

Bill Brown

JG: This is an interview on January the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1998 with Bill Brown of La Grande, Oregon, director retired of the Oregon Department Fish and Wildlife, Eastern Oregon Division. ...Maybe, Bill, if we could start with just little bit of background of like when you were born and how long you've been here in the valley, Grande Ronde Valley, and then just briefly of your background with the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

BB: I was born in Riddle in 1914 and didn't live there very long, moved around to Gardner, Oregon for the first grade when there wasn't a road to it. And then to Roseburg and graduated from high school in Roseburg and then went to Oregon State and graduated from the first class of Fish and Game was in 1938. Went to work for the... I worked for the Oregon Department of Forestry for a combination of the Forest Service for eight summers from the time I was fifteen on, as a lookout and then a mounted smoke chaser for the last four years. Then I went to work for the Oregon Game Department, the Oregon Game Commission then. Frank Wire, the director. And my first job was...the major part of my job was live trapping and transplanting beaver all over the state. I had four trappers working in northeast Oregon and we moved Oregon beaver to...all over the state.

JG: What... Do you remember about what year that was?

BB: About 1939, 1940. In the fall we worked the big game season. And then I went...I had a reserve commission in the Army so I got called early and so I had five years as a...started out as a horse-drawn field artillery and two years in the Pacific and then one year in Italy. I wound up the war as provost marshal at Brenner Pass in Italy the end of the European war. And then I came back and went to work for the Game Department again in 1946 as the first district game biologist for southwest Oregon. I had five counties down there. And I worked there until 1949, Bill Sneider, who was Frank Wire's assistant, a '39 graduate, one of the greatest, [laugh] dreamed up the idea of the regional system whereas instead of each employee in the field reporting to somebody in Portland who he'd never seen, to set up Oregon in five regions and all the employees in that region would be under one supervisor so they could exchange duties and we had people that only worked three months out of the year, tend a fish stream there, the rest of the time they run their plumbin' business or somethin'. So I came to northeast Oregon in order to start the guinea pig region up here to start it. And uh, I had nine counties. We got it going and then after two years, why, it was working so the whole state went on it. Now every state in the Union uses some modification of that system.

JG: How long...what year you retired?

BB: I retired in 1976.

JG: I'd like to...what this is, of course, it deals with all of the Grande Ronde watershed on the upper regions, see, like from Looking Glass on up into the headwaters and all the tributaries, kind of a history, you know, I'm tryin' to drive here. And got a few things, a few holes, that maybe you can fill me in on of things that...like a giant jigsaw puzzle, you know, kind of pull all this together. I've been told it should've been done twenty-five, fifty years ago when you still

had a lot of people that still alive that had that first-hand knowledge. But I was wondering like how the Grande Ronde river system itself if you maybe would start with this stretch where the Interstate goes up from Orodell or La Grande here up to Hilgard of any changes you can recall there, the vegetation or...

BB: Just the river between...

JG: Yeah, along the river reach there from Hilgard down to La Grande.

BB: Well, uh, the major changes of...which there'd been a fire go through there, which was a natural thing. The worst thing that happened was when the tussock moth hysteria hit.

JG: It showed up right there just across...

BB: Yeah, right along the river, yeah.

JG: Yeah, right along the river there.

BB: Which is a natural phenomenon. But the disaster was, that one of the local timber beasts convinced 'em they're gonna have to cut all the trees 'cause they're all gonna die, which is not true and the Forest Service entomologist told 'em it wasn't true. But they really got a hysteria goin'. He flew people, you know, journalist out by the airplane full from New York and so on. They got a lot of timber for nothing as a result. [laugh] But, they did start to clear-cut along the river there. Fortunately, we got that stopped and so they didn't clear-cut a lot of it. But otherwise it's a lot like it was when I came here. Well, my first... My first duty there was in 1939. Outside of the snow is a lot cleaner since the trains don't burn coal anymore. [laughs] And that really made a difference in the canyon the way it looked in the wintertime. Those old coal burners really had it black up there. And there've been some pretty heavy fires on the south slopes caused by the railroad. And that hasn't been a recent occurrence, but there were some years when that slope burned every year.

JG: I can see quite a bit of remnants there, I mean the results of it up there.

BB: Now that was pretty darn good deer and elk winter range until those fires... One fire wouldn't have...wouldn't have hurt it, but persistent fires, you know, year after year, really change the nature of the vegetation on that south slope. It used to be that you could count quite a few deer and elk wintering there. But if you do see...see 'em in that canyon you'll have to see 'em on the north side now.

JG: Do you remember...

BB: Incidentally, on that north slope I've seen not only deer and elk, but I've seen antelope...we had one antelope that wintered there for two winters...and mountain goat...I saw a mountain goat there last year, a real trophy big horn ram. That seems to be a travel route that north slope around there. Every one that I've seen tracked up both of the rare animals were travelin' towards town, but then they hit a gulley up there where that diverts 'em south.

JG: Do you remember what the vegetation went to after the fires there, or before and after, the ground vegetation? Of the brush?

BB: On that south slope?

JG: Yeah.

