

Arlen Chenault

5/89, T1, S1

[buzzing sound too loud to hear the voices]

JG: And when were you born?

AC: March 25, 1929.

JG: And whereabouts?

AC: La Grande?

JG: And can you give me just a brief background of how long you've been in Northeast Oregon, or...?

AC: Well, actually all my life, Jerry, except for the couple years I was in the service.

JG: What years was that?

AC: That was 1950-52. I was in the Korean.

JG: And where did you grow...grow up like in La Grande as far you went to school?

AC: No. I was born in La Grande. At that time we...the folks lived on a place out the other side of Island City there, east of Island City about five miles or six, something like that. And when I was about two years old then they bought a place up Catherine Creek and we moved up there. And then from Catherine Creek we moved into Union and I spent the rest of my life here, so I guess that...like I say, I was out that Korean situation.

JG: Then can you give me a little bit of background of, oh, time spent like growing up in the woods or, of course, when you started with the Forest Service, or anything else?

AC: Well, of course, as a kid Dad started hunting when we...well, I killed my first deer when I was twelve years old and I've hunted ever since. Hunted upland game, waterfowl, deer, elk...and not so much elk until I was a little older, about sixteen, I guess, when I started hunting elk. And we were always in the mountains either mining or whatever, just plain messin' around. Then I started work at the Forest Service when I was sixteen, that was in May of 1945.

JG: In what area did you work with Forest Service?

AC: Well, I started out in...on trail crew, worked the first two years. That, of course, was done in my summer vacation, I was still in high school. Worked my first two years then on the trail crew and then after that I went into fire control and just a little bit of everything. I scaled and cruised and marked timber and the whole thing, did the whole ball of wax...

JG: That was pretty much on the old Union district?

AC: Mm-hmm, that was.

JG: \_\_\_ a lot of ground from... [laugh]

AC: I guess. I guess.

JG: I guess to start would be any either personal sightings you've had or any knowledge you might have of species that would be either extinct in this area now or endangered or real rare? That'd be different things like, oh, wolf, grizzly bear, wolverine.

AC: The only thing that I can think of along that line, Jerry, would be this little fox that used to be in this country. I've seen two of those.

JG: Was that red fox?  
AC: No. They're a dark color.  
JG: Oh, they are?  
AC: Yeah, they're a real dark color, little fox. They're not very large. I saw both of those in south Catherine the same year, that was in 1949. It could've been the same one, of course, you don't know. Other than that I can't think of much, Jerry.  
JG: What about nesting bald eagles? Do you remember any that were in here during the summertime nesting?  
AC: There used to be one over around Mud Springs there...or off of Lick Creek out of Medical Springs. There was a bald eagle nested there and the only other one that I can think of is the one that was at the...the end of Thief Valley Reservoir, that pair that was in there for a good number of years on a cliff.  
JG: Do you remember what years about that would've been on the one at Medical and then Thief Valley?  
AC: The one at Medical was...that would've been in the '60s. It was when we were putting in...I forget what timber sale, but we were putting in a timber sale and we run into it then. That was...yeah, it had to been in the middle '60s around '65, '66, in there. And the one here on Thief Valley was in the '70s. It would've been around '74, '75.  
JG: Yeah, I've heard about that one Slim, I'd seen that one.  
AC: And, of course, the one you know is the golden eagle up there on Medical. And then there was another golden eagle around there by Fruit Springs. I remember that one.  
JG: Yeah. I know...was that the one right above the road in that big fruit tree?  
AC: Mm-hmm.  
JG: Yeah. Yeah, I know there still quite a few goldens, it seems like, but the bald they come in the wintertime, as far as nesting ones they seem to be pretty rare.  
AC: Of course, you know, then...well, not so much in this area, but down there on...when we first started goin' down to Brownlee Reservoir, that was in the '60s, there were two or three bald eagle nests around there at that time that we saw in there. I don't remember the name of the creek now where that one big one was, but the nest had been used for quite a while apparently.  
JG: Was that before the dam was in?  
AC: That was after, just after.  
JG: But have you seen any sign of them?  
AC: No, I have not, have not.  
JG: Do you remember any like peregrine falcons or anything else?  
AC: I don't recall any peregrine falcons. Goss hawks, yeah, but no peregrine falcon.  
JG: What about sharp-tail grouse population? Change over the...  
AC: That's one of those things, you know, that you really don't pay that much attention to until they're gone. You once wake up and, hey, you know, what happened to them, you know. You just, you know, you don't really...  
JG: Take it for granted that they're...  
AC: Yeah. It's just... But you just don't see them anymore.  
JG: Do you remember what areas that you'd seen 'em in or knew they were in?

AC: I think most of 'em, that I recall, were up here on what we call the north end back of, oh, Prominence and that country in there. And that's probably where I saw the most that I ever saw was in that country there.

JG: Do you remember about when the last \_\_\_?

AC: I was tryin' to think. We were... We were down there on a fire one time. It was after I got back from the Service. It had to be late '50s or early '60s, Jerry. It was while I...let's see, I was back and I became fire control officer in 1956 so it had to be...it was before that so it was sometime in the middle-'50s in there. And I can actually say that I saw them. And that was I guess the last time that I saw 'em in there.

JG: Do you remember about how many there were there or what the population was?

AC: I think... No, I can't, you know. It's just to say that here was a grouse, you know, we saw him there that morning when we were on the fire. How many I couldn't see, you know, whether there was a big population or what I can't... Yeah, I really couldn't say, Jerry

JG: What about either pine martin or any sight of wolverine?

AC: Never seen a wolverine. I've seen one pine martin and that was over on Elk Creek.

JG: Was that back in about the '50s?

AC: Let's see, that was...we was in there on a pack trip, a private trip. I'm tryin' to think when that was. We were living... That was in the '60s, yeah. Be around '62 or '3.

