bad things about Arizona, I don’t know if I want to go down there.” Because they had had all sorts of problems with the public down there. There had been a big shakeup, somebody got caught poisonin’ bears or some darn thing like that, one of the ranchers down there, and it had made national news. If you remember the lion head picture that was so famous, where there was a pyramid of lion heads sittin’ underneath a cottonwood tree, that had all hit the news not too long before that. Everybody was jumpin’ on ADC in Arizona.

16:12

So anyway, I said, “Let me think about it a little bit.” So I went home and talked to my wife about it. Bless her heart, she says, “I’ll do what you think’s best.” You know, so I called him back and I said, “Well, OK, I’ll try it.” So they shipped me down there for 120 days and let Mark come home. In the meantime, they said, “We want you to apply for this position.” [sighs] I said, “Weeell, OK.” So I gave them an application. [pause] It was a challenge, I’ll tell you. You hear the old story about how do you teach a girl to swim? Well, you take her by the hand and you lead her down to the water and the other guy says, “No, it’s my sister.” Then you just kick her off the dock.

Well, I think that’s how I learned to be a state director. They kicked me off the dock. [laughs]

(So you got the job in Arizona?)

I got the job in Arizona, yeah. [laughs]

(Right off the dock! [laughs])

[laughs] We moved down there. Our family was here until school got out in May. I think I went down there in February, if I remember right.

(In what year?)

1992. Then I had to deal with all the crap that was goin’ on down there. There was a group in Tucson called Wildlife Damage Review. There was four ladies that—maybe I should use that term loosely. Anyway, they headed that outfit up, and their whole purpose in life was to get rid of ADC. And they, they just harassed us every way they could think of. It was a constant challenge just tryin’ to keep one step ahead of ‘em. [chuckles] The Coronado forest, the forest supervisor there was so mad at my predecessor that he wouldn’t even return a phone call from me. This was also right at the time that the Forest Service and the BLM all of a sudden decide that we had to have EAs.

(Environmental Assessments?)

Yeah, to go with our work on their lands. And they were writing them. We had no authority to write NEPA documents at that time. So they was pretty well puttin' whatever they wanted to in those documents, and we were in a constant [pause] problem just tryin' to get something in there that was accurate. Because most of the people that were writin' these documents didn't have a clue what we was doin' or why. The prevalent idea amongst most of those land managing agencies was that predation was not a problem for anything.

19:42

Another problem that I ran into there was, we had to justify why we wanted to be out there. The BLM would say, for instance, "Why do you even need to be here? What have you been doin' on BLM land?" The MIS system had all this information in it. I'd say, "OK, let me show you why we need to be there." So I'd go to the MIS system. I would try to show how many hours and how many losses we had had on this particular BLM district.

I ran into a problem there because one of the district supervisors who had been there in the past hated paperwork. He had taught the men how to put all this down as private land, rather than BLM or rather than Forest Service, because he just said, "Just put it down private. Those guys have got some private land out there that they're basin' their allotment on. So just go ahead and use it as private land." So everything turned up in the MIS—not everything, but a big share of it that should have been either Forest Service or BLM work for years past was all showin' up as private land. And you'd go and you'd talk to the trapper and you'd say, "Isn't this out here public land?" "Yeah." "Well, haven't you been workin' there?" "Yeah." "Well, how come it doesn't show up in the MIS?" "Well, Lackey told us to do it this way." [laughs]

21:28

So I'd have to go back to the guys and say, "Well, we've been doin' it, but our recordkeeping's no good, so I can't prove it." You know? [laughs] It was an uphill deal.

(It sounds like one headache after the other.)

Oh, it was terrible. My wife thought I was gonna have a heart attack or a stroke or somethin' because I was so stressed out all the time. But we kind of worked our way through it, and I was able to build a pretty good working relationship with a lot of those people down there. One of the things that we had had a problem with was the Game and Fish department in Arizona. This lion head thing had come to pass because Arizona Game and Fish had asked ADC to save heads from the lions we were takin' in depredation situations for them so that they could do DNA studies, pull teeth, check ages, sex, all this kind of stuff. And so there had been 11 heads that were saved for 'em down in the southeastern corner of Arizona.

(By that district, by that ADC group?)

I think that represented the lions that had been taken by two different trappers over the period of probably the summer. They were frozen. So the trapper took these up and gave 'em to a guy named Tom Waddell [?], who was the game warden in that area at the time.

(For Fish and Game?)

23:14

Yeah. He promptly took these things, piled up the heads underneath a cottonwood tree, took a roll of film, and turned around and gave the film to a guy named Barry Burkhardt [?], who was a reporter for the *Arizona Republic*. They hit the Associated Press and things went downhill big-time from then. Darrel Juve, who was the state director in Arizona at that time, he tore Fish and Game up from top to bottom over this. There was definitely no love lost between them and us after that.

When I got there, Duane Shruf [?] was the director of the game department. I called him and asked him if I could have a meeting. "You bet." So we went over and I talked to him and John Phelps [?], who was another one of the guys, a fur-bearer biologist who dealt with predators a lot, that sort of thing. And I told him, I said, "Look, I know the situation as far as your outfit and my outfit gettin' along right now, and I know how it got that way, but it's counterproductive for both of us. There's no sense in havin' this relationship, and I want to start over from square one and I want to be friends with you guys. I want to be able to deal with you. I want you to be able to deal with me." Duane says, "That's the way we would like to see it, too." So we all shook hands and parted friends.

It was only maybe a month, and we had a lion start killin' sheep up by Wickenburg. This particular calf had been trapped some time in the past, and he was minus a couple of toes on one front foot. So it was pretty easy, if you could find his tracks, to nail this cat. The game warden at Wickenburg has been usin' this cat for a research cat. He had a radio on him, and he'd been followin' him around for quite a long time and he was gathering data on what this cat was doing. When the trapper up there said that this cat was killin' sheep, the game warden was like, "Heck, he is, he hasn't been anywhere close to those sheep. I know, I've got the radio. If you kill that lion, that other thing that happened is gonna be mild. I'll see to it that this thing really gets lit up."

So the trapper called me and says, "What do I do?" I said, "You go catch that lion. He's killin' sheep. You do it." I called Duane Shruf and I said, "Hey, here's the situation. I've got this cat killin' up there. Your warden is threatening my trapper with another media blitz if he catches it. What are you gonna do about it?" He says, "If that thing is killin' sheep, you do what you gotta do and I'll take care of my guy."

26:30

So we caught the lion and we never heard a peep out of that warden. So I know that Duane did what he told me he'd do. We actually had a really good relationship with Arizona Game and Fish by the time I left there.

(Sounds like it. How long were you in Arizona?)

I left in October of 1995.

(Three years.)

A little better than three years, yeah.

(And then where did you go?)

Back to Wyoming.

(As state director?)

Mm-hmm, yeah. I left down there hundred-degree weather, went to Casper, Wyoming on the 15th of October [chuckles] checked into a motel and the next morning I got up and there was about a foot of new snow on everything. I went out and went to look for a frost scraper to clean the windshield off my pickup and realized that I didn't have a frost scraper any more. [laughs] I thought, "You fool! [laughs] How come you're here?" [laughs] "You're an awful slow learner!" [laughs]

27:45

(What caused you to leave Arizona?)

They twisted my arm.

(To go to Wyoming?)