BB: Well, it went to pretty much to annual grasses because it was grazed pretty heavily. And so it went from a brush...more or less pretty good shape native grasses with some timber to Medusa-head rye and cheat grass. I would guess that

- that's what the bulk of the vegetation is on that slope now although it's been rested from the fire and it should be doin' some recovery on the native grasses. But I used to ride that so I personally pretty, you know, familiar with it, but I haven't ridden it for, oh, twenty years and so I really am not sure what's happening since it's got a rest from the fire. Both of the fires were started by hot metal comin' off the wheels.
- JG: Yeah, yup. That was pretty frequent, you know, all the way to Union every once in a while you saw 'em out there towards Hot Lake and goin' up towards North Powder there. Every whip stitch, it seemed like that would happen with the conditions just right. What about the cottonwoods community down along...right along the river itself.
- BB: A lot of those have been cut out. There've been a couple of spells that went...the market must've gotten right or...to cut that stuff so about all the accessible rivers in Northeast Oregon got hit to a certain extent.
- JG: Do you remember, Bill, when about that was and what they were using that for?
- BB: I think it was goin' for paper, for pulp. I think goin' to Walla Walla to that mill up there.
- JG: Do you recall anything about like what year or what period of time that was when that got started on that?
- BB: I'm eighty-three years old, I've been dropped on my head pretty hard several times. [laughs] So dates unless it happened to be somethin' that... I've got two bushels of diaries.
- JG: I know and the Indian Creek we used to have, or, you know, all over here, was white fir. There wasn't any market for it until, oh, about the...probably the mid-'60s when that started occurring. 'Cause at first you just let the white fir stand and then you got in to going from there to stackin' 'em wait for a market and put 'em on the deck, you know. Then finally the...you know, open that market up over there in Wallula, and that started towards the later part of the '60s as far as...I don't know of any market before that, you know, around here.
- BB: Yeah, it was just trash trees.
- JG: Right. Yeah, you couldn't give it away. Going farther up the river itself do you recall anything about the splash dams or any history on those when they were logging before the turn of the century and they'll float the logs down the river?
- BB: I do not have anything, no knowledge of how those operated.
- JG: What about the beavers up the Grande Ronde? I remember, you know, you saying that you transplanted beaver in this country along there late '39 and '40 about, you know, from that period on as far as the beaver population up the Grande Ronde up into \_\_\_\_.
- BB: It worked up in the...to where we had quite a few beaver in that area, say, in the '50s and '60s. Well, you'd even see beaver sign on the little ponds along the highway. And with the unlimited open season they're still a viable, healthy population of beaver. But they're bein' harvested, not as heavily as they were for a while because the price has dropped, but for a while when you had fifty dollar a blanket beaver, why, they were goin' after 'em pretty good. A lot of those old trappers died.
- JG: Yeah. There aren't too many still active.

BB: Those old boys that really made a livin' at it. So they're just kind of a target of opportunity, but they're still a healthy population as good as the habitat is. The habitat has been harmed a lot by work on the stream, to prevent ice jams and so there really wasn't a natural stream with eddies and backwaters that beaver need. So I think that really the effect of just physical...the changes to the stream are more important than any other thing as far as the population's concerned.

JG: What about, you know, as far as the distribution of beaver all the way up in towards the head waters? Do you recall anything \_\_\_ in the...like you said, there's a lot, you know, below the roads in little ponds and like that, did that pretty much stretch all the way through there?

BB: Yeah. They went pretty well up as good as the habitat would allow.

JG: Food source.

BB: Yeah. It's surprising when some of the places where'd you see where they were workin'.

JG: This last summer over on Camas Creek and then on, oh, there at Five Meadow Lake were...at the base of Five Meadow there's a beaver up there and they're workin' on lodge pole, you know. You think more of the...

BB: Oh yeah.

JG: ...aspen like there and all you had was lodge pole to work out on there. Same way over in Camas Creek, it was all lodge pole in there pretty much.

BB: When they're workin' on lodge pole it's pretty marginal habitat, but they can do it, they have to.

JG: It looked like...

BB: But Camas Creek has always had a good population, for some reason or other. This per mile at Camas Creek you got more beaver than I ever saw anywhere on the Grande Ronde.

JG: Up at Five Points they're still workin' this spring workin' on the cottonwoods in there. That was a good...looked like a good... It got washed out, it had a lot of trees down then that high water came through, took everything down river and they's back up there cuttin' again a little later, you know.

BB: Uh-huh. But I think the removal of those cottonwoods in the past has had an effect on the beaver population because you didn't have the seed trees and the volume that you now that you had then to start those young trees that are really the most productive for the beaver.

JG: Yeah. Keep it perpetual.

BB: Yeah.

JG: Do you recall during, see, it was what, 1960 when the interstate replaced the old Oregon Trail highway as far as anything they're doing... What I did, I looked over the old photographs, you know, looking at where the old road and everything was and then when they put the interstate in then it looked like there was a number of places of course they changed that river channel.

BB: Yeah. They really... That river's really been abused clear the full length of it. And that freeway certainly took a lot of the bends out and straightened the banks. But probably the most damaging thing was the removal of the boulders and logs and everything that was done back in the old railroad days to keep that...those ice jams from forming. They really worked that river over for that purpose.

JG: As far as fish habitat, again going from La Grande up into the headwaters or different fish species. I got quite a few people, you know, comment like over there on the Catherine Creek area that was, you know, with salmon and catching those and were, evidently, you know, seemed to diminish slowly over the years. Haven't talked to too many people about as far as up the upper Grande Ronde country, do you recall?

BB: The Grande Ronde in my history with it never had the percentages of population that Catherine did, but it wasn't as good a habitat. The habitat has been lowered so much by jerkin' all the logs out and takin' the rocks out and straightenin' some of the bends in order to handle that ice jam thing. And so it was just wasn't as good a habitat in modern times as it probably was before. But Catherine Creek is...has until right recently hasn't had a lot of changes made in it. There's dam that certainly is a detrimental to salmon passage, but then the State Parks did some real damage above the State Park there, there again to stop ice damage in the park. And they went clear up onto that extension service land.