JG: Which Elk Creek is that?

AC: The one that drains into the Minam just the other side of China Cap, yeah.

JG: Do you know or have any idea on the fish hatchery just up Catherine Creek when that was actually in...put in or running?

AC: I can remember going up there and watching...watching them feed the fish when I was a kid around ten, twelve years old so that would put it around in '30s and '40s in there. I remember it then for sure.

JG: Do you recall what fish they...what they were raisin' up there?

AC: There were rainbow for sure and then the larger fish in the holding pens outside that they had were rainbow probably, oh, I remember 'em bein' around six, seven inches long.

JG: Do you know when that closed up or when they were...shut 'er down, or any of the background, or reasons behind it?

AC: No, I sure don't, Jerry. There would be a person there to get a hold of, if she's still alive, that's Grace Eddy, lives in Baker.

JG: Oh, yeah. Buck Eddy, yeah.

AC: Mm-hmm. She could get more on that probably than anyone. It seems to me the man's name that ran it was Green when it was a fish hatchery.

JG: While you're growin' up do you remember anything like the Indians' routes or any times they were comin' up to fish or any...?

AC: Well, I remember the Indians, you know, on the Creek, but as far as where they camped and all of that all I could...you know, I'll I've heard is stories, you know. They used to camp right there just about at the fish hatchery. There used to be quite a camp right there. But I do remember 'em as a kid, you know, on the creek

and then actually in later years. It wasn't too long ago, fifteen years ago, they were still tryin' to fish it, you know.

JG: Do you remember anything about the...the fish runs or what fish were in there and kind of population or \_\_\_?

AC: In... On salmon, you mean?

JG: Yeah, salmon principally.

AC: Oh yeah. Yeah, I can remember the salmon. I mean, there were salmon here you can't hardly believe, you know. This, I suppose, was before all the dams, but we had Chinook salmon up here that...oh, heck, large fish, very large fish. The fact is, my brother and I used to be named Little Salmon and Big Salmon. [laughs] It was legal then you could go after 'em with a...what they called a salmon glass and a grab hook and that's the way we fished for 'em, you know. Yeah, there were many, many of 'em in there. And the fish were actually...Mom used to can them so quality-wise they were pretty good fish, you know. That's different than a lot of these you see in stream today. I don't think I'd even eat one today. That's the difference.

JG: Was that pretty consistent each year as far as...?

AC: Mm-hmm. You bet. Yeah, we used to...oh, on or about Stock Show time you could just about count on 'em, you know, about that time the run would be here. We used to out to the old Davis Dam or Benson Dams out here in the valley, you know, and that's where we'd first get 'em. Then we'd kind of follow 'em up the creek, you know.

JG: Did they have a...remember a season on 'em or the numbers that you could \_\_\_?

AC: I don't recall. There was probably a fishing season that included the salmon and probably open like the fishing season did then in May, along in May. But as far as tags or anything like that there wasn't anything and as far as I can remember there wasn't a limit. Because we...Heck, we'd get four or five big fish in a day, you know.

JG: Do you remember about when that...as far as the large runs...when that was slowin' down or stoppin'?

AC: I was tryin' to think here. Somehow I was about twelve years old, along in there, ten, twelve, thirteen, fourteen they had and there was a large run of fish. So that would put you in about in the '30s, late '30s and early '40s. They also had something that...here at that time, it's...it's big lamprey eel. We used to have those in Catherine Creek.

JG: I'll be darned.

AC: And I've heard people say that they didn't get up this far, but I'll dispute that because I've seen them here. And actually what we do there at the old city water intake they had a walkway. There was a dam there then there was a walkway across this dam above the spillway. And we'd go out there at night...and this was legal...and we'd hang a gas lantern there. All these fish then would run up the dam, you see, under that gas lantern we'd gig 'em then on that...on the apron of the dam. And every once in a while you'd see one start up through there you'd think is a salmon and it was actually one of these blasted eels.

JG: I'll be darned. [laugh]

AC: They are quite a thing, you know, they were large. They were probably in diameter, oh, two-and-a-half inches in diameter and three feet long.

JG: I'll be darned.

AC: Yeah. They were the ones with the portholes along the side, you know.

JG: Whereabouts was the dam at that time for the intake?

AC: It was right...well, there were actually two dams there, there was one below the settling ponds and then the main dam...or the dam on the main stem of the creek there. They had the creek divided and they could part of it into their holding ponds and then the main creek was over on the...it'd be the west side next to the hill there. There was two dams and one of 'em I think is still in place, the upper dam is still there, or parts of it, I think.

JG: That's still above the flour mill there...or the fish hatchery?

AC: No, this is clear up.

JG: Oh, way up.

AC: Way up where the city intake...

JG: Oh, the city intake...the current intake is, same \_\_\_.

AC: Yeah, right. It was right...yeah.

JG: I didn't know if they had another one at that time.

AC: Yeah. These other dams were here, but usually they just...they were just free-flowing, you know, they weren't damned up at that time and they weren't much of an obstacle to the salmon.

JG: Remember about the fish runs on some of the other streams or rivers?

AC: Ah, not really. I didn't have much to do with the Grande Ronde at that time. We did most of our fishing here.

JG: Didn't know about like the Eagle Creeks remember...

AC: No. The first time, of course, the Eagle Creek was in 1945 when I went in there. But yeah, they...I caught steelhead in Eagle Creek and caught salmon in Eagle Creek as high up as West Eagle Meadows. So they did make it there before they put in the dams on the Snake. They had a real healthy run of Chinook in that Eagle Creek.

JG: Did you ever get over in the Minam to fish?

AC: Not... No, not until I started working for the Forest Service and there again that's kind of like, well, kind of like Catherine Creek. You hit that at the right time of the year and you could actually smell the stream before you got to it, you know, from the salmon dieing, there were that many there.