Mm-hmm. [pause] Yeah. I was pretty comfortable there in Arizona by that time. Things had kind of settled down as far as a lot of the problems we'd been havin'. We'd completed some EAs and had the thing workin'. We still—actually, just as I was leaving, we got the right from the Forest Service to write our own NEPA. And that was kind of a neat deal, too, in a way, because I told you that we'd had a kind of a problem with some of the Forest Service people, and the Forest supervisor for the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest had been workin' with us through doin' the EA on the Apache-Sitgreaves. We got right up to the end of it and they had actually written a decision notice on the thing wanting this changed over. The NEPA people in our outfit went through and they said, "How do you feel about the EA?" I said, "It's OK as far as I'm concerned. Those guys have worked with us pretty well in puttin' it together. But there's a few things I'd like changed in the decision notice."

29:23

So I wrote a new decision notice, and we gave it back to the Apache-Sitgreaves. John Wedell [?], I think was the man's name, he went ballistic. He just did not like this thing at all. And I can't even remember now what the wording was in the thing that he didn't like. But he and the guy that had been writing this EA in the first place came over and met with me in my office. We sat there and we talked about it. He was really sayin', "I don't like this. I don't like this. I want this changed." And I thought about it for a minute, and there was this one sentence in there that was really buggin' him. I says, "Well, OK, John, how about if we say this?" And I just changed the wording of the sentence so that it still meant essentially the same thing, but it was different wording. He said, "Yeah, that works for me. Good enough." So we changed it. I says, "Is there anything else?" "Well, I'd like to see this changed." "OK, fine, let's do that." We changed maybe half a dozen words in that decision, maybe rephrased things just a little in that one sentence, and he went out of there just grinning ear to ear, and everything was fine.

(chuckles)

30:56

Well, at this time also, we had been through the anti-trap thing in Arizona. The first time it came out, it was proposition 200. It was defeated pretty soundly when it went through the first time. Well, the people who had written this thing came back again with another proposal. It got beat, too, but it was only because there was some language in it that made people think they was gonna lose fishing. And the governor liked to fish. And so he was afraid that he'd lose his fishin' rights if it got through, so he kind of told those guys, "Hey, back off on this and if the voters pass it, I guess they do, but otherwise, I'll sponsor an anti-trap bill myself after the election."

Oh, let's see, I'm lyin' to you! That was what happened the first time around, the first time it went. The second time it went through, it passed. They lost all the right to have traps on public land in Arizona. [pause] We had just finalized this EA with the Forest Service. [pause] The Forest supervisor called me up and he says, "You are not gonna do this, are you? We need you to have traps on the Forest Service land over here." I said, "John, I don't think I've got that choice. From what they tell me, I have no choice but to observe this thing, because it's law." He says, "Feds, you've got the precedents. We approved that in another time. I'm gonna see about time." So he run it up the flagpole through the Forest Service to see whether they could tell the state to go fly a kite and allow us to use traps. It went all the way to DC, and finally they told him, "Back off," on the Washington level. [laughs] But I thought, "You know, this is pretty good. I've got this Forest that wouldn't hardly even talk to me when I got here, and now they're out here fightin' for us through their own resources to try to get us to do what we can do."

(Wow,)

Old John was a pretty good guy.

33:41

(So that was three years of that kind of work in Arizona, and then you went to Wyoming. Did they have any kind of those kinds of fun things going on in Wyoming? [laughs])

Yeah. The reason I went there was [pause] that they was I guess havin' problems. Bill Rightmire was the state director in Wyoming at that time. He told me one time—Bill and I were pretty good friends, I thought, anyway. He had told me one time that the longer you're in an area, the more you're power base erodes, was the way he put it. Bill had been in Wyoming for quite a while and had the opportunity to make enough enemies and whatnot to make life miserable for him. There was also an awful lot of indications that we might lose our budget at that time and we might not be able to keep performing like we should.

(In Wyoming?)

Everywhere. So everybody was kind of worried about that. I don't know all the things that entered into it, but I got the feeling that the Service was not real happy with the way Bill was managing things in Wyoming and anyway, they was gonna move him to Hyattsville. He was supposed to get a directed reassignment back there, and they wanted me to go in there and try to make people happy.

15:41

I resisted it, because I thought I was really gettin' into it. I wasn't crazy about movin' to start with, and I didn't want to get into this mess with Bill because I considered him to be a friend of mine and I didn't want him mad at me. Tom Nichols [?] was the regional director there in Denver at the time. I told him, "Tom, I just don't think I want to do it." "Well, OK." [chuckles] The next day Bobby Acord called me, the deputy administrator. He twisted my arm pretty hard. "Bobby," I said, "let me get this straight. You're givin' Bill a directed reassignment. Am I being given a directed reassignment?" "Oh, no, no, no, nothing like that. You can stay there if you want to, but I'd take it as a personal favor to me if you'd come and do it. I think you're somebody that can do a good job in Wyoming."

So I went home and my youngest daughter was havin' quite a lot of troubles in school at that time. [pause] My mother-in-law was livin' with us, so we had quite a group here to talk this thing over. We kicked it around for a while, and we made a list of all the reasons why we should stay there and all the reasons why maybe we should go to Wyoming, and the Arizona list was a page long and the Wyoming list was three or four lines. [laughs] I told 'em, I said, "OK, I'll tell you what, let's just pray about it."

17:36

And so we prayed about it and slept on it and the next morning we had a little council and for some reason, we all felt good about goin' to Wyoming. So I turned to my daughter and I said, "Now, what do you think about this? You're gonna be movin'. You're goin' to a whole other place, another school." She says, "It can't be any worse there than it is here. Let's go." So we left. It was a challenge, but it was nothin' like goin' to Arizona had been.

(Really? What was the difference?)

Well, I left that group in Tucson behind me, for one thing. You know, Nancy Zierenberg, the head of that outfit, she'd call me up and demand that I allow her to go out with my trappers and take pictures and things like that. And I'd tell her, "No, I can't let you do that." We would just go around and around and around and around over things like that. It was just a constant thing.

I remember one day sittin' there at my desk and I looked up and here comes that guy packin' a TV camera on his shoulder, walkin' in there, and some cute little honey shoves a microphone under my nose. "Mr. Phillips, can you tell us exactly how you can justify killin' 16 mountain lions in the state last year?" [laughs] No warning, no nothin', just, there they are. [chuckles] And Nancy had sent 'em in. So it was kind of entertaining that way. They stayed there and more or less picked on Arizona and New Mexico and kind of left me alone after I went to Wyoming.

30:36

The problems that I had in Wyoming was the politics, mostly. There was a pretty good portion of the major sheep producers there that didn't belong to the Wyoming wool growers. They had their own issues with the wool growers. So you would normally think that the Wyoming wool growers would be a pretty good representative of all the sheep growers in the state, but they weren't. So you had actually two factions out there. This group of guys is wantin' to do this. The wool growers are pushin' to do this. It was kind of a problem there.

Another thing that was a real problem for me there was that when I got to Wyoming, Bill was still there. They hadn't moved him out.

(Oh, he was still state director?)

No, he wasn't state director, I was, but he was just through the wall in the next room, still stumpin' to keep his job.

(Oh, my!)