JG: The Hall ranch there.

BB: Yeah. It was on the Hall ranch and bulldozed that channel out, and well, as soon as they did that the gravel started to move and it changed the whole nature of the stream in that stretch. For the most part it hasn't been tinkered with. It was much more productive for salmon than the Grande Ronde, off the cuff opinion.

JG: I remember when I got out of the Army in '59 and around '60 or right in there there was still a lot of salmon.

BB: Yeah, that was pretty good fishin'.

JG: Yeah. But even when it had the high water, you know, it was just mud comin' down through there and there was still even a few bunch of salmon, you know, kind of get up through there at that time on that.

BB: Yeah, that dam that...there below Union used to be a real snag in problems for the State Police and you can't have a snaggin' problem if you don't have fish. It was pretty good.

JG: Do you remember when that got changed up? 'Cause reading some of the history there it seemed like that was pretty much a barrier there, the Davis dams, the lower dam, I guess, wasn't it?

BB: Yeah.

JG: \_\_\_\_.

BB: Yeah, it really was a stopper. I think they got a fairly satisfactory ladder goin' in it. One thing about the size of the creek, it's not like some of these big streams and you got one little ladder someplace. The ladder's easier to find. If it's at all suitable they'll find it. Whereas in some of these bigger streams they put a ladder in and there's a lot of other water comin' over and the fish can waste a lot time tryin' to find where the ladder is, or maybe never find it. But I think that the...that it'd been better for the salmon if the dam wasn't there. Since it is I think they got that ladders a-workin'.

JG: 'Cause it worked, I guess up through there, you know, they're there and then, of course, back up to Union water intake \_\_ towards that thing. I didn't \_\_ 'em \_\_\_\_.

BB: The fish got over good enough that the...for quite a while the Indians were still fishing that upper river.

JG: Do you recall about the period of time that they were fishing up there, Bill?

BB: I know they were fishin' pretty extensively in the '60s, but I don't know how long that lasted.

JG: Do you recall anything about about how far up or where the prime areas where that they were fishing?

BB: They were fishin'... I know they were fishing pretty extensively on the Hall ranch. That seemed to be a popular area right in there. But I don't know really how high they went.

JG: What about the... Do you remember anything about the eels up the Grande Ronde and up Catherine Creek as far as population of lamprey or eels?

BB: You've raised into somethin' I was thinkin' about the other day. Yeah, they used to run and I'm...you just don't hear anything about it. You know I'm out of touch for twenty years. [laughs] But, yeah, we used to get a lot of lampreys that ran all these streams.

JG: Do you recall...were they pretty much like in the valley area or in the upper reaches of the streams, too?

BB: The went up probably as far as the salmon went. The salmon went up the Catherine quite a ways considering the size of the stream. They went in the smaller water than you usually think of.

JG: I think a lot of the...well, then about time that you're plantin' those beaver when they started building those roads and logging up there they, you know, push a lot of that side cast, you know, into the stream and start puttin' a bunch of barriers in there just about that time around '40, I think '41, somewhere in there.

BB: And then the Fish Commission came along and pulled 'em all up. And they had a crew doin' nothing but that. That was the only good benefit of the merger, I stopped 'em doin' that. [laughs] They had a crew that worked all of its days pullin' logs out of streams.

JG: I'll be darned! I didn't know that.

BB: The Chesinim they cleaned it out, I believe it was them. As soon as we had the merger we started puttin' 'em back in.

JG: 'Cause I knew they were, you know, were doing that...or the policy was that way, but I didn't know what the background was. I didn't know they actually had a crew.

BB: That was the commercial fish outfit. They had a crew that went around. Unfortunately, they had a heck of...the fish guide charge up. [laugh]

JG: Made a lot of progress.

BB: Yeah. They even went into the Wilderness Area in the Minam, pulled the dam.

JG: Do you recall on the Minam there, you know, that splash dam. Do you remember, Bill, any history about when that went in there or when they were logging in there, that Minam country?

BB: Well, it was started...they were loggin' before World War I and probably through that period. Of course, to me this is all hearsay, but probably into the '20s. But I think the heaviest loggin' was in the teen years.

JG: But they were floatin' all that down the river, weren't they?

BB: Yeah. They were all... They had a splash dam, you know where it was, and yeah, they were winter loggin' and uh, \_\_ 'em on the river and hydratin' the pine

and then splashin' it down the Minam to the mill right at Minam. They took that dam out twice. I can't remember the year, but it wasn't too long before I came here the first time they took...blew the dam, but they didn't take it all out. It just really destroyed the salmon spawn for a couple of years because all that granite, sand and mud that had accumulated behind the dam flooded down and covered the spawning beds. Then that, of course, floods and so on slooped it out and then when the Fish Commission blew it again, why, there was a lesser effect, but there was still some movement of that stuff, but it wasn't the volume that there was before. And they did that...I was here when they did that.

JG: Do you remember about what year that would've been?

BB: They can tell you down at the office. I'd rather not...not use my memory on that one. I remember they had a crew in there all summer, supplied 'em by helicopter and motorcycle from Red's horse ranch. And put those long steps in the gorge, you know about those, tryin' to build a ladder effect, cuttin' slices in the rock and then puttin' logs in so they had steps to let the fish up. And they'd move the bulk of the dam.

JG: Did that at the same time?