JG: Do you remember Slim, on like the fur bearing populations and distribution of beaver or mink or anything along those lines in this area?

AC: Well, of course, start out with the most common one, the muskrat. I used to...there again as a kid and then during the winter months while I was going to high school I trapped quite a lot. And I trapped both the muskrat and mink. And, oh, I suppose I started trapping when...about 1945, '46, '47, '48 in there, I trapped and usually did pretty good, especially on the muskrat. But I trapped mink on Big Creek, Catherine Creek, Little Catherine and then around out here in the valley around the sloughs and that. But did quite well, there were quite a few mink. The fact is, I think the best...best winter I ever had while I was in high school...or was it...I think I turned in twenty-two mink pelts so that was pretty

good. There really wasn't that much competition either as far as trappers. I don't think there were...at that time about three trappers in the valley then, the old man Barnhart and Bert Wordell, a few people like that.

JG: Have you seen since that time as far as the mink population any indication it's different?

AC: From the sign I don't believe...from the sign I see, you know, when I'm out fishing even on Eagle Creek where they used to be so much, I don't think we have as many mink. Now, that's just...you know.

JG: Yeah, what you see.

AC: Just a personal observation, but I just don't think we have the mink that we used to have.

JG: What about beaver distribution, or numbers?

AC: Well, that's one I didn't ever try and trap 'em, but...

JG: I was thinkin' just signs as far as \_\_\_.

AC: Yeah. I think... From what I... I'd say it's just about the same, Jerry. There maybe used to be a few more up around the Eagle Creek country, I don't know, than there is now. But that in there back...oh, back to Cougar Meadows up through there there used to be quite a few beaver in there, but you don't see that much sign in there anymore.

JG: On the big game population, let's start like with the big horn sheep, that old bunch, do you remember anything about that as far as when they \_\_\_?

AC: No, I don't, Jerry.

JG: \_\_\_ Okay. Antelope, were there anything that you recall from back there in distribution in this area?

AC: Actually, oh, as it started drying that Powder River country out there I don't think there's a whole lot of difference, you know, now from what it was twenty years ago. You'd see that occasional small herd out there, you know, and that...or maybe just, you know, a single or a pair or something like that, but I don't...I don't think there's just actually been that much change in there. There's never been that many antelope. I guess the furthest north I've seen an antelope's right out here, right in back of the old Dobbin's place. I saw one out there three years ago.

JG: I had one in my woodpile \_\_\_. [laughs] Right out back the house there last year. It was a buck and doe and the old buck...I don't know were he disappeared to, but boy, she's just havin' a fit tryin' to get across the road over the fence there.

AC: Yeah, they can't handle a fence very well.

JG: But she's real excited, I don't know if he disappeared or somebody got him or what happened, but, boy, she was sure upset.

AC: I laughed at this young fellow I was hunting with that here was saw that one over there...we're deer hunting is what we're doin', you know, and he came back and he stood around and he looked at me for a while, you know, to kind of... I could see something was wrong. He said, "Are there any antelope in this country?" [laughs] I said, "Did you see an antelope today?" And he said, "Yes, I sure did." Well, I did too.

JG: \_\_\_ start to see.

AC: Yeah, he didn't believe us.

JG: Last year that buck and doe they right down there in the old Titus pasture, Robinson's there, they're bedded down for a couple days there along the creek, Little Creek there. And then all of a sudden he disappeared and she was right up...came right up by the house there. But I hadn't seen any other sign of 'em since then at all. What about the deer population from when you were growing up compared to any specific areas or thing that you can think of?

AC: Yeah. Especially Keating area, I guess. Along in the late '40s, '48, '49, in there, I contracted a lot of tree pruning out there, was out in that country quite a lot, around the Fruit Springs area and east of there. But, oh, I don't know how to put into numbers, but it was not usual to see bunches of two hundred and more deer. And then...well, when we were maintaining that south boundary fence down there, you know, clear around into Goose Creek country and then clear...clear into breaks of Eagle Creek, they was just crawlin' all the way through that country.

JG: I remember there used to be, you know, oh that was in the early '60s there in bands...herds of about, oh, seventy, seventy-five up till the draws there around Sparta in there.

AC: We... One time there at the same time that...this would've been '48, I think, but we're going out there to prune there one morning and ran into this big cat track out there and old Bob Walker had his hounds at that time so the rest of the guys went on to...went on to their prunin' and I went down and got old Bob and got his dogs and went out and we eventually got the cat. But we left right from the cattle guard there in Mangle Gulch and went right up that draw to the west there out through there. And we ran into one bunch of deer there, we sat down and counted 'em and we came up with about 375 head of deer in one bunch. And you could see it if you came down this way into the Catherine Creek country there was, around the old Edmondson place in there, it was not unusual there to count 250 head in that field...that wheat field of theirs above the highway there. And there were deer scattered all the way from the top of the summit, you know, big bunches of them clear down through right practically into Union here. But of course you just don't see that at all, you know, anymore.

JG: What about the habitat at that time in comparison to today, do you remember?

AC: Well, I can't see is there's been that much change in it. As far as the winter kill they probably in proportion had as much, you know, or more then than they do now. But there was a heavy winter kill every...every winter, but there were so many more...you had so many more survive, you know. But as far as that country around Medical there where there're so many deer I can't see that that's actually there's much change in it as far as the browse. The thing I do remember is seeing that browse there over around, oh, the Sparta grade out in that country where there's so much bitter brush out in that country where they used to eat it down, you know, the size of your little finger. You can go out through there now and, heck, they're hardly touchin' that stuff, you know. There's just that many deer to where they're really usin' that stuff like they used to.

JG: Did you ever see any white tail numbers at all?