And he was usin' the wool growers and the Congressional delegation, everybody that he had been able to make alliances with in his time in Wyoming, to help him. It was tough. I mean, the first day I walked in the office, I came in there and I met Bill in the hallway. I shook hands with him and he looked at me and he says, "You know, Rick, these are difficult times." I said, "Bill, I hope you realize that I didn't campaign for this." He said, "I know, I know. It has nothin' to do with you." But he says "I'll tell you this: just take my advice and don't own a house in both states, because I'm gonna be here if I can." And it drug on for a couple of months before they finally got the thing settled. But here I call up the executive secretary for the Wyoming wool growers and try to get something accomplished with him, and he's just got off the phone with Bill tryin' to keep his job. I never did ever get a good relationship with the Wyoming wool growers on account of that. I had a good relationship with a lot of the wool growers, but as far as the organization was concerned, I never did. It was detrimental to the whole thing.

42:15

(So that was a big difference in terms of the politics.)

Mm-hmmm.

(How long were you state director of Wyoming?)

From October of 1995 until August of 2000.)

(And then what did you do?)

Retired. [laughs]

(That's it!)

[laughs]

(Did you do any work for the government, volunteer or anything, after you retired?)

Yeah, I did some coyote trapping on a mule deer project down here in southern Idaho for two summers, just on a contract basis. There was federal supervision, but it was Fish and Game money that was payin' for it, and it gave me a chance to get back out and do what I started out doin' in the first place. It was kind of funny. I was thinkin' after I went down and picked up my traps and was headed down the highway toward where I was gonna be camped, I was thinkin' back 35 years before when I had made that same trip with a load of traps as a brand-new temporary trapper, and now here I was goin' down the same road as a temporary trapper again. I wondered if I had made any progress or what here. [laughs]

(Or another way to look at it, you did a lot in those 35 years.)

[laughs]

(Did you like Wyoming better than Arizona to be state director, or was it just different?)

43:53

It was just different. Totally different. Financial, politically, the people, everything.

(The land, huge differences.)

One thing that I got real discouraged with in Arizona was the fact that—we lived in Phoenix. There's three million people down there. People don't want to even acknowledge you're there. It's their way of dealing with livin' on top of each other, I guess. And so there's not the opportunity to really interact with people like you do in a rural setting. People out here in the Wild West, they seem to wave at each other. They're pleasant to each other. If anybody's wavin' at you in Phoenix, they're probably usin' their middle finger to do it. I got real tired of that real fast, and I had to—my wife loved it. She thought Phoenix was the greatest place in the world. She'd live there the rest of her life if she had a choice. But, she worked for the Forest Service. And for a girl who never did have an opportunity to really further her career any because she'd keep havin' to follow me around from place to place, she'd just get goin' good in one position and I'd move and she'd have to follow me and then start over in another position there, it was kind of tough on her that when we lived in Phoenix, she worked in Cave Creek, north of town out there. So when she'd go to work in the morning, she'd drive out through the saguaros and see the road runners and the coyotes and things like that, just loved it. And I'd get over there on Black Canyon freeway and head into town on bumper-to-bumper traffic and people blowin' their horns and cussin' each other. [laughs] It wasn't too much fun for me to go to work in the morning.

46:11

My wife absolutely hated the wind in Casper.

(Oh, really?)

The wind blows all the time there. It really gets on your nerves after a while. She didn't like that. [pause] It was nice to be able to shop anywhere you wanted to in Phoenix. Anything you wanted was close. Casper's a damn long ways from anywhere. So [laughs] she didn't enjoy that all that much. But I had great people to work with in both states. The thing that I've always enjoyed about my job is the fact that there was such great people out there.

(That is a good segue into one of my next questions, which is, what did you like best about your work? And I say that overall, over all the years. What did you like best?)

47:15

[pause] [sighs] That's a tough question.

(Or one of the best.)



[pause] You know, havin' the opportunity to interact with some real professional people in the wildlife field has been a lot of fun and educational. It's been just entertaining, you know. [pause] I always enjoyed fieldwork. I got into it because I liked fieldwork. I enjoyed workin' with bears. They were somethin' that really kind of pulled my chain, I guess. After I was a supervisor, my wife who always worried about me out there playin' with those bears in the middle of the night and stuff like that. She'd say, "Oh, boy, now you're a supervisor, you don't have to do that any more." Then somebody'd holler for help, one of the trappers would say, "Come and help me catch this thing, will you?" And I'd take off and she'd say, "You're just like a doggone race horse. Somebody says, 'bear' and you're ready to jump out of the gate." You know, [laughs] I guess probably workin' with bear was one of the more fun things that I did. It could be an awful lot of work. It was dirty. You'd be workin' with livestock carcasses that were rottin', stinkin', full of maggots.

49:16

My wife has a favorite story she likes to tell people about my takin' her with me one time. When we got up to where these kills were, and it was after dark when we got there, in fact, the sheep man that was with me chased the bear off of one of the kills when we got there, we just didn't get a shot at it. And there was no place to build a decent pen, and so we hooked this—there was a lamb and a ewe that had been killed, and we tied a rope to 'em and was gonna pull 'em up into a tree and I was gonna build a little chute and set the trap, set the snare underneath there.

Well, I threw the rope over a limb and went to try and pull this bait up into the tree, and it rough-locked and we wasn't gettin' anywhere with it. I had these other two guys there, helpin' me. And one of 'em climbed the tree and he got up there to where he could pull on it. The other guy was pullin' on the rope, and I had a shovel there. This old ewe, when the bear had opened her up to eat her, her paunch was hangin' out and the rib cage was pretty well empty in there. And we'd had her strung up by the head. So I got that shovel and stuck it up into the rib cavity up in here and I said, "OK, now, I'll push on this, you pull up there, and you pull on the rope and we'll see if we can't hike that thing up there."

51:00

So we did. I give a big shove on that thing and everybody pulled and yanked and whatnot, and it went zippin' right up into that tree, but there was a stub limb stickin' out there, and it hooked that paunch and dumbled all that green gunk out of the paunch right down my shirt front. So w, [chuckles] So we went ahead and set the snare and went down off the hill. The other people left, and my wife had the idea we was gonna go to a motel or somethin'. I just drug a teepee out of the back of the pickup and started settin' it up. She said, "What are you doin'?" I said, "We'll camp here." She said, "Oh, come on! Let's go to a motel." I said, "There ain't no sense in drivin' back down there 25 miles to the motel and another 25 back here. That's 50 miles we don't need to drive." She said, "You stink."

([laughs])

I said, "Well, yeah, I guess I do." [chuckles]

So I went over to the crick right there, over in this cold-water crick and proceeded to wash as much of that off as I could get, but I'm sure I wasn't too successful. Came back over there and

rolled out the sleepin' bags and went to bag. She laid there all night worryin' about this bear. She just knew if she was sleepin' by something that smells like bear bait—

(Oh, that—)

She was afraid the bear'd come down there and sniff me up. In the middle of the night I woke up. She was thumpin' me in the ribs. She said, "Rick! Listen to that! What is it?" I listened and there was some mice runnin' up and down the side of the tent. I said, "Honey, it's mice. Don't take any sound shots." She had a .38 special under her pillow, and I was in between her and the mice and I didn't want her shootin' over there. [laughs] Anyway, we woke up the next morning and had the bear and everything was cool. But she has never let me forget the way I made her spend that night up there.

([laughs] And she was worried about you getting attacked about the bear! What did you like least about your work?)

53:20

Politics. Had to be. In fact, that's the reason I decided to retire.

(Really?)