BB: Yeah. That would be part of the same operation. And that left the salmon spawn up into the upper river. We can assume there were quarters turned off now, [laughs] but sure raised hell with the trout fish up above. Salmon are pretty strong competitors to resident trout.

JG: That's what I read about some of the history.

BB: Oh God, that was good trout fishin' up there!

JG: Yeah, pay for one thing and something else can take the blunt of it.

BB: But that was...oh, I raised my family up there. I really...from I think the first trip in they made was in '51 and every year of vacation for...you know, on the Minam or...with some swings into the high country.

JG: I knew you'd spent a lot of time over there.

BB: Yeah, we didn't take a vacation anyplace else. But that was good trout fishin', big fat trout. I could stand at one place with a little island, my favorite hideout camp across the river, and a nice bend and take and release ten real nice trout, you know, from just one place. [laughs]

JG: What kind of trout were up in there?

BB: Those are rainbow.

JG: Oh, rainbow.

BB: And there were dollies too, but my...our type of fishin' didn't take dollies very often. There was a rare drive-by fisherman. The only time you really took one of those good dollies was when you made a mistake and sank your fly.

JG: Again, going back on the upper Grande Ronde, do you remember anything like the steelhead or the trout fishing up in the...above La Grande?

BB: The fishing you're talkin' about?

JG: Yeah, for rainbow or any bull trout or steelhead.

BB: Well, bull trout were more apt to be taken in the canyon. Then there were big bull trout in the Minam. But I don't...and the Wannaha had the best bull trout fishin' in Oregon, big, big salmon-sized bull trout. I've seen those heads layin'...at that time we had a guy that was head of fisheries that hated bull trout 'cause he

thought they eat salmon. So he did everything to destroy 'em that he could and he was fairly effective. One of the things he did was they had a no bag limit, no length limit and no season. You could take bull trout any time you could catch 'em and keep as many as you wanted. Some of those guys were goin' into Wannaha with pack horses. And we put a weir in the Wallowa River above Wallowa Lake and hired a young high school kid there to look after it to keep the bull trout from gettin' up the river to spawn. And there were eight to twelve-pound dollies trapped behind that weir. And essentially it eliminated the Dolly Pardons from Wallowa Lake. But we had quite a campaign before we got those Dollies back some kind of management on 'em. We tried to get 'em included in the regular trout bag limit which would've made a big difference. This guy, who incidentally was a good personal friend of mine, we were elk huntin' partners for ten years, but we disagreed on that. [laughs]

JG: Different philosophy.

BB: Yeah. But anyhow he just...in our pre-hearing...in our meeting before the regulation proposal was submitted to the commission, why, he'd veto it every year. And one year... There used to be Dollies layin' in that...in the big blue hole, you know, up the Wannaha. They'd just lay in there just like salmon, but you had those steep banks and you couldn't land 'em. There were big ten-pound fish and better. I had a friend with the Forest Service, he was in charge of research out of Portland, he was a writer. And I told him about those big trout so we were gonna go up there sometime in the next week expedition and fish for 'em. And I had a beaver trapper here that was really a good woodsman and a good fisherman for Dolly. And Alvin Bennett, he...his favorite bait was to shoot a ground squirrel and take that fresh hot meat, you know, with all the juices comin' out of it, make a big bait. And I told this guy about it and Bob...what's his name...he was in charge of the Starkey outfit at that time and this guy made his trip and I had to go to Portland and couldn't go with him.

JG: Bob Harris?

BB: Bob Harris.

JG: Yeah.

BB: Yeah. But I told him about this story about Alvin usin' squirrel for bait. So this guy wrote a hell of a story and sold it to *Outdoor Life*. The jist of it was that he and Bob got up there and this old mountain man told 'em about usin' squirrels for bait, well, boy, it looked pretty big, they shot a squirrel, but they put the squirrel on the hook, cast it out there and come up this ten-pound Dolly. He had...I told him about all the problems and I told him about a turtle trap that I used to have for catchin' crawdads and turtles over in the Umqua. You just take a big chunk of four-inch mesh screen wire about so big square and then turn the sides up like so and so you had a hole at the top and then you catch those turtles when you...and then put a pole on the wire, four wire, so you can keep it up, big pole. And I used to catch crawdads for my dad to fish Dollies that way. And well, anyhow, so he had one of those and they caught a ten-pound Dolly and had a picture and all this stuff and this old mountain man's story, you know that's not the way they did it. But anyhow, the Imnaha was really a Dolly stream, but it was still...at that time



still on the no bag limit, no length limit deal. Anyhow, old Rainer, Bob Sayer, did you know Bob?

JG: Yeah.

BB: Well, Bob was my biologist and has been tryin' to sell this at the meeting. And old Rainer he started makin' his pitch, put some protection on the Dolly, they're cleanin' 'em out. And old Rainer let him go and then finally says, "Well now, just what does Dolly Pardon eat?" And so Bob says, "Accordin' to *Outdoor Life* they eat squirrel." [laughs] Then everybody in the room laughed so hard Rainer was embarrassed and he dropped it. Then we got the regulation changed. [laughs]

JG: The ways...what you have to go through sometimes to get something done.

BB: Yeah.

JG: That's funny. What about, Bill, out in the valley here as far as habitat change from when you had first come here and, you know, through the '50s and '60s leading up to date of changes, you know, along the river areas?

BB: About the only change that I know of of any consequence was the...when they did some work on the...on the freeway, why Bob got the State Highway Department to dump some big rock in that stretch of the river from town on up. That changed that habitat quite a bit, but it's only on that one stretch of the river. They did a lot hurt or run a drift boat down when the water got low, but it was...was probably an aide to the fish in the package of that area, but that's a travel area, it's not a...