AC: No, not until, oh, about...let's see...the first white tail, I guess, I can remember seeing is around 1978, '79 in there and those were back of Elgin over there.

That's the first ones. And then since then I've seen 'em over...well, this last fall there was a small buck over here in the State farm up there on the upper end of the State farm. But, like I say, the first one I think I saw was around '78, '79 over there in back of Elgin. The only thing about the deer...the number of deer that used to be around Mule Peak and that country in there. I remember one hunt there. I left from down there on Pole Creek, I hunted up through Sanpass Creek, around the back side of Mule Peak in the south Catherine then came back through between Mule Peak and Burger Butte and down into the one fork of middle fork and then back down to the rig. And I saw, could have shot, thirteen bucks that day and turned 'em down. \_\_ that now. [laughs]

JG: What about the size in comparison?

AC: Well, there again, you'd see larger bucks, more of them. I think, well, the biggest buck I ever killed was 286 pounds. Killed him on Little Catherine. A buck that size now is damn unusual. While I was on Mule Peak, 1949, I'd go out just about every evening and I had seven four-point or better bucks that I'd watch every evening from Mule Peak there. Beautiful bucks.

JG: Yeah, 'cause I remember really well nearly all that country over east Eagle too there's some big ones hanging clear\_\_.

AC: Yeah. Around...yeah. Looking Glass Lake used to be another place. That was a big buck country if there ever was one. Boy, there are some big bucks in that country. But, oh, there's still a few in there, but not like there used to be.

JG: Remember on the elk population the change over the years?

AC: Yeah. In the '40s there in...now is this Keating country I'm talking about...it was unusual to see an elk or elk sign around that Forshet country, Goose Creek country and down in there. You just didn't hardly see it. And then, I don't know, they just gradually increased, for what reason I don't know, but you begin to see more elk, more elk sign in there. That's all the way through that Keating area this happened. Until there, oh, early '60s, late '60s and early '70s there was quite a...quite a bunch of elk in that country. But now then they've kinda goin' the other way again, there's just not so many elk in there. See, in 1968 I killed an elk in Selcer Gulch, again in '71 I killed an elk in Selcer Gulch, I think it was...yeah, '71. And there were just quite a few elk in there at that time and not too many hunters, really, mostly local hunters.

JG: I think Ed \_\_ said at first there there were, of course, had the either sex season to keep them out of there, figured that was prime deer range.

AC: Yep, that's just exactly right. Yep.

JG: Remember when that was when they first hunted?

AC: Let's see... When did you come back here?

JG: It's '59 when I got out of the Army. I remember Ed was huntin' shortly thereafter or maybe it was about that time.

AC: I was tryin' to remember because I was thinkin' of 'em when Vern Pritchard was here we were markin' timber there out of Twocolor. And that area was either sex at the time and he wanted an elk. And I said, "If I wanted an elk I'd go right up Jim Creek and get myself an elk," and he did. I'll never forget that. So that had to be...

JG: That's probably the '58.



AC: '57, '57 in there. Yeah.

JG: Do you have any thoughts...there's been, I guess, quite a bit talk about when an area was roaded as far as the detrimental to the elk or that and yet it seemed like that all that area was roaded in that whole south end and yet the elk came in?

AC: I don't know. I've heard both sides of that, but as far as I'm concerned it depends more on the cover and some of these things than it does the roads. A good example, I think, is over there in some of that Grande Ronde country, which is a lot of it in private and closed now, it's into the gate business, Dale Stanley and some of those owners over there. But I used to hunt in that country quite a bit over there and there were roads all over it and yet it had a larger elk population than what you had in the Keating area. But uh,...

JG: That's what always kind of struck me being that way where you had all the whole area pretty much of roading yet the elk are movin' into it.

AC: Yeah, they liked it. There was something there they wanted or they were being pushed out of someplace else. I don't know what it...what it is. There's one thing I noticed the last two years, I've gone back up to my old stompin' grounds here in the Catherine Creek area and that's up there in the Burger and head of Sanpass Creek, Pole Creek and in there. And since...since they've put the cattle in there...when was that...'80, '78, '79, '80, in there...I don't think we have near the elk population in there that we used to have. I think the cattle run 'em out, it's too much competition. But as far as the Catherine Creek elk there may be fewer now than there was back in say the '50s, I don't know. But I can't see that much change in it myself in the elk number.

JG: Probably pretty consistent. What about size of elk in comparison?

AC: You get back in the high country there and on the breaks I think you...the last time Donna and hunted deer up there and she went up with me, I think, was in '77 and we saw...and during deer season we saw five bulls that I would shoot any day, I'll tell ya. They were five and six-point bulls and there was just quite a few of 'em back there.

JG: Yeah, and some of this interview there's been some comments about like what the archery season now where they have it both a period of time during the rutting season and, oh, length there of where they're bein' able to call 'em in and taking out quite a few of the big bulls. You got any comments on...both the archery season and the time it is?

AC: It's possible for 'em to do this and it's, well, the fact is I've seen two big bulls...let's see, when was that...it would've been '82 I saw a real big bull taken that way right up here at Frazier, he was a six-point. He called it in. Yeah, I think that happens.

JG: It seemed like they archery equipment has gotten more sophisticated plus...

AC: Oh yeah. Sights and you name it and they've got it, compound pulls and all that. No, they... It doesn't take a very...very husky man, you know, to let go of an eighty pound pull anymore with this new type of bows that they're usin'.

JG: Do you have any thoughts about any...what the season should be or period of time?

AC: Well, I don't know. The deer season used to run into the rut. I didn't agree with that because a buck deer he gets a lot of other things in his mind when he, you

know, when he's in the rut and he doesn't pay near as much attention to the hunter. And I think the bull elk's the same way, well, I know he is because I've actually worked myself right into a bunch of bulls during, you know, during deer season when they're still in the rut. And uh, I don't think...I'd have to... I'd have to say that I don't think that they should have it during the rut.