I just got tired of people changin' the rules in the middle of the game and somebody back in the Beltway tellin' me how I had to run things out here. It got real tiresome, you know. Joe Packham told me one time that a state director doesn't do much of anything but worry about money. He was pretty well right. You're continually worryin' about your budget. You're tryin' to keep your trappers funded, because there's this cooperative funding system that Wildlife Services works under, and you can't just say, "OK, I got federal dollars and I'm gonna spend the money." Federal money will only take care of maybe half your budget, or even less. The rest of it has got to come from cooperative resources, and those people expect results or they're not gonna dig in their jeans to give you the money.

You start havin' regulations come along that says that you've got to hire women or minorities whether they know how to trap coyotes or not, or they, the thing that really tore it as far as I was concerned was the FOIA.

(Freedom of Information Act)

For years we had had people that we were workin' for, some of 'em were pretty reticent to sign that control agreement that we required 'em to sign before we would work on their property, because they were worried that the wrong people would find out that they was cooperating with us and that they'd be subject to their barns gettin' burned down or their kids gettin' harassed or whatever, because that's the kind of thing that some of these people are pretty good at. [pause] And we would always tell 'em, "No, that's Privacy Act protected. We can't, we won't ever give your names out."

55:51

Well, we had stood fast behind that for years and years. And in 1995, I don't remember exactly the date, I think it was the winter before, there was this group in New Mexico that sued and

wanted the names of all the cooperators in New Mexico. Initially Alex Lara had told them they couldn't have it, and then somebody back East told the FOIA people, "You've got to release it." So they released all these names to all these people. They put the thing on the website under their "Hall of Shame," they called it. That led to a lawsuit by the Texas Farm Bureau to put a court injunction on us to keep us from doin' that. All this was goin' on at this time.

We had a state directors' meeting in Texas. The Justice Department set this lady lawyer out there to straighten us out on this whole situation, and of course none of the state directors were a bit happy with what she was tellin' us. I was particularly incensed about the whole thing, I guess. After the meeting, where she spoke to us, I happened to be out in the lobby of the hotel and she came downstairs and checked out and was gonna go get on her airplane, and I buttonholed her and talked to her some more about it. I told her, I said, "You realize why this ruling that you people have made, that you have just undermined my ability to deal with any of the people back where I come from, because you just made it so that my word's no good?" And she says, "Those people are just gonna have to understand that the law has changed." I said, "I beg to differ with you. That law didn't change. The way you are choosing to interpret it may have changed, but the law hasn't changed a bit." And she just more or less told me that was tough, and out the door she went.

58:11

I thought about it all the way home on the airplane, and I thought [chuckles] you know, I got my time about in and I'm about old enough, I think I'm just gonna pull the pin and let somebody else worry about this.

(And that was one decisions or one of the catalysts for you?)

Yeah. But as far as dealin' with people, the people in Wildlife Services are great, every one of 'em I've ever met, almost without exception, in all the states I've ever been in have been great people. That was one of the things I missed the most after I retired, was the fact that I wasn't in that loop any more.

(What did you find the most challenging about your work?)

Personnel. [chuckles]

(Management?)

Oh, I'll tell you—some of the supervisors, I remember one supervisor told me told me, he says, "I swear to hell I'm just bossin' a bunch of kids out here. I can't believe these guys [chuckles] don't act more mature." [laughs] Personnel problems was always a headache, and that also ties in with funding because you lay awake night after night worrying about whether you're gonna be able to keep this guy funded so he can keep his job because he's been there for 15 years and he's raisin' kids and he's got a wife that's working, and PAB is mad from some reason or another and they're talkin' about droppin' the program and goin' to a bounty program or some silly thing like that, you know. You get to where you feel like that you're responsible. If that thing happens, you think it's your fault. You don't want to have to go to somebody and tell him that he doesn't have a job any more. If you ever get into a position where you have to fire somebody, I hated that worse than anything in the world. It just was not fun. But I know old Wonacott used to look at

us, he'd just glare at you, and say, "Gosh damn you, I'll fire your butt!" We all thought he could do it, so we would really worry.

([laughs])

01:00:57

[laughs] Didn't realize how much paperwork that was gonna cost him at the time.

(And that he probably wasn't gonna do it!) [laughs]

But he put on a pretty good bluff.

(What was the most difficult social or political situation you found yourself in, and how did you get out of it?)

Hmm. [sighs]

(Did Arizona qualify?)

Oh, yeah, I think so. I think for that category you could just say Arizona. [chuckles]

([laughs] That's kind of what I was thinking.)

I had a problem there, too, because the previous state director had an extremely good rapport with the Arizona cattle growers. They were the chief cooperative entity that we had other than the state department of agriculture as far as funding was concerned. Arizona doesn't have very many sheep, and most of the work that we did there was actually for cattle. And the cattle growers were the ones that had the political clout in the legislature to get things done. So it was imperative that we got along well with them, and when I showed up there I had the same kind of a problem, and a way, with the cattle growers that I did with the wool growers in Wyoming, because they were mad because Daryl Juve had been moved, so they was lookin' me up and down to make sure whether I was gonna do anything that they wanted me to do, and of course, I did things different than Daryl did. So I was kind of suspect to begin with, and on probation to boot, you know. [laughs] So that was difficult. I was walkin' a pretty fine line there for a while tryin' to build a relationship with the cattle growers and the wool growers and tryin' to build a relationship with the agencies, all of 'em. It seemed like they was all mad at us when I got there.

Plus I had all those people down there in Tucson and everywhere that was givin' me trouble. They weren't the only ones. There was a couple more groups in New Mexico that were very active, and still are. But, ah, socially? [pause] I don't really know—I guess I just had to be me and if they liked it, they liked it, if they didn't, they didn't. [chuckles] I couldn't see any other way to do it. [laughs]

(I'm going to stop the tape here for just a moment.)

01:03:57 End part 2.

Part 3

00:00

(We're starting again on CD#2. The next question I have is, what is the funniest thing that happened to you while you were capturing or handling animals, or one of the funniest?)

Oh....., can't tell you. [laughs]

(The shirt story was pretty funny. [laughs] That was a pretty good one.)

I don't know, a lot of funny things happened, I guess. [pause] I guess one thing that I can think of that was kind of funny, after I was a district supervisor, I was out with one of my trappers one day, and he was settin' a coyote trap, down on his knees, settin' the thing there. He had it all buried and he was just gettin' ready to finish coverin' it up. And I had picked a trap out of the back of the truck and set it and walked over there behind him while he's doin' this. Just about the time that he reached down to poke the pan cover down in the trap, I sprung that other trap that I had. He thought he'd been caught when he heard that trap go off. He knew it was him.

I had never seen anybody jump three feet in the air off his knees, but he did. And on the way down he realized he'd been had. And he turned around and looked at me and he says, "You might as well shoot a man as scare him to death." [laughs]

02:03

(What's one of the scariest things that happened?)

Probably shootin' bear with a dead flashlight in the middle of the night. One of the things that I used to do if conditions looked right, if you'd go to one of those herds that was bein' harassed by the bears, you'd probably set a snare, maybe two, and then when the sheep would bed at night, I'd just take my sleepin' bag and go roll out right next to the herd.

(And wait for the bear?)

And wait for the bear. I was lucky enough to shoot quite a few of 'em that way when they'd come in and make a kill. But—

(And that was when you hadn't snared 'em? You just were lying in wait for them?)