JG: Not the spawning area.

BB: Not an important spawning area. But every little bit helps. And of course the highway was a really traumatic change in that stretch of the river. So it probably was a net loss in habitat even though they did some mitigation and certainly...

JG: There's a lot of things they've...like I said, I've worked that out of aerial photographs there and, you know, looked at what was there before and what was, you know, gone after they, you know, changed that...put the freeway in. There's a lot of...a lot of...I think there's...I can't remember now how many miles, but there used to be miles and maybe up to three, something like that, actually in the length. It seemed like that it was changed or modified or whatever. \_\_\_ measurement \_\_\_.

BB: But when you eliminate a loop, why, you...you've done some harm, it doesn't matter what else you do.

JG: What about the cottonwoods that were, you know, you have quite a few of course down the canyon here into La Grande and then going out. Do you remember how far those were going out into the valley or how extensive those cottonwood communities were within the valley itself?

BB: You mean below La Grande?

JG: Yeah.

BB: On the State ditch there weren't really a lot, there were some, but not a lot of 'em.

JG: Do you remember...of course once you log a land, you know, the Soil District went through a lot of land leveling and taking, oh, I think both up Catherine Creek and out in the valley here during the '50s and, you know, later of how much change there was in some of those projects?

BB: Well, they did a lot of drainage more they did leveling. It was...as a matter of fact I had a race with a...they had a guy in charge of the Soil Conservation outfit that was hard-workin', efficient, son-of-a-gun and that's your problem when you get a government employee like that. [laughs] And we were in a race to see if...[end tape]

BB: ...and I was tryin' to set up the Ladd Marsh thing in 1950 to '49...I actually started in '49 to try to preserve some marsh. And we bought one 200 acre chunk that includes what we call Lone Pine Hill...at that time it only had one pine on it... [laugh] and went over almost to where the freeway is, an l-shaped piece. It took kind of the heart of the marsh.

JG: Yeah, the \_\_\_\_

BB: Bought it from Grandy. At that time they had the...the State Farm Bureau had their state meeting here and one of the locals out in the valley was runnin' for president and he needed a campaign so they took on my project at Ladd Marsh. And at that time we had a...had a no-good director, alcoholic son-of-a-gun, friend of the governor's, wanted to replace Frank Wire. Had a brand new commission, five new commissioners with no experience under the belt. They really whipped me because we didn't have a sportsman group here to give me any protection, you know, any local help and I was new...workin' my new stuff. They got the governor up here and two commissioners and whipped 'em around and the result was I got orders to abandon this project and sell the land that we already had acquired. Well, we didn't have a Land Division then so I put the land up for sale. One little thing they didn't tell me is how much it was worth. [laughs] And I kept very strict records on this thing. We had seventeen people applied to buy it, none of which wanted it. I had the price set at seventy-five dollars an acre, which was about the price of wheat land out here at that time. And I figured that wetland is scarcer than wheat land and so it was worth more. So we just knocked around in limbo for a couple of years and then we had a commissioner, a rancher, Delbert Gildersleeve over at Haines, hell of a good guy, and uh, but he was real green when this thing was goin' on and he was all for supportin' the public. And then people kept comin' to him, "Hey, this was a pretty good project." Delbert's heart was in the right place and so...and he had guts and so he...we got together and decided to set up a project. And he bought enough and we had Phil Sneider in there in the corner makin' it go when we got rid of that drunken director, who was an old friend of my family. His wife used to baby-sit me, called me Billy. But we didn't see eye to eye. But anyhow, we got...so I wrote a new...new project, but there'd been a lot of changes in that time. In fact, the original project ran clear to McAlister here and over to the highway and clear to Hot Lake and all on this side of the railroad. So we set it up...it isn't at the present boundary of what I set up, but Dee Smutz's place is in that boundary. And someday, why, the Erwin will decide to bunch it and he'll probably be able to get it. But he's...he's a good neighbor and so... And we... This guy...this Soil Conservation guy had figured out a way to whip me. And he got Dick Smutz and one of the councils...Walt Teevler and they figured by diggin' a ditch around my L-shaped place on Dick Smutz's place. You know where Dick's place is?

JG: No.

BB: Well, it's out...there's no house there anymore, there's a big barn.

JG: Oh, okay. Yeah, I know.

BB: But he owned out into the marsh into the tule area. They'd run it right down our boundary and around the end around Harley Counsils and Harvey had the low place and round Peebler's and then go on out. Well we wouldn't of had any source of water, it would intercept all the water then the marsh and we're drained. But I was breakin' a four-year-old colt...this was a gravel road then...and I worked this colt out to Harley Council's place, which is about three miles, and the winter, visit with Harley and Lou, they're out in the wind feedin' cattle. I got to know 'em real well. That's the way I bought the Grandy place, pettin' their cat in town. [laughs] But anyhow, so I cut a deal and I bought seventeen acres from Harley for \$135 an acre. And I figured, well hell, that's good marshland, it's worth...worth a lot, you know, worth more than wheat land. And it's just right in the corner and they couldn't dig their ditch anymore. [laughs] So that stopped that one. Old Dick kept tryin' to figure out how much I paid for that land and he went in and counted the stamps on the deed. I didn't know if there was anything that says how many stamps you have to put on those things. You can put as many as you want on 'em. [laughs] Eventually I bought Dick out too, but... But anyhow, that's the way we stopped the drainage of the marsh. And then we brought our surveyors up here to survey it, boy, this country's terrible for a survey, you know, God, there's no corners established.