JG: Do you remember some of the past any of these like the special hunts where they'd have for problem areas or problem deer of when...? I remember like out Medical that they had the season...special hunts would be like in December and yet that's when all the deer were gone that...

AC: Yeah, they were gettin' the wrong deer, yeah. I've never agreed with that. If they're gonna have a special hunt why don't they have it August when those deer...the problem deer are there, you know, and they can go after the problem deer instead of the deer that comes in from Eagle Creek or someplace else, you know.

JG: Yeah, 'cause this year like up at the house there the whole...everything was down and they were havin' the hunt there in December and January.

AC: Yeah. No, that isn't... I don't agree with that at all. It's not... You're not after the deer that you want to get. They had that same thing over in the Keating area there that year. You could actually...if you wanted to go about it you could come up with five deer, you could get five tags. And the deer that they were killing weren't the deer that were in there year-round. These were deer that had moved in, you know, 'cause this hunt took place in November. You've already got the high deer, you know, that are moved into that country that move down. And I didn't agree with that hunt at all.

JG: What year was that?

AC: Oh, that'd be around '80 in there someplace, I think, Jerry. And they were havin' so much problem they thought with the winter feed over there so they wanted to get rid of a bunch of the deer and they did. I saw one pick-up there it looked like cord wood in the back and they were all does.

JG: Do you remember Slim...I guess you got Snake River quite a bit, didn't you, before the dams were in there?

AC: Mm-hmm. How many years ago Pine Creek and that we used to go in there and steelhead fish, sturgeon fish, yeah.

JG: Of how the...what the vegetation was in those bottoms as far as winter feed for the game?

AC: Well, of what I can remember Pine Creek, you know, like I say, at that time you weren't thinking about these things, but what I can remember of Pine Creek there just wasn't that much change in there. They always had cattle in there, you know. They had those places up and down through there. I can't remember there being that much change in there, but, you know, as far as the grouse and that. I don't think...but there again just not payin' that much attention, you know, at the time. I do know one thing, there were a lot more sheep in that country. When we first started goin' down there they ran sheep all over that country, which today they don't.

- JG: What about on the...over in this country in the Grande Ronde Valley as far as the change of vegetation or, of course, this getting into not only for the deer or elk, but also bird population of the habitat change?
- AC: There's been a tremendous change. One of the best example I can give you is this...the old Davis place out here where you used to have all the sloughs, you know, that meandered through there and they were completely brush lined, the banks were all brush lined. There was so much more pheasant population here then, I mean, and then cover and everything. Well, I guess just from the way they've...their farming practices, the way they're farming now. They're farming it different. But there were so many more places...well, another one is right out here in front of your place. See, that used...that whole creek down through there used to be brush lined all the way. There were brush patches in there a half-acre in size, you see, that weren't even...that weren't farmed at all.
- JG: It's just a little line of trees in there now.
- AC: Yeah. Barely is...barely anything in there now. That used be one of our favorite hunting spots, you know, when I was in high school. We just right after school, you know, we'd grab our shotguns and away we'd go. You stepped over that Slackhammer ditch and you were outside of the city limits and we killed birds there all the time. We would get our limit when there were three...three roosters was the limit. We could get our limit there pretty easy.
- JG: Do you remember when...if there's like any massive change during a period of time or just kind of gradual?
- AC: It's been a gradual thing. It just as the...there again, like that Davis place is...the farming method changed, well then...that had changed, the habitat has changed. But a lot of the...oh, a lot of that Woodruff, he put in a lot of that that was never cultivated before, just kind of a wild thing out there on Catherine Creek north of Sherman Hawkins' place. A lot of that in there, you see, was, boy, that was beautiful bird hunting, but there was just cover all over out there.
- JG: Give me some idea of the...for like the pheasant of when the heavy population, or the difference in populations there about for...
- AC: Well, it's gradually decreased since '60s. Started in as about '60 and it's gradually decreased ever since. As I remember in 1963 I bought Donna a shotgun, twenty-gauge shotgun. You used to buy 'em and they were all full of cosmoline and the grease and all of that. I took leave one afternoon, went over and picked up the gun and I came home, lived there at the Forest Service at the time, cleaned that gun up, took the dog and went out in that field of Hawkins there and in twenty minutes I was home with three birds. Try that now. [laughs]
- JG: What do you think, it's pretty much just the habitat or think of anything else that...?
- AC: It's the habitat too and then it's some of our sportsmen. I don't think there's a lot of people...I would like to see a little more enforcement in that a lot of people a bird got up they didn't care whether it was a rooster or hen or what and they let drive. I think that...that had a lot to do with it. And there are more hunters now, of course, than there was. And, like I say, it's the way they hunt. Even last year I saw one out there hunting from the back of a pick-up, you know. Here they are

cruisin' the stubble field in the pick-up instead of goin' out there and gettin' on the ol' two feet doin' it.

JG: What about observation along those lines too of the big game or other things of over?

AC: I don't think it's as bad now, but for a while there when they...when we had these cow tags, you know, I think they were bringing in more than one cow on that cow tag, you know, failing to punch the thing and going out the next day and gettin' another cow. I think there was quite a bit of that for a while, but I don't think there's that much anymore.

JG: I know...used to see quite a bit particularly up that Hall ranch and goin' up over Medical where the deer they just shot and left lay there.

AC: Yeah.

JG: Back...when was that...mid-'60s or late...late-'60s.