Yeah, yeah, just waitin' for 'em to come in. 'Course, they'll grab a sheep and all the rest of 'em jump up and run. Quite often it was dark, no moon, so you knew that they, that somethin' had happened, because the sheep had all ran. You'd take your rifle and flashlight and just walk out on the edge of the herd, where they'd been, anyway, bein' as quiet as you could. Usually the first thing that you know when you was gettin' close to the bear was, you'd hear him eatin', he'd be crunchin' the bone, rippin' the meat, and you know he was right over there, but you can't seem him. Get up as close as you dared and flip the light on and hope he was there. If you had bright moonlight sometimes you could get up close enough to shoot and you wouldn't have to have a flashlight.

04:05

There was one night I remember, I had shot one and I guess the recoil of the rifle goin' off broke the filament in my flashlight bulb. So everything went black. He rolled around out there bawlin'

and raisin' Cain, and I couldn't see him. That particular instance, I beat feet back around the bed ground and left him over there doin' his thing until I come up with some more light to go back. That's pretty spooky.

(What did you do? How did you get another light?)

I went back to the—luckily the sheep camp was just down the hill a little ways. I went back and got a flashlight from the sheep herder and went back up there. He was pretty well shot. He wasn't goin' anywhere. But he was sure makin' a lot of noise. [laughs]

(In the dark! [chuckles] Wow. What was your favorite lure recipe?)

05:22

Oh, the lures that I used were pretty involved, really. I used a lot of essential oils and artificial musks and things like that to formulate 'em. I usually used a mixture of fish and coyote gland scent for a base, and then I would add the other stuff to it. I had three or four different lures that I used all the time. Acid was one thing that went into 'em. Canton musk, beaver castor, muskrat musk was really good. Mink musk is an awful good additive, but it doesn't last very long. It's hard to keep it there. I don't know, it's too volatile, I guess. It just goes away. But if you can get it to 'em while it's more or less fresh, why, they really like it.

(You made your own, obviously?)

When I first went to work, they gave me about half a gallon of Mast #5. It was great stuff. It caught quite a lot of coyotes. Looked just like mustard. They had a dye that they put in that was supposed to keep the birds from messin' with it when you put it on the M44s. But that was the only commercial scent I had a chance to use for a long time. They pretty much expected you to make your own lure or buy it or whatever. In later years, they got to where they'd buy a little bit of lure for the trappers. I gave the guys in Wyoming an allotment, so many dollars they could spend on lures so they could buy some if they wanted to. Because not everybody is a great lure maker. You can give five guys the same recipe and they'll come up with five different smells. So it's, some of those smells are gonna work and some of them won't. I kind of hated to expect those guys to base their jobs on whether they could make decent scent or not. If there was somethin' else out there that'd work better than what they were makin', they ought to be able to get it.

07:49

(What your favorite trap to use?)

Oh, for coyotes, I liked the old 3N Victor, that was the thing, just like the one there on my retirement plaque. That was the standard issue coyote trap for years and years and years. They lasted good. They were stout. The chance were good. Probably the biggest weakness of 'em was the cast jaws. They really did a good job, but they was brittle. If somethin' would happen just right, they'd break and you might lose an animal on account of that. It was really hard to take those jaws out and put new springs in or somethin' like that if you had to, because you'd be gettin' 'em in or out you'd wind up breakin' the damn things.

Later on, the last few years I was around, the push was to go to the #3 Softcatch. I never really did care for the things. Most people I knew didn't, but they was the politically correct thing to use, so that's what we was usin'. I know in one instance we had a situation in Arizona where there was a lot of feral dogs. Dogs was all over, and they was gettin' into people's livestock, they was killin' a lot of deer and antelope. I think the thing that really tore it was, somebody caught one of 'em trying to open up a Desert Tortoise. So the county commissioners up by Kingman, Arizona, came to us and they wanted us to trap these dogs. And I told them, "It's gonna be a nightmare as far as dealin' with the public's concerned here, because there's a lot of people that aren't gonna want you to kill those dogs." They said, "We'll have some public meetings and we'll see if we can't get it straightened out so we can."

10:07

So I gave them a proposal of how much it would cost and the commissioners said, "Fine. The cost is OK. We're gonna have this big public meeting." I showed up with some Softcatch traps, and like I knew, there was people that was just poundin' the table. "We don't want people settin' traps out here, they're gonna catch kids, they're gonna catch my dog." All this stuff. So I set the trap and put my hand in it and showed 'em, "See? It really doesn't hurt." [pause] One of these commissioners was sittin' there. He says, "Let me try that." So I set it and handed it to him and he set there and looked at that thing, and you could tell he really didn't want to do this, but finally he gritted his teeth and stuck his hand in there, and you could just not believe the look of surprise that came over his face. [pause] He says, "That don't hurt a bit! He says "I've got no problem with this thing. That's fine. Let's do it." Just like that.

(That was it?)

That was one case where the Softcatch did some good.

11:37 End part 3

Part 4

00:00

(This is CD #3 for the interview with Rick Phillips. You were just talking about the Softcatch traps. You were alluding to the fact that you and not many other people really liked them. What about them didn't you like?)

The thing that I had the biggest problem with 'em was, they sprung slow. They had a big, wide jaw face and soft springs. You was tryin' to be as easy on the animal as you could, so they didn't have enough flip in the springs to close those big, wide jaws fast enough to catch the animal. So there was an awful lot of times you'd have a sprung trap and no coyote. Research did a bunch of work on it and I think they finally decided that rather than setting the trap level, if you would set it so that the loose jaw was cocked up a little bit, that it gave it kind of a little head start and maybe it'd help.

There are people that use the Softcatch and like 'em, but I never really ever did think they was all that great of a tool unless you put more springs on 'em so they work faster, and that partially defeated the purpose of the trap in the first place. So I think politically that there's areas where you'd be crazy not to use 'em. But effectively, I don't think they will ever be as effective as the old 3N was.

01:42

(When you were using the 3N, did you ever make modifications on it? Some trappers modify their traps.)

I never did do too much to 'em until the Paws-I-Trip system came out. When the Paws-I-Trip showed up, I embraced those things with open arms. They were a great innovation as far as I was concerned.

(What was it called?)

A Paws-I-Trip. It's the tension device that goes on—actually, it's just a mechanical thing. The way the pan is constructed, the way the trigger is constructed makes it so that you can set it so that there has to be a certain amount of pressure on the trap before it would spring.

(And it was called paws-a-trip?)

Yeah, Paws-I-Trip, like dog paws and then a hyphen and an i and a hyphen and trip. They're commercially produced, and I think that probably most of Wildlife Service's programs are using them. Maybe I shouldn't say "most," but I know of several that are. It makes it so you can exclude an awful lot of non-targets. You don't catch the skunks and jackrabbits and things like that that you used to without 'em. They also make it so that when the coyote steps on the pan, you've got a little bit more weight committed before the trap fires, and he drops in and you catch him higher. So you don't have toe catches that way. It can be a problem if you're in a situation where you're trying to trap pups around a den, because they're little enough that they might not spring the trap unless you adjust it for 'em. But that is probably the major modification I made to those traps.

03:54

I tried hookin' the chain to the middle of the bait piece instead of havin' it out on the end of the spring, and I had mixed emotions about that. I made it so that it maybe was a little easier on the animal, because he was pullin' from the center instead of havin' it kind of off-center [pause] but it also made it difficult to bait the trap, because you had that bump underneath there, particularly if you was trying to bed it in rocky ground. Sometimes that was still a problem.