JG: What they did, you know, I was readin' the old survey notes they just took like a cottonwood stick or somethin' and stuck it down the, you know, in the soil there so you don't have anything to, you know, last very long.

BB: The nearest section corner, this is established, is right in the center of the road there at Gekeler...at Gekeler and 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Foothill Road, right by the Game Department. There was a spike there, that was a gravel road. Every survey no matter where it was somebody went out and dug that up and got it. Well anyhow, our surveyors figured out that, good God, Harley had a heck of a chunk of Dick's land, was fenced into his place. And old Dick came over and I said...he said, "I don't care what your survey comes out, you're not gonna move that fence." Okay. We never did tell him where the boundary was. [laugh] He never did find out until his...till we bought Harley's place and then the survey showed it. But Harley had...Harley's farmin' a lot of Dick's land. But it was interesting, but you had to...you had to stay alert, either that or just give up. And I was in opposition in Portland all the time. The head of our Game Division, John McKeen, lifetime family friend and grade school compatriot, but we never did see eye to eye on that. He fought me all the way so I had to keep my skirts clean. But we got it.

JG: I guess now it's up over 3,000 acres all together.

BB: I haven't kept track of the acres. When I retired it was 2,600, but they've got some more and they're gettin' some more. They got another acquisition about 300 acres comin'. But the stuff they're buyin' now is outside the boundary of what I had set up. But when I retired the State owned...the Department owned more land in the Northeast region than all the rest of the state put together. [laughs] And every foot of it wangled out under old John McKeen. [laughs] But

probably the most valuable thing that we did in that period was acquirin' that land in the long ranch...in the long run.

JG: Oh yeah. Yeah, 'cause that's there forever, you know.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. Habitat's the key to ever...

JG: Yeah, it is. Yeah. To the whole thing.

BB: Yeah. So we had to...well, even on the Imnaha when old Chainsaw was...was supervisor he was...we were old traveling buddies, old 3C mates. But he was for cuttin' every tree and startin' over. He bragged there was never gonna be an acre of wilderness on the...on the Umatilla. And my organized saved the Minam to get...well, we made three assaults on it, you know. Every time you compromise and Hatfield they gave us a big boost in our first one because we got a piece that we never could've saved, the Little Minam, 'cause they already had a road surveyed into it, to log it. And so when we got the first one to compromise we left the main stream out of it, took the Little Minam and brought it down the main Minam to the horse ranch. Then the Little Minam clear to the mouth and left the main Minam from the horse ranch to the...so, well I figured there isn't that much saw timber in there.

JG: Yeah. —

BB: And it's... And it's just a natural to go to Wilderness, so the next time we'll get it. So that was a compromise we made with Hatfield. And I took Hatfield in there, he'd never been on anything but a Sunday School picnic, took him through a pack trip when he was governor. So we had...he'd always drag his feet and drag his feet till the last minute then we got what we wanted. [laugh] But uh...That's the way we got our Wilderness. But anyhow, save the Minam wanted to go on the Wanaha and I said, no, we scatter our efforts we're...we're just not gonna get anything. So we go till we get the Minam, then we get the...but in the meantime nobody ever even knew how to say Wanaha or Toucanan. And so we had a deal with...every week we put out a hunting and fishing report and every week there was some comment on the Wanaha, Toucanan, "the fish season is closed on the Wanaha," you know, anything so it was a word that the public recognized. So we did it and the first year that we went after it we got it from old Herb. And that's the only one we ever...the only wilderness we ever got the first time we went to Congress. But we had Hatfield behind us, so we went, we got 'er and that put old Herb into shock. Boy, he had his troops out workin' on that. We'd have a joint meeting to discuss it at a... One example, at Milton-Freewater at the Sportsman's Club. Old Herb showed up with all his...all his troops and old war uniforms, you know, and all foot soldiers, God he just snowed that meeting with his people. And he...and they just kept program goin' till ten-thirty. Then it's, I was supposed to have equal time.

JG: [Laughs], going home by then.

BB: People were goin' home, you know, before...so I didn't even make the show. And I got another meeting where I got my program on. But the and we wound up gettin' strong support from that club. And we organized...I organized an — here. And gee whiz, Boise Cascade, the Forest Service and the supervisor and I were...we were classmates in high school and college both, close friends. We both worked for the joint Forest Service, State Forestry all through our high

school and college careers. But he was dead set against Wilderness. Heck of a nice guy, really, but, boy! And so we had a big meeting of the Isaac Walton League here that we're gonna vote on this issue. And boy, it just snowed under with Boise Cascade and Forest Service people and I think we got thirty-some votes for Wilderness, four against. Boy, I thought Jack Smith was going to die of apoplexy! His people voted for the Wilderness! [laughs] But had to, you know, there was only four votes. And who was it, Wade Hall was there. You know old Wade.

JG: Yeah.

BB: He says, "It's gotta be a crooked election 'cause I voted twice." [laughs] You know he didn't, but he...[laughs] That's the... That's the way... That's what you had to do, though. I ordered...organized an Isaac Walton League here, one in Pendleton, one in...we had a pretty good club in Milton-Freewater, it was a Wildlife Federation Club. And we had Delbert's real strong club in Baker, Wildlife Federation. Let's see, why, I even got one in Hermiston and one in Heppner, Isaac Walton League, and one in Ontario. You needed to do things like that to get some kind of support because you had...the cattlemen were not really well organized. They didn't... They never did do a good job themselves of programs. They had the resources, they had the money, but they never were really as strong as they could've been. Then we had Glen Parsons here by the...the truth was not in him. Oh, he really double-crossed us in a couple of deals. We were set up... We were gonna set up an elk winter range over on that Shaw McCann's ranch, you know, over in Clover Creek?