AC: And they first had those late seasons over there in that Keating country and not so much Keating, but around Forshet and that on the breaks of the Powder out in there, there was a lot of that. Ed and I that one day out there runnin' lines I think we ran into three carcasses that had been shot and left. Yeah, they up and shoots themselves a doe and then they gets up and sees her, you know, and she's a little poor, maybe a little skinny or somethin' like that, and just walks off and leaves her.

JG: Yeah, it seemed like, in a way, a different breed to that back, oh, in the '30s a lot of people they were maybe shooting, but then usin' it there for the families.

AC: Mm-hmm. Yeah, right.

JG: Compared to, like I said, up that Hall ranch I remember we counted six or seven does and fawns just left out there layin' they'd shot durin' the night and then up on the summit there's a couple. They didn't even try to take anything.

AC: Nope. They just...well, it's like those two idiots down there at Thief Valley, you know, and the antelope. What fun can anyone get out of that?

JG: Yeah, just shootin' 'em like that. Do you remember, Slim, of what the change or when that was the heavy rabbit populations that used to go between here and North Powder and then over in that Keating country?

AC: Oh yeah. That Keating... Let me think...[end tape]

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JG: ...and there were scads of rabbits at that time. Just all over the place.

AC: I think it started someplace in the '60s when it started really goin' downhill. But I know during the...through the middle there of '50s that we'd go over there, you know, and use 'em for target practice, you know, for off-hand shooting, you know, running shots with our deer rifles. And my crimany there were just rabbits all over that place!

JG: Yeah, but since the...that time probably early '60s or whatever I haven't seen hardly any or if any, you know, drivin' through. I haven't been over there that much, but...

AC: It used to be, you know, kind of all over, right up...right up towards Rainbow Flat here. As I was a kid, you know, we took our 22s and go up there rabbit hunting

and there used to be lots of jack rabbits up there, but you don't hardly see a jack rabbit up there now.

JG: I don't think they've ever come back. I think there's a lot of...it seems like an awful lot of skunks this last few years. Do you remember from what that cycle has been? Remember, oh, in the '50s or '60s it was kind of rare to see a skunk around.

AC: Yeah, right. Yep. It's... There again, it's gradually increased. You used to go out...you could go hunting, you know, with a dog you'd never get into trouble unless you're...with a hunting dog. But the last two years that I hunted with a dog, which was four years ago, that dog got into...what...one day he got into three out here. I used up all the tomato juice in Union. [laughs]

JG: I just wonderin' when you were growin' up around here whether they ever had the skunk population?

AC: Once in a great while you'd get one in a mink set, yeah. And that would be all. But, I mean, that was once in a great while. But you just didn't see them, you didn't see their sign, you know, where you see it now. But you go along any of these sloughs out here that are down, you know, and you're lookin' for skunk tracks along the edges and man alive!

JG: Just along the highway between here and La Grande the number that are hit.

AC: Yeah.

JG: Just amazing those last...especially last year and year before.

AC: But they're...the other thing that I really don't agree with as far as this upland bird thing, they're one of the worst and the next one is the magpie. I used to go out here and jog and walk along a lot of these tree rows out here in the valley, you know, these little rows along these windbreaks. And you can go along there and find just pheasant egg after pheasant egg, or you could, you know, and there's still quite a few birds around where these magpies would pick 'em up and drop 'em and eat 'em. I don't agree with protecting that bird at all.

JG: What about currently the magpie population? I was talkin' to Ed and he said I guess it's way down over there, they don't see anywhere near like they used to.

AC: I... If anything it's up here, I think, Jerry, yeah, from what you can see. Because...before...

JG: I haven't been out that much. We did have one come around the house there...well, I had a couple, three I think two years ago and then this year I just saw one come through one day, which we never used to see.

AC: You get out in the valley, though, in the spring when they're, you know, hatchin' out there's quite a few magpies. Yeah.

JG: Yeah, for some reason Ed said I guess they're quite a \_\_ what it used to be, you know, real heavy over there that the population seemed to go down.

AC: I think your magpies are hard on your chuckers too. I don't think they do them much good. That's some thing. I don't know, it's kind of funny. We used to go down and we fished down there at Troy for years for steelhead long before, you know, they went out. They closed it for a long time, now it's open again. But anyway, when we first started down in there we'd see a skunk occasionally, you know, we'd have a little problem with one, but man alive, the last time we stayed

down there there were skunks all over the place, you know. I don't know. So it's just not here, it's all over.

JG: It just seemed like this exploded the population. And George was saying too, I guess raccoon around this area it's been real heavy increase.

AC: Mm-hmm.

JG: Do you remember anything about any...where they used to have game farms or anything like that in this area? Or even the pheasant or when that was?

AC: No, I can't think of anything right off hand, Jerry. The pheasants they used to release here. They hauled in from someplace.

JG: I guess over at Hermiston they had the big game...well, there at Mission and then they moved it, I guess, into Hermiston country someplace in there up close to where the...I guess the Hermiston \_\_ freeway. Talkin' to a guy that worked over there on the fish screens and that, but he said that was...they had that over there and just...that...they distributed all over from there.

AC: Yeah, right. Yeah, other than that I can't remember there being anything here. There was some...those were private deals. There used to be a fur farm down here.

JG: What was that? Mink that they...?

AC: I can't remember now what the heck that was. I don't think it was mink 'cause what they had they had about a...well, they had pens there that were probably a half-acre in size. And then it was fenced with chicken wire and about, oh, six feet high and then around the top of the fence they had a piece of galvanized tin probably, oh, eighteen inches high. So whatever they had in there couldn't climb the wire then climb over. I can't remember what in the world that was. But it's right in there where...oh, it's at...they've drained it all now, but it's, well, where that...where Pat Huffman owned, you know, that place across from the mill there.

JG: Yeah.

AC: It was back down in there.

JG: Do you remember about the...anything as far as early predator control of what was being done or any changes?

