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Interviewee: David Wanderaas
Interviewer: Clark Grant
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David Wanderaas: David Wanderaas and I graduated in 1973 and a degree in Resource Conservation, emphasis on Parks and Recreation Management.

Clark Grant: What got you interested in that?

DW: Well, I grew up in a farm over in Eastern Montana and in the summertime’s we’d go to visit my grandmother out in Spokane, Washington and we’d always travel through Glacier National Park and through the Western national forests—Western Montana. I was always so impressed by the beauty and the ruggedness of the mountains and the cooler temperatures. It looked like a wonderful place to live, hunt, and fish, so that drove my interest in forestry. Although, out of high school, I really didn’t know too much about what forestry was involved with.

CG: But you found out when you came here?

DW: Yes. First job for the summertime one year—freshman year—first summer job up in the Kootenai forest—that’s Raven Ranger Station, which is now a work center. First day, the job was to walk up to a lookout tower and restrain the phone line—the crank phone line. Of course, my new boots I’d just bought two weeks before were not broken in whatsoever, so after a six-mile hike up to that lookout on day one, I had blisters about the size of silver dollars on the back of both heels and they lasted for about six weeks. The first half of summer was a miserable summer (laughs) with the feet. Everything else was pretty exciting.

CG: What can you say about your time here at the university?

DW: You know, it was an outstanding five years—two semesters off—two quarters off—to work. Just a real growing experience. The one account that I wanted to recall—and I guess I’ll say that everybody certainly has their adventures and their unique experiences as a college student, and every experience is very special. I went on to work with the Forest Service for thirty-five years in planning work, and environmental analysis, and timber and recreation, and minerals and lands work. With that work, there was always the National Forest Management Act of 1976 that was predominant in all of our planning and all of our management and all of our analysis of projects. For me, it was always interesting to recall when I was a student here—that would’ve been I think January of 1971—I had been out working for the fall, but came back to school. Students were invited to join at an SAF meeting here in town to help serve the meal and get the experience of an SAF—Society of American Foresters—meeting.
Myself and another person, we went to that meeting and little did we know that that was the
meeting that the Forestry School presented the Bolle Report—Dean Bolle, the Bitterroot
report—to the SAF meeting and particularly to the Forest Service and to the Regional Forester,
that was Neil Rahm at that time. I think the Bolle Report had just been released probably in
December of 1970. Yeah, I think December of 1970 and this meeting was I think January of
1971. So, it was basically hot off the press. The forestry staff, Bolle, Behan, Shannon—several of
the other professors—were there and they made their presentation of the Bolle Report to the
SAF meeting members and particularly to the Forest Service. I had no understanding at the time
of what was evolving—I was probably a third semester sophomore in the Forestry School in
resource conservation—but what I always remember is how livid and how animated that
discussion became.

The professors and Bolle, and particularly I remember, Dick Behan—Professor Behan—making
their presentations and Shannon there on the economics and the cost efficiency and the
negative cost return, timber practices—with those activities on the Bitterroot. That those kind
of practices needed to change. The Forest Service, of course, that had been the mode—the
timber production mode—that they had been into since World War Two. That was just a real
wrencher on the changing of practices that maybe the forest service should look at
undertaking. I remember Neil Rahm, the Regional Forester, was just absolutely livid that these
upstarts from the Forestry School and the dean would suggest that the Forest Service wasn’t
doing proper practices, perhaps was spending too much money. The economic return was not
there and the ecological impacts were difficult with all the terracing and the cost.

I remember the professors—really, I’d always looked at those men as my teachers, professors—and
to see them on the hot plate up at the mic talking, presenting their information. You could
just tell they were under a lot of duress. I remember Dick Behan was very red-faced, but
persistent in what he was stating. I don’t remember too much about Bolle, but I think the staff
folks probably made most of the presentations. Everyone was just dressed up and down by the
Forest Service folks and by Neil Rahm. It was just a hot potato. I had no understanding at that
time what was evolving. Of course, with the Bitterroot report and then the Monongahela
report, and all the national overview and oversight, and congressional oversight then of Forest
Service timber production practices, that eventually resulted in the National Forest
Management act of 1976. That set the guidelines for the National Forest management and up
through today and continuing. That report, of course, was an absolutely significant change in
the practices—forest management practices—in this country. Later on, the land—the caring for
the land, serving the people—practices that evolved through the forest management act.