JG: Yeah.

BB: He had about 6,000 acres that they wanted to sell, they came to us. And that was a natural...that's where the elk just naturally gathered on that foothill farm land there. And you could handle 'em there and keep 'em from gettin' on the neighbors. So you had hills...you had Ladd Hill... Anyhow, we needed to, well...we didn't need it, but we wanted the approval of the Planning Commission. We had several of those people that were real enthusiastic about it. One of 'em was the manager of the U. S. National Bank and was several people that... And the weekend before that meeting, Boise Cascade called every one of those people and intimidated them, "If you vote for this thing we'll take our money out of your bank." You know, every one and I didn't know it. We'd kind of made a deal with 'em with Glen that they weren't gonna oppose it. Well, I had made a deal with Glen. Boy, here we get to the meeting, we got one vote and that was a tough old knothole that lived at North Powder, an old rancher over there, that voted in favor of us. Every other one voted against it and they just slunk out because they're people that...Les Kepler, you know him?

JG: Oh yeah.

BB: He says... He says, "I was all for your program, but we couldn't afford it at the store" and that kind of stuff. Well, I still could've got it, but old McKeen got mad and got one of our directors and we wound up buyin' a bunch of...we never did take it back to 'em. We spent the money on the stuff that they got now where they're feedin' elk and so on, which are not natural places to do it. It would've been better if we'd of just...

JG: Well...

BB: And Les says, "Well, we knew you were gonna come back and the next time we'd of voted for it." And that's what a couple of 'em told me.

JG: —

BB: Yeah. He said, "We knew you'd be back the next meeting." But old McKeen wouldn't let me go back to the next meeting. We spent... We dedicated the money to those places there now that are too high and not natural. Well, and then the next month Boise bought 4,000 acres, you know, they bought all the...all the hill land and the timber. They bought everything but the farm land. Hell, they'd a been just as well off to have let us buy it because the timber was gonna be there and the Department has a policy of selective loggin' their land.

JG: You still have access to it.

BB: Yeah, there still would've been Boise's timber and they wouldn't of had to own the land. There's not all that good of timber, either, really.

JG: No, it's on the edge there.

BB: Well, it's runs back in those hills and it's a lot of fir and not all yellow pine old growth. But that's the way we got...or didn't get...some of the land.

JG: I was wonderin', Bill, another thing too, do you recall anything on the mining up the upper Grande Ronde? Oh, I think that would've been about the time you first came here they were dredging up there and then in later years picked up around Camp Carson in the '50s and again in the '80s.

BB: I don't think they were dredging. They were mining up there. They were dredging over at Sumpter still and some on the John Day, a dredge was still workin' when I came here. Oh, I'm sure there was no dredge workin' in the Grande Ronde system when I came here.

JG: What about later on? 'Cause I, oh, was up there to Baker at the...you know, the records there for Camp Carson mining. They had a couple of re-entries back in there.

BB: Oh yeah. There've been operations up there.

JG: Do you remember anything about that or what they were doing?

BB: Not really, no.

JG: What about out along the rivers here, you know, along the stretch La Grande to Island City where they've taken gravel out of there? Any... Do you recall any operations along that area?

BB: I really don't know. That State ditch thing had been so degraded already that I'm not sure how much that affected...that would had. That's just travel water, you know, there. And the only thing that workin' in the stream would do would be degrade water quality the length of the river. But as far as the physical effect I just wouldn't think it would've been...had too much impact because that's just...it's already been destroyed for livin' space by taking all the curves out and it's just travel water. It would be more effective travel water if it'd had some debris in it, but...some rest areas and particularly for downstream migrants, but it...apparently the...they've got some good goat now on what downstream migrants do and they can't use that stretch of the water...river for anything except just goin' through it.

JG: Just goin' through, yeah. [pause in conversation] Just about the only other thing, Bill, as far as flood years in that, do you recall anything special about effects on habitat durin' those periods of time?

BB: Well, floods are usually beneficial for migratory fish habitat. They generally scour out the silt and mud and establish gravel beds. Outside of the fact that there may be some mechanical mortality as far as effect on the habitat it's a natural thing, that's the way the habitat was formed.

JG: Yeah.

BB: Somethin' like fire. You have it just once in a while it's probably beneficial. Have it every year it probably isn't. [laughs]

JG: A little bit too on the intensity of the fire whether...

BB: Yeah.

JG: A few of the more recent ones they're really...boy, there's a lot of silt's comin' down.

BB: Yeah, but then we've been workin' at it for quite a while. [laughs]

JG: Do you recall along that State ditch itself as far as the vegetation changes over the years 'cause there's not, you know, much there, you know, along from where it takes off, where they cut off the old Grande Ronde River, till it comes back in?

BB: You get out in the valley and there's some...some places are pretty good vegetation, but you got just a straight bank you really don't have a riparian area. But there's some pretty dense brush and in some cases trees along if you get out in the valley, get away from town. At least there used to be. I know. I used to try to put a bird dog through there. [laughs] We used to go out and put one guy out in a row boat and one of us on each bank with a dog workin' that brush. Boy, that used to be pretty sporty pheasants. When they come out of there, they had velocity.

JG: Was that along the old channels, or is that on the ditch?