AC: Oh, yeah, well, of course the cat, cougar, that used to have a fifty dollar bounty on him. I collected on one of those. And, let's see, for a while they had the bounty on the coyote. You should remember that here. When they'd have that? It wasn't too long ago. Yeah, they had, what was it, five bucks on 'em, somethin' like that. And then way back there in the '30s and early '40s, I think, they had a bounty on crows and magpies, so much a piece. I remember that. Two bits a piece or some darn thing.

JG: Was that for the pheasant?

AC: Mm-hmm. Yeah, and fact is I think they even had out traps for them similar to these traps they use on starlings now around these orchards and whatever. And what else? I can't think of anything else.

JG: Do you remember when 10-80 when they started usin' that or when that was phased out?

AC: Let's see, 10-80. When I was fire control officer, I think, that would've been in the '50s. I went out and mapped 10-80 stations for the...for the Fish and the U.S. trapper or whatever on the south end down there. So that had...that was when I

was fire control. I think that was in the '50s, Jerry. And then when they phased it out I really don't know.

JG: Yeah, 'cause it's still here in '59. I remember seein' 'em there so I think it must've been that early '60s, you know, '61, '62, maybe a little bit later than that, but I think it's...

AC: Yeah, that's... I think about that time the environmentalists started getting on it and yeah. We as Forest Service we were still usin' 10-80 grain right up until when?

JG: That'd been probably towards the mid or late-'60s.

AC: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it had to be.

JG: Someplace in there. No, I was thinkin' more of the stations that they had. 'Cause I guess they used to have the cyanide way back and then what'd they do, go from that to 10-80?

AC: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

JG: You mentioned sturgeon fishing. Slim, do you remember anything of any change like when or number of runs or anything about the sturgeon, what areas?

AC: Well, ever since I've been big enough to fish for 'em I guess we've fished for 'em in the Snake River and that hadn't changed much other than the season now there is no season. But uh, no, I guess I caught my first sturgeon when I was seventeen years old and that was on the Snake River and we've caught 'em ever since.

JG: Seem there's been any...much change in population during that time?

AC: I don't think so. It was kind of seasonal thing, you know. You fish for 'em in the spring and in the fall. We used to down there and still do the same thing, you know, when we fish for 'em, or did until I quit fishing for 'em down there. I...maybe below the Hells Canyon dam the fishing was better there than it ever was above, you know, the dam when there was no dam, you know what I mean, on up river the way it used to be. I think the fishing...that dam, you know, I don't think they could run beyond the dam, you had a congregation of 'em below the dam down in there because... That one day Ed and I and Jim Zinelly went down there and that day we had on an eleven sturgeon and landed seven, all illegals, too large. [laughs] But I think that's just because of the dam and those same fish used to, you know, run it from there clear on up into Idaho and, you know, clear on up through there.

JG: Just got stopped there at the dam.

AC: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

JG: Do you recall anything about the High Lake country of stocking the High Lakes?

AC: No. Everything that...I think they still did a little stocking after 1945 when I went to work for the Forest Service. They were still doing a little stocking then. They were doing it by air at that time. And along in the '50s they stocked mackinaw, cut-throat and some of those in the Eagle Lakes up there. They put mackinaw in...I don't remember catching any mack out of Looking Glass Lake, but they put mackinaw in main Eagle Lake. They put cut-throat in Bear Lake. But the brookies were there from day one. Now how much they...how much additional stocking was done after '45 I don't know, but in '45 there were brookies in all of those lakes. And fact is pretty good population of brookies in main Eagle Creek above the falls. Used to be real good fishing for brookies in there. As far as population I can't see that there's that much change until later years when there's

more pressure, you know, on those lakes. And it seemed like the fish got a little larger and you caught fewer of them. But like old Diamond and Tombstone over here, you hit those lakes when they were just right back in, oh, 1948, '49, in there. I think the fish were actually smaller, but you could catch more of them.

JG: Yeah, brookies that were pretty much in there?

AC: Mm-hmm. And then the one I...I've enjoyed fishing was the old dolly vardon, I used to like to catch them. But you just don't find 'em anymore except maybe on the Minam River. I think you can still go over there and catch a dolly vardon or two. But as far as Eagle Creek it's not unusual to pick up a dolly there that, oh, over two feet long. They were quite common there at one time back in the '40s and '50s.

JG: Were they pretty well spread out like between the different Eagle Creeks over there?

AC: Mm-hmm. Yeah, they were in west Eagle, they were in east Eagle, they were in the main Eagle there. The biggest one I ever caught was right below the falls on main Eagle there, twenty-eight inches.

JG: Just one other thing that I we haven't talked about would be...like the waterfowl population in the Grande Ronde.

AC: Well, there's nothing compared to what it used to be. About all we have here now...we don't have any...any...anything coming in hardly. Most of what we have are locals. We do have a few, but...that come in later in the fall, but nothing compared to what we used to. They used to flood Smith...well, there again, the old Davis ranch out there...they used to flood practically that whole thing in the fall and I've seen thousands upon thousands upon thousands of ducks out there. And I mean thousands. That's when the limit was ten and you could go out and get your ten ducks very easy. We didn't even use decoys, we just pick a spot, you know, where they were comin' in and get in behind the...pull a little hay off the hay stack and put it in the fence and get behind the hay and get with it. Some of the best duck shooting around. But what...what's happened in this valley to change that I have no idea. I think the change has happened more down Boardman way and all that. When they got everything they need down there, you know, why do they want to come here, you know? I don't know what's changed it, but I do know it's been a heck of a change.

JG: Yeah. When was that about when you're run into all those ducks comin' in?

AC: Oh, ever since I can remember, actually. And then it started to change along in the '60s.

JG: Now were geese about the same?