(Did you do coyote calling?)

Oh, yeah.

(Did you use your voice or did you use the electrical—now there are some audiotapes.)

I learned how to call coyotes from a guy named Bill Austin, who was one of the trappers in Wyoming when I worked there. Bill really got to be quite famous later on, and he had a line of calls that he called the "call of the coyote." But he was a really good coyote caller. He taught me how to call coyotes. And then of course I learned a bunch more as time went on on my own. But calling was really the first line of defense. I would always try that if I possibly could before I went and set traps. A lot of times you could solve a problem in just a couple hours where you might have been weeks doin' it with traps. I used mouth calls, mostly. Bill showed me how to



make a holler out of a piece of conduit and an old coyote-getter sign, and we experimented with different kinds of reeds for years tryin' to come up with somethin' that'd be better than that. Those old getter signs worked good, but they was brittle, and when you wanted it the worst, they'd split down the middle and you'd go phhlt! instead of comin' up with a call. [chuckles]

06:13

That was a good thing. We used the holler mainly to locate coyotes, and then you'd go in and call 'em with the wounded rabbit call. Later on, some of us kind of by accident found out that those coyotes would be comin' in to the call before you ever started with the rabbit call, and so we started experimentin' with callin' 'em in with the holler. And of course Bill got real good at that. He claimed he could speak coyote and all that sort of stuff, sold tapes teachin' you how to do it, things like that.

Voice howling, the first guy I ever heard do that was Mike Worthen. Mike was goin' to college at the time, and they hired him to be a temporary trapper, take part of my district up here. I was showin' him around the country and got to a place that looked like there should be some coyotes, and he said, "Well, why don't we put in a howl and see if we can get somethin' to talk to us here?" So he got out and rolled his head back and proceeded to yip and yell. I thought, "My gosh, that kid sounds pretty good!" And after he'd went home, the next day I was out doin' something and I thought, "Well, I'll see if I can't do that. I ought to be able to do that as good as he did," and I doggone near choked to death. I thought I'd strangled. [chuckles] It was something you definitely needed to practice at. [laughs]

([laughs])

07:55

But I've been acquainted with some extremely good voice howlers. There's some of these guys sound more like coyotes than the coyotes do.

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

Well, I hope I've got better. I don't know. Trapping methodology has changed an awful lot since I first started. Lures have improved. There was an awful lot of improvements got made back in the '70s and '80s in what they called the fur boom. Coyote pelts were sellin' for 100 bucks apiece, and foxes were \$50, \$60 apiece. There was—everybody in the world was out there trappin'. There was a lot of competition. There were some real strides made in lure formulations and stuff during that time period.

When I first started pretty near all the trappers used two traps to a set. They would almost without exception use flat sets, just to set on a rock or a stick or a bone or somethin' like that, and they'd hide the traps in front of it and everybody stressed, boy, you gotta bury those things and camouflage 'em so you can't even tell if the ground's been disturbed. Most people were extremely paranoid about human scent. You'd go to all sorts of lengths to keep from leavin' any human scent around your sets. The first place, I guess, that I decided maybe that that wasn't all that necessary was, I was out with an old boy named Bill Lassiter. He used to be a trapper out of American Falls down here. Bill was an old bachelor. He'd been a trapper for years and years and years. And he always chewed tobacco.

10:04

We were out settin' traps one day, and he was diggin' a trap bed, drivin' his trap stake. He wore leather gloves and used a hatchet to dig the trap beds and drive his stakes with. Well, he goes to drive in that stake and his leather gloves gets slippin' on his hammer handle, so he turns around and spits a wad of tobacco juice in the palm of his hand and goes back to poundin' the stake. I couldn't believe it. Then he's settin' the trap with this same glove. "Doggone, Bill," I said, "do your coyotes ever dig your traps up?" "Hell, yes," he said, "don't they dig up everybody's?" [laughs] And then he went on to tell me, he said, "I think that there's no way in the world that we can keep that coyote from knowin' we've been here. His nose is good enough that he knows we've been here. The only thing we can do is just try and make him think that we haven't been here all that long and that whatever we've done doesn't affect him." 'Cause they smell people everywhere they go. There's no place a coyote can go that they don't bump into people, where people have been.

I thought that over quite a lot, but I still do everything that I can to hold the human scent down. I've known people that set traps with bare hands and they caught a lot of coyotes. One of the trappers that worked for me in Arizona made the sorriest-lookin' coyote sets that I ever saw in my life, and he caught coyotes right and left. [laughs] So it's—

([laughs] I want to come back briefly, I thought of something, before we—because we're kind of wrapping up, what about, you said bears were your favorite thing to trap. What about them was so interesting to you?)

Well [pause] [sighs] I guess it was probably a couple of different things, I don't know. Any time you're dealin' with somethin' that can eat you, you know, it probably gets your adrenalin flowin' a little bit more than somethin' that don't. I don't know, my old Uncle Bill used to not be impressed by bears at all. When I was a kid, I was pumpin' him for all the bear stories he'd tell me. "What's it like to shoot a bear?" He'd say, "It's about like goin' out and shootin' somebody's pig in a barnyard." [laughs] And in a way, it can be that way. When you've got this thing tied up in a snare, and there's not a whole lot of sport in shootin' him, as far as that goes. But it's catchin' him that's the thing.

13:24

Bears have got a fantastic nose. They can smell better than coyotes, I think. They'll pick up the scent of a carcass maybe a mile away if the wind's right and go right to it. They're big. They're strong. They can be extremely wary and hard to catch. I used to occasionally try to catch a bear that a sheepherder had been tryin' to catch. And after they found out about those foot snares, then they was pretty hard to get ahold of.

We had a grizzly bear that showed up up in Island Park one time, and the interagency grizzly team had caught the bear the year before in a culvert trap for a research bear and collared him and turned him loose. Well, then they found out, after they started followin' the dang thing around, that he was habituated to people. He'd day bed within a hundred yards of somebody's house about every day. He would just hanging around people. He was secretive enough about it, most of 'em never even knew it. But he moved down into this Island Park area up here and started gettin' into people's garbage cans and things like that. And the Forest Service in particular was really concerned. They was afraid that he was gonna hurt somebody. And the

other flip side of that was that somebody was gonna hurt him, because people sometimes tend to shoot first and worry about the consequences later.

15:15

So the Forest started pushin' Fish and Game to catch this bear. Fish and Game resisted. They said, "He's not hurtin' anything, don't mess with him." Finally they got enough heat, they said, "OK, we'll try to trap him, but we're gonna use a culvert trap, 'cause we don't want to take a chance on hurtin' him catchin' him in a snare." We tried to catch that dang thing for days with culvert traps. He'd been in one. He knew what they were. He wasn't goin' back in there. All night we'd track this dang thing around with these beaver. One night, it's kind of funny, they had several game wardens that had come up there to help out with the thing, and the game department had a cabin at Island Park village. Myself and two other guys was out followin' this bear around here at night, and the guy that was runnin' the radio says, "You know, I think that dang thing is right in Island Park. He's right over there. He's gotta be." Pretty quick we took off and went off in different directions and we followed him around for a while.