BB: No, that's in the new channel.

JG: In the new channel.

BB: That was around Bud Jones' and that. That's one of my favorite places to hunt. But that's been thirty, forty years ago.

JG: I think that just kind of fills me in on a few things. Oh, just one other, um thought, when the Mt. Emily sold out to ValSetz, do you remember on the railroad logging what...about when the last year would've been when they were logging actually with railroads from up the Grande Ronde?

BB: I don't know which year it is, but it would be the early '50s. They weren't railroadin' too long. I know I had a heck of a time with that railroad the first year I came. I tried... My predecessor said you could ride that road from Spring Creek clear through up and drop into the Grande Ronde in January. Well, it turns out that he'd never been on a horse in his life and certainly had never been up there. And I tried it the middle of January and the temperature about zero, buckin' snow. Had a good, big, thoroughbred horse and real experienced, but finally it got dark on me and I left...had to let go...I couldn't tell where the road was, it was all drifted under and I couldn't tell where it was gonna pitch off. And there was just that one road that pitched off on place so I just pitched off, bluffs and so on. And I got down and crossed the river on the ice and then I came to this

damn railroad. Well, they were plowin' it. There's this bank as high as the ceiling, you know, you get a horse over. I messin' around and busted it down and got on the railroad and then I had another one. And then there was a gap and then there was the road. Anyhow, I...so I, "well, I'll ride down the railroad." Then it came to damn trestle. Well, there's big holes in the ties! [laughs] But anyhow, I got...I got out through to Boyd Stanley place about midnight and the temperature was, you know, about fifteen below. But the railroad was still working then and that would've been the winter of '50. But they were... By that time they were puttin' a road into the headquarters. There hadn't been a head...road to the , rail road, you know. And they didn't operate it much after that.

JG: Where they had the big decks...they had the river camp was that where the decks were or was there much decking up around the headquarters?

BB: They had a lot of coal decks at the river camp.

JG: Yeah, mm-hmm.

BB: Yeah, big coal decks.

JG: I had some pictures and that's why I kind of think where it was and that's what I was kind of wondering. I never... They weren't identified whether it was there or if there's anything up at headquarters camp.

BB: Yeah, as a matter of fact one of those early years we had a... ah, my research unit wanted to put in a...put a research,...young guy workin' on his Masters studyin' salt use by elk, he wanted to know somethin' about... So I took him up the... Carl Morton and I took him up the Grande Ronde. Well, heck, that was just a gravel road and we got up and just the side of the Tony Vay ranch and Carl had been up there and he had a pick-up with big wheels and chained up all the way around, but he broke it out, but it...it was gettin' pretty tough. And we turned around and in the process of turnin' around we took the rear-end out of the pick-up. A pick-up does not run very good when it's cross racing a road and you got no transmission so we started walkin'. And it was getting pretty late and we walked down that...down from...from actually above what's now the Forest Service's...well, that cabin they got up there.

JG: Yeah, the guard station.

BB: Yeah. That was the first year they put it in there. But anyhow, we walked from there to the river camp walkin' in those tracks and snow this deep. And we got down to the river camp and Winnie...let's see, one of the Taals was in there and he had four-head of big draft horses and he was horse loggin'. And he was in the big equipment shed where they worked on the trucks and the damn doors were opened and they had a great big double-tank stove, you know, one with a tank about this big you put cord wood in and then another circulatin' thing and so on. And he had his wagon parked, he's sleepin' in his wagon and had that stove goin' full blast, but he didn't have a car. So we walked clear down to...oh, what's their names that got the store? Oh, you know who they are. There wasn't a store then, they just had a...he was workin' loggin' and she was drivin' the car drivin' the kids to school in a station wagon. They had a kind of a modified sheep ranch then. It was thirty-four below, midnight, and he got out and tried to start his pick-up, got his tractor goin' and towed the pick-up, but couldn't start it. Well, he was tending the pick-up or somebody down below had it in a garage and he was



startin' it a couple times a week and keep it through the winter. So he took his tractor and one of us went down with him and go it goin'. It only had one headlight and the side window was broke out, but we were glad to see it. We limped it into La Grande. Got in about four in the morning. But it was thirty-four below when we got Pete, oh God, ...they were really nice people. Pete...that's the way I am with names. Five minutes, why, it'll come to me. But there just wasn't any activity up there in the winter at that time. But they were still...still railroad loggin' and so they hadn't really done anything because of the road.

JG: The picture I had it showed, you know, it had all the big decks and it's fairly, you know, flat and open. I just took that'd be river camp up...

BB: That's the river camp. They had a big truck shed there and there were...and it had four bays that they could put trucks in to work in. There weren't any trucks there in the winter. All there was was...I keep thinkin' Winnie Taal, but it wasn't Winnie, it was his brother.

JG: Wes?

BB: Yeah.

JG: Oh.

BB: Yeah. And he had a stud horse and three mare draft horses. He was horse loggin' in there. And he had a cold so bad he could hardly talk. God it was cold in that shed! You know, you could stand up there... Well, you could imagine all those doors were open. There were no doors on the front of this thing. It's just this great big shed with this big stove in it and he had his wagon parked as close as he could without it catchin' fire. But you could stand there and one side of you freezin' and the other side blistered. [laughs] But there's nothin' to hold the heat, you know, this big, old, high truck shed. "Yeah, I'd be glad to haul 'em in...haul you, but my car hasn't started for two years." [laughs] And then in the course of the conversation the car wasn't there anyway. [laughs] [recording stopped]