AC: The geese were a little different. There for a long time, I don't know, you didn't see many geese here in the valley. I think actually now we have more local geese than we had back in the '50s and in the '40s. As far as Thief Valley and that country down there...I've hunted that for years...we're not getting near the geese into the Thief Valley that we used to. We get the locals, a few locals again, but we used to have quite a bunch of geese come in there, you know, that were coming through along the fly-away, you know. But we don't...here in the last, oh, I don't know, six, seven years we just don't have the geese in there that we had for a while for some reason, I don't know what it is. Same reason, I guess,



that they got all the good stuff down there on the Columbia so... I don't know if anyone knows why that fly-away has changed from what it used to be, but it sure as heck has.

JG: Yeah, we're talkin' about fly-away, quite a large area where you can \_\_ about things that modify it.

AC: Yeah. I was thinkin' here the other day after talkin' to you about this...did you talk to old Bert Wordell?

JG: Not yet, no. I was thinkin' of \_\_ try and catch him.

AC: Yeah, he's tracked here all his life. He's hunted and yeah...

JG: Is there anyone else you can think of \_\_\_...I've talked to George and he said like Ralph Puckett, of course, lived over in that country, you know, of the change of the valley \_\_ been there for, you know, length of time where he'd probably have a pretty good idea.

AC: I can't think of anyone off...off-hand, but...

JG: 'Cause we've lost an awful lot over the years that are pretty old, you know.

AC: Mm-hmm. You can just about see from Twocolor to Cougar Meadows, you know, that...it's grown up that much. You go in there now and you can play hell [laughs] But that was just practically wide open in there and then the number of cottonwoods...there were quite a few cottonwoods in there at the time. We've lost all that in there.

JG: Yeah, it's been so long since I've been up in there.

AC: Boy, I'll tell ya, it's changed. Well, hasn't the summit up here changed?

JG: Oh yeah! I was thinking about when I drove over that the other day, good grief! Because you just \_\_ you just look out over that whole thing and come around that corner.

AC: Yeah. You'd come down there and fact is, you know, if we wanted to look at anything over towards Bald Mountain way or anything for smoke, well, we'd just pull up on that...go up, turn around and start back down towards Union on that straight-away and you could see that whole country.

JG: Yeah, see the whole country.

AC: \_\_ seein' it now. [laughs] Boy, it does change.

JG: \_\_ climb up one of those trees up on top. [laughs]

AC: Yeah, it sure does change. All that right out from the old Grogrance area, you know, all that in there we'd grow grass, you know, tryin' to plant that in there. And I don't know how many times that was planted and now they're in there doin' it, you know. [laughs]

JG: Mother Nature does a pretty good job if you leave her alone.

AC: Yeah, just leave her alone.

JG: Yeah, did a lot of that stuff.

AC: Yeah, that Sparta burn out there, that tickled me on that, you know. That grew up all on it's own.

JG: \_\_ all the trouble you go through.

AC: Yeah.

JG: That's what I looked at is just the cutting practices, if you cut it such a way you let...like I said, Mother Nature take care of it then it does pretty good. Leave some trees in there and some cover.

AC: I don't know if that isn't the answer to this spotted owl thing. I don't know why in the hell they can't log...log that way and let the owl have some of that.

JG: That's it. I remember...that was up off the American River we took a trip up there one time...that was...that wasn't, you know, when you and Ed and I went up to Wenatchee that...was it you and Ed and I that...?

AC: Yeah. You and I and Ed and Ron.

JG: But something else, I was over on that and the clear cut a hundred acres and it was...it reminded me a great deal of Indian Creek except they had nine species up there instead of seven. And they clear cut a hundred acres and they planted the whole thing to Doug Fir and the frost come in and wiped the whole thing out. And I said, my god, you got a perpetual forest here! If you're just going 'cause...going in we went over into the area where it was...hadn't been cut at all and there was everything from seedlings clear up into these great, big, old giants in there. And I said, you know, just going and there's no reason to ever plant when you look at what it cost you to plant or brush control or tryin' to protect those seedlings it's just completely crazy puttin' that investment into it.

AC: Well, they had an area over here they wanted to...there was an old system road into it over on La Grande district here. But anyways, this lodge pole, you know, they were gonna go in. This great big basin, beautiful basin there. And they were gonna go in and salvage that lodge pole. And underneath you name it, they had tamarack, they had some Doug Fir, they had White Fir, they had the damndest stand of free pro underneath that you could believe. And I said why in the hell don't you just leave this alone and let that shit fall down? Oh no, we gotta go in there and salvage and they did. And the next time I saw that...the last time I saw it it looked like this up here on Miller's. I don't know if you've seen that or not. But they had the damndest stand of bull thistle in there you ever saw in your life and that's all they had. They killed every damn thing they had in there.

JG: Yeah. It's just...

AC: It's a mess. I don't know. I can't figure 'em out sometimes.

JG: Yeah, 'cause you had...like you said, such a stand in there.

AC: Yeah. No, it's beautiful, you know, and stuff, you know, just... I couldn't believe it.

JG: It's... It doesn't make any sense at all. \_\_\_ going tear the whole thing up.

AC: Nope, no sense at all. I get a kick following the spotted owl thing. That's...[chuckle] God, I don't think they really know what that owl does want. That's what he prefers, maybe, but it's like that god damn Poubar, you know, he had such a thing for these goss hawks, you know. I took him down there one day and showed him one down there in Zine Creek. He was right out in the thorn brush, right out in the sage brush, and I said, "does he need forty acres?" [laughs] Boy, he, he had the hots for them. Bruce and I here the other day had to think of that. We're drivin' through from Medical there through by...around by Thief Valley and comin' through and there's a goss hawk settin' out there on the fence post right out there in the sage brush. He didn't know he wasn't supposed to be there, but he was there.

JG: Nobody told him. [recording stopped]