The next morning, those guys that was stayin' there at that cabin had been sleepin' with the door open, and there was a dust basin right in front of the doorstep. And this big ol' grizzly track right there in that doggone dust basin right? Well, I'm sure, he'd stuck his head in the door to see what was goin' on in there, and these guys slept right through it. He went around the side of the house and tipped over the garbage can and rooted through that thing, and they all slept blissfully through the whole thing. [chuckles] They was all kind of lookin' over their shoulders when I talked to 'em the next morning.

17:13

Finally, it was evident we wasn't gonna catch him in a culvert trap, so they let me set snares, and then we caught him in a garbage dumpster right next to the Elk Creek subdivision up there. They radioed the bear and hauled him out. Next spring he was right back again. 'Course this time, why they still wanted to use culvert traps. We set a trap up right next to this summer home. We had the bear located with the radio. He was maybe 150 yards from where we were, day bedded. There was people drivin' by him on four-wheelers on both sides of this patch of brush he was in, and they didn't have a clue that he was there. We set the trap right where the wind would blow the scent of the bait right to him.

Next morning early we went back there and the trap door was down. We thought, "Oh, gosh, maybe we got him." Went over there and there was no bear in the trap, a big old gob of bear hair underneath the door. The trap that we was usin' was one that they borrowed from Montana Fish and Game.

(The culvert trap?)

18:31

Yep. It was a nice big trap, but the trigger system was right at the bottom in the front of the trap, and the game warden that has set the bait up had a quarter of road kill moose that he was usin' for bait, and he laid it in there and just hooked it to the trigger and layin' down the bottom of the trap. I told him I thought maybe that we needed to get it up closer to the front because I was afraid that the bear could reach it without gettin' inside, and that's what had happened. The old boy had probably just reached up in there, probably had both front feet in the trap, and he'd

reached up and hooked—it had big old claw marks in the meat, you could see where he'd drug it back and tripped the trap and that guillotine door had fell in the middle of his back and knocked a big chunk of hair on him when he left, but that was the only thing we did.

We went right back to usin' foot snares. Well, he'd spring 'em. We finally took the remains of this road kill moose and tied it to a tree and when we had the bear located, he was in the willows there at Henry's Lake outlet. We knew he was right out in there, just, like, 150, 200 yards. Set this thing up again so the wind would blow the scent of the bait to him and he couldn't miss it. We set I think it was five snares, blind, around there, just in places we thought that he'd step when he came in. Then I went off to the side and set one of these buckets that I'd made. I baited it with some tuna fish and [pause] some blueberry pie filling. I found three or four spawned-out cockney and I put them in there, just made him a little smorgasbord in this bucket. [chuckles]

20:39

The guys that were monitorin' the trap called me and says, "We got him! He's in the trap!" So we went up there at daylight the next day. Oh, he was disgusted. He was bawlin' and bellerin' and raisin' Cain. He had sprung four out of five of those snares and didn't get caught in any of 'em, and he took a big old feed off'n this moose. And then I guess he'd stopped off for dessert in my bucket on his way out and got caught in that. [laughs] So, but he was a smart bear. I'm sure he would have been a whole lot smarter. I don't really know whatever happened to him. Fish and Game insisted on takin' the radio off of him when they turned him loose. That was a real unpopular decision with everybody, Forest Service and us and the Park Service was especially mad about it because here this bear had already proved himself to be a problem and they turned him loose to goin' back and forth through the park and no way of knowin' where he was. But I kind of think somebody must have killed him some place, because we never saw any more sign of him there in Island Park. I think if he was still alive, we would have.

22:10

(If one of your grandchildren asked you about any trapping secrets, what would you tell them?)

I'd probably bore him to death for about the next week. [laughs] I've got two of these kids that's gonna be livin' with us here now for this winter, and I'm gonna take them out and teach 'em to trap muskrats, start out the same way I did. I'm sure they'll never go on to do things with it like I have, but it's just a [pause] hobby, I guess, that I wouldn't trade for anything. I'm back to fur trappin' now, and I've got coyotes that are livin' all around us here. We've been listenin' to 'em howl at us all summer, and about another 10 days, I'm gonna thin 'em out a little bit. It's just fun. I enjoy it. I've had the opportunity to have experiences followin' this trade that probably only a very few people in this world ever got to have. And I enjoyed it.

(Any secrets? Some trappers that I've talked to have some kind of trapping secret [laughs] kinds of things that they don't necessarily like to share. And some don't. Some just say, "I'll tell anybody anything.")

I'm not too close-mouthed about it. I used to have a method for keepin' my tracks from freezin' down that I was pretty close-mouthed about, because there wasn't anybody else around that could keep their traps workin' in frozen ground and get results, and I figured that that was job security for me. People would ask me what that was I was usin', and I'd tell 'em, "Oh, it's White

King's soap," or somethin' like that. As time went on, as soon as I got to be a supervisor, I told everybody what I was doin'.

(What were you doing?)

I used calcium chloride.

(And you were telling them White King's soap?)

Mm-hmm.

(What would you do with the calcium chloride?)

Well, as you get it, it comes in flakes of varying sizes. But it doesn't work well that way. You have to grind it up into a powder. Then you just mix it in with the dirt, and it keeps it from freezing.

(And you shared that when you became district supervisor?)

Yeah, in fact, you can do the same thing with table salt. It's cheap and it's easily available. Calcium chloride is just a type of salt. So, the down side of it is, it rusted the traps awfully bad. You had to have 'em waxed real well or it would rust 'em, and after you'd caught a coyote or two and they'd polished all the wax off, then it'd rust 'em anyway. But it sure did make it so you could keep traps workin' when the ground was harder than a rock. You could catch a lot of coyotes that you wouldn't have gotten otherwise.

25:32

Lures, I think, are probably the thing that people safeguard more than anything. They won't tell you exact formulations. I don't worry about that too much. Most of my formulas are involved enough that I've got 'em written down, so I would have to read 'em to you if I was gonna give you the exact formula.

Methods of setting traps, somebody might think that they've got the last word on it, but you go over the mountain a little ways, there's probably somebody else that figured out how to do it the same way. One ol' boy that we used to all admire, Fred Anderson, he used to live at Moreland down here and work at Big Desert. He was—I think when he was 70 they made him retire, if I remember right. But that old boy could catch coyotes. He was just a fantastic coyote trapper. But his supervisor said that he would never, ever set a trap in front of him when he was with him. He said, "You'd catch a coyote in a trap and old Fred would just take it out and say, 'Oh, I'll let that one air out for a while.'" And just leave it lay there. Wouldn't reset it while Bob was watchin' him.

26:57

Um, as far as secrets are concerned, I don't really know that I got any red-hot secrets. Most of what I know I stole from somebody else over the years. The bear snares, I think I've worked out a better way of usin' them than other people did, but that was just mainly a matter of payin' real close attention to detail, because there's so many things that can go wrong with a bear set. If that bear happens to step down so that he's got a claw stickin' close to the edge of the loop, it'll pull

it shut under his foot instead of puttin' it over the top where it belongs, which was one of the advantages of that bear bucket thing. They intentionally put their foot in the loop there, so that worked well.

(And that was your modification for that, to use the bear bucket?)

Mm-hmm. I always liked to have a backup, 'cause there's so many things that can go wrong in a bear set. A bird springs the snare, or you catch a sheep dog, or maybe the dang thing just springs it somehow or another and doesn't get in it. So I always liked to have somethin' else around just in case. You could—I've caught quite a few bears just in a whole in the ground

(Really?)