Actually, that fall, I had been tied in with setting up timber sales with Forest Service staff. I was
a summer employee and we pretty much were able to locate roads as we thought appropriate.
Cruised, marked, laid-out a timber sale as we thought appropriate. I think the district ranger
wrote a resource report, which was a three or four pager and then that was approved. A sale
that I was helping with the fall before, that was being sold, and roads being built, and timber
being hauled within a matter of a few weeks after we had located the roads and cruised the timber and laid out the timber sale units and the boundaries. That, within a couple years, was not the case anymore. There was much more environmental review and oversight and interdisciplinary review. It just absolutely changed the ball game of the practices that’d sort of become standard in the sixties. To me it was just—later on, as I realized what that incident actually was, the presentation by the Forestry school—Bolle report—to SAF, but basically to the Forest Service. What a ream of changes that occurred from 1971 up until Congress passed the forest management act five years later then, in 1976. Just what a change in forestry throughout the country from that point on. In hindsight that was just a very unique experience to see the interaction between the Bolle Report staff, the dean, and the Forest Service. Some years later I came to realize what that all meant and how controversial. It took some fortitude for the Forestry School staff and the dean to bring that forth and to pursue that. That was just very, very unique.

Another thing I guess I’ll mention is some of the folks that are no longer with us. We retirees or alumni that are here, it’s just wonderful to be here. Classes from the ‘60s, ‘70s, ‘80s. I’m from ’73. To think of some of the friends, co-students either in our era or later, who just weren’t able to be here. I think of one person, Dave Bollog (?), who I started forestry school with. He was a Vietnam veteran. We worked together one summer up in the Kootenai. Then the next fall I came back to school and he couldn’t afford to come to school, so he went to working logging. He was wrapping choker, tied on a cable around a logging truck—load of logs—and a log came loose and killed him. So, that was no further opportunity to enjoy life and a career in forestry.

Another person I particularly think of was several years later, when I was working up in Region Ten, Alaska Chugach forest. One of the summer students there was a junior, going into her junior year in the forestry school here. That would’ve been about ’78 or ’79. Just a really pleasant young lady, easy to work with, and everybody just enjoyed working with her. Her name was Suzy Seville (?). She came back to school that fall and I had a letter or two—friendship letters—from her. She talked about Thanksgiving time running up to Kalispell with her brother to join the family for Thanksgiving dinner. She was a little worried about the tires on her car driving in the snow conditions. It was snowing just before Thanksgiving. I found out a few weeks later that on that trip from Missoula to Kalispell, she and her brother were involved in an accident on Highway 93 and she was killed, as was her brother. That was an upcoming, pleasant, outstanding, young forester, who had a great career in front of her, snuffed out by a car wreck. So, I always think of those young folks, who just weren’t able to make it.

Then I mention one other friend, who graduated from ’73 and the name was Mike Peacock. He worked with the State of Alaska and I worked for the Chugach forest up in Alaska. I came back down after fifteen years up there, he stayed with the state. I went to a national training session about ten years ago and visited with some folks from Alaska and found out that about ten years prior to that—probably around 1995 or so—that Mike had been killed on a timber sale action over at Icy Bay, up in Alaska, by a deranged miner. Shot with a hidden gun. In that sense, he died in the line of duty. So, Mike is another person who that just wasn’t able to have more than

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half of a career and I feel so fortunate to have an entire career. There are other folks, who, for one reason or another, just didn’t live their full lifetime like they’re supposed to and died in the middle of his career. I want to recognize those several people that I thought of.

I think that probably concludes my memories. Everybody has great memories of Forestry School and I won’t run into some adventures and misadventures. But those items are SAF meetings and those friends and acquaintances, who just weren’t able to be with us today. I wanted to recognize those folks. Thank you very much.

CG: Thanks for sharing. I have one question if you’re willing. One final question, which is, you said you’ve been working for the forest service 35 years?

DW: Correct.

CG: What’s sustained you throughout that?

DW: Well, I enjoyed the work that I was doing. It was multiple resource activities, from timber sales to recreation to lands and minerals, soil and water work, but I always felt that there was a great purpose for what we were doing. We really were managing the land to the best of our ability and we were serving the public, the owners. Very responsive, I thought, to the overall demands for management of those public lands. So, I feel very fortunate to have had a career that I really enjoyed doing work in natural resource management—that I really enjoyed—and working for the American public, which I think are probably the best bosses in the world. I have no regrets and just enjoyed all thirty-five years. After thirty-five it was just a good time to wrap it up, let some younger folks with new perspectives come on board, take their role. Still tied in with firefighting as an AD [Administratively Determined firefighter] across the West and spend anywhere from thirty to sixty days a summer fighting fire, but don’t have to be concerned about coming back and handling the missed workload when coming back from a fire. Now, I’ll come back and take care of the yardwork and other projects, rather than being three weeks behind on the workload at work. I feel very fortunate to have had that opportunity for 35 years.

[End of Interview]