Just dig, like, a post hole and dig a trench down alongside of its so the trigger could extend into the middle of the hole, put some bait in the bottom, burnt bacon works pretty good for that sort of thing. I used to make a bear lure out of burnt bacon and honey and a little bit of anis extract, like you use for makin' licorice. That seemed to work for me pretty well.

28:58

(Would you do this in addition to the snare? Because you said it was a backup?)

If you make a pen, let's say you've built a pen here and you've got the kill back in there. If somethin' goes wrong and he doesn't get caught here in the front, then he eats your bait and he's gone. But if you set this bear bucket off to the side, or you rig up somethin' else for him there, that you'll maybe pick him up while he's monkeying around there, why, you've still got a chance to catch him.

You asked about scary situations, and I just happened to think of one that I think was probably the worst of any of 'em.

29:46

I had a man call me one time that had a bear problem, and he had a little farm plot, probably 250, 300 head of ewes. He grazed 'em on a bunch of waste ground and stuff on some of his fields out by Ashton, kind of right up against the mountain there. He says, "This dang bear has come in and killed several sheep, and I've been tryin' to get him, and I can't get him. Why don't you come see if you can get him? I've already got a pen made." He told me where to look for it. So I went up there the next morning and he'd made this pen by takin' two sheets of plywood and he'd set 'em up in a V, a bunch of little quakin' asp trees, maybe three or four inches in diameter up there, and he'd just propped 'em up in between those trees, wired the things to the trees, and had this old ewe layin' back in the back that was about half ate up.

I thought, "Boy, that's cool, I don't even have to build my own pen." So I went and got a snare. I thought he'd been usin' a trap, so I poked all around there to make sure that I wasn't gonna dig my way into a trap. There was no sign of one, so I started settin' the snare. About the time I've got the snare set made, I was lookin' everything over, and I decided the old ewe had one leg that was stickin' out there close enough, the bear could maybe reach it without gettin' over the snare. So I stood up and walked back into the pen and I grabbed that old ewe by the leg and went to

throw it up, heave her back into the pen further, and I noticed there was a piece of bale string tied to her leg. It went out through a hole in the side of the plywood.

I thought, “Now where in the devil is that thing going?” So I laid the leg back down and I went back out around the pen and this old boy had a 12-gauge shotgun tied between two trees back there with the muzzle pointin’ through another hole that he had cut in the back of the pen there.

(Oh, my gosh!)

And that string was goin’ right back and around and was wrapped around the trigger of that thing. If I’d of reared up on that thing to move that thing, I’d have blew my innards all over the mountainside.

(Oh, my!)

32:26

To say I was upset was probably a little mild. Then I went down and I braced the old boy about it. “Why in the devil didn’t you take that thing down?”

(Or tell me it was there.)

“Or tell me it was there?” I guess he felt funny and was embarrassed and his reaction was to laugh. And I had to grit my teeth just to keep from rarin’ back and just smackin’ him, I’ll tell you. I think about this, I still get that kind of a cold feelin’ in my belly realizin’ what [chuckles] he’d done. It was a spooky deal. But we did catch the bear.

(Well, good!)

He tore the pen all down. Since there wasn’t anything big enough to tie him to, I’d snubbed him to a log that he could move. And he pulled that thing right straight down across this alfalfa field and hung up in a net wire fence about 50 yards from the sheep camp. Scared the poor old sheepherder flat to death. [chuckles] He woke up in the middle of the night with this bear tearin’ the fence down right next to his wagon. [laughs]

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

I don’t really know, but I’m afraid that there might not be any trapping. And I think wildlife management is goin’ more from the ballot box than science all the time, and I really don’t know what is gonna happen 50 years from now. It’s— [sighs] I keep hopin’ that people will come to their senses, but I don’t have a lot of faith in the human race any more. [chuckles] I really don’t know. Trapping as we know it now, well, it’s not like I used to know it, and it’s gonna change. There’s no way around it. We’ve lost the ability to use traps on public land in Arizona. They can’t trap in Washington. They have real limited ability to trap in Colorado. Massachusetts lost their right to trap years ago. Florida has had nothin’ but snares for about as long as I can remember now. So I think one by one by one they’re probably gonna pick off a state here, a state there. And of course, there’s things that hit Congress all the time.

There was one bill that I'm aware of, probably it was more than that, but there was one just this last month or two that was introduced that would have done away with all trappin' nationwide. I understand that thing's been defeated in committee, but those sort of things are always comin' up. Our good buddy Congressman DeFazio is always tryin' to do somethin' about that. Some day somebody might be lucky, I don't know, get it done. I hate to think about it. I hate to think that my grandkids can't go out and do that sort of thing some day. [sighs] Out of four boys, I only had one that really did a lot of it, but he was good at, and he enjoyed it. Thing was, he couldn't make any money at it, so now he's a millwright and mechanic and anything else you want him to do, he can do it. [laughs]

36:42

(What do you see as the biggest challenges facing people in your line of work?)

Public opinion.

(Dealing with public opinion?)

Yeah. I think it— [sighs] The last few years that I was involved with the thing, you spent all your time tryin' to educate people about why you were doin' what you were doin'. Joe Blow out there doesn't even know there are government trappers any more. When they find out there are, why, they're surprised and they can't figure out why they even have to be there. A lot of fur trappers are kind of jealous. They would like the whole thing thrown open for about a year or somethin' like that. They don't see why they have to be spendin' tax dollars to hire somebody. So you run into some opposition from that quarter. But the fact of the matter is, those guys couldn't do it like we do it. Like I said before, if they're gonna make anything at it, they have to go out there and take the cream off the top and keep goin'. They can't afford to set there and wait for that old three-legged one out there that's been duckin' everybody for years.

38:23

(Over the years, when you first started, everyone probably knew what a government trapper did in their area, a lot more sheep, more livestock, I would assume. And that's changed now.)

You know, as you say, when I was a kid, the government trapper was looked up to as a professional in his field. He was the best at what he did, or he couldn't keep his job. And people admired him for it. But like I say, that's all changed. It's really not that way any more.

(And that's a big challenge. [pause] What other hobbies or interests do you have?)

Oh, I've always enjoyed playin' the guitar and my wife and I had a band for a number of years. We used to be Saturday night warriors all over the country. That was fun. But after I got to be supervisor, I was spendin' too much time runnin' all over everywhere otherwise and couldn't devote the time to it any more.

I kind of enjoy blacksmithing. I started with that years and years ago. I like makin' things out of steel. Hunting and fishing, of course. Fur trappin'. When I get a little time I like to knock chips off of a piece of rock and make arrowheads or somethin' like that. I don't know. I keep pretty busy. [laughs]



([laughs] It sounds like it! We've come to the end of my questions. Do you have anything that you'd like to add?)

40:21

[pause] I guess that it kind of tickles me that you're gettin' some of this down. I don't suppose I had anything to tell you that was all that exciting, but there's some of these people you're gonna talk to that got a lot of experiences that will go to the grave with 'em if somethin' isn't done. There's so many of 'em that have already gone that you'll never get that experience back. I wish that I could have some way of gettin' some of these old boys to tell me stuff. Like you say, most of 'em is so close-mouthed, they wouldn't tell you their secrets or whatever. Sounds like a nice project. I'm glad you're doing it.

(Thank you very much. This is the end of CD 3 with Rick Phillips.)

41:14 End part 4. End.