Freeman: How do you perceive that the ISC report relates to ecosystem management, for example the FEMAT (Forest Ecosystem Management Assessment Team) project?

Thomas: The ISC report was the first in a series that included ISC, SAT, Gang of Four, FEMAT. These were sequential reports, each one doing something the previous one did not. Now, basically, I wrote the instructions for each one of the teams, and in doing so I would say to the folks appointing the team, "this is the letter of instruction for you to send to the team." Sometimes I would get back the instructions verbatim, and sometimes I would lose a point or two. For example, in the case of ISC, we kept telling our bosses "this is the wrong question." This wasn't a question about spotted owls; it's a question about old-growth. And, if it's about old growth, it's about a component of the ecosystem. Thus the right question was (playing off the purpose of the Endangered Species Act): how to ensure the preservation of ecosystems using threatened or endangered species as indicators. So, it started off as an owl plan, but basically when you look at FEMAT, it's just ISC with bells and whistles hung on it. After all that time and all that effort we could never come up with anything better as a basic core than ISC. So, ISC ultimately turned out to be the first big move toward ecosystem management—the only effort that has really been applied at landscape scale.

Freeman: Would you say that goes also with the Scientific Panel—the "Gang of Four"?

Thomas: The core options in the Gang of Four [report] were all based on ISC-modified, basically, up or down in terms of timber yields and degree of protection. The Gang of Four effort added two things to the equation, one being fish. When we got through talking to Congressman Harold Volkmer from Missouri (who was the chair of the subcommittee that asked the Gang of
Four to do this job), he called out as we were leaving the room: "And don't let us get surprised by some goddamn fish." We used that as the entrée to consider fish, and then we wrote the instructions to ourselves to that effect. About this time, a figure enters the picture with influence up to the present. His name is Jim Lyons. His influence goes back before ISC to the genesis of the technical consideration of the "old growth" issue. This was the SAP [Society of American Foresters] assessment and subsequent report on scheduling old-growth timber harvest. Lyons was the SAF staffer who organized and guided that effort. When you trace the players in the entire "old growth" issue, there are those who continue a role through the entire drama. For example, Jerry Franklin and I were on the SAF committee staffed by Jim Lyons. Lyons did not have anything to do with the ISC, but was cognizant of the effort. When Congress tried to make a legislative fix, he was Chief of Staff working for the Agriculture Committee, and he knew all the players from the previous SAF effort.

Freeman: John Gordon included?

Thomas: John Gordon was one of Lyon's professors at Yale. I first met Jim Lyons when he was an undergraduate at Rutgers.

Freeman: How did you get chosen as Chief? Were there any individuals who said "Grab Jack Ward Thomas"?

Thomas: I don't know. The guy you need to ask is the guy who pushed for my appointment—Jim Lyons. Remember, Lyons was on the SAF staff for scheduling old growth timber harvesting that began the whole process. Jerry Franklin and I were the two token "weirdos" in the SAF group; the rest were hard-core SAF forester types. The genesis of the technical assessment of the old-growth issue starts there, and also the connections between the people. At the time, the ISC, because it was totally concerned with biology, did not rely on foresters or economists. The ISC was mostly composed of "owl people." By the time the Gang of Four came into being, the issue now clearly contained fish problems. The instructions to the Gang included consideration of the oldgrowth ecosystem. Now if you think some Congressman thought out that letter of instructions.
thoroughly, you would, I believe, be mistaken. The Gang negotiated with Lyons about what our instructions should be.

Congress never acted on the Gang's report. When BLM and the Forest Service were finally at the point of acting on the ISC strategy, Cy Jameson, Director of BLM, pulled BLM out, to cover his ass for a run at Congress in 1992. The judge then said, "Nah, that's enough," and shut everything down. The Judge asked the government two questions: 1) how will this work with BLM following the Jameson plan (nobody beyond Jameson had the slightest idea what the Jameson plan was); and 2) in essence, from reading all the material (the ISC report), there are at least 39 other species that might be associated with old growth. What would be the effect of the ISC strategy on these species?

We had to answer the question about the 39 species. I was assigned to head the team (SAT) to answer the Judge's questions. I went to Jim Overbay, Deputy Chief for the National Forest System who assigned the team, and said "Look, why don't we quit evading the real issue and answer the appropriate question. The question is: 'There aren't 39 species associated with old growth, there are maybe 900 to 1,400 of them. Let's look at the whole spectrum of species.'" Overbay said "Okay, let's go." So I wrote the instructions that he would then give to us to follow. Now the Administration was not ready to talk ecosystems just yet. But when you consider 900 to 1,400 species and their interactions and interdependence, you are talking about ecosystems. The SAT report never made the headlines like ISC and FEMAT, but the SAT report was a truly crucial turning point. That is when we looked at all associated species. At that point everything bogged down in political controversy. Congress and the Bush Administration said "We give up. Let's wait until after the elections." When Bush campaigned in the Northwest, he promised to push for changes in the ESA after the election. Perot said (and I am paraphrasing) "To hell with that endangered species stuff." Bill Clinton said, "I feel your pain," and promised a solution shortly after the election. That "solution" was FEMAT. And the key to understanding the quantum change that FEMAT represented is to read the instructions to the team.

Freeman: Calling for a "comprehensive and balanced" policy?
Thomas: The instructions said to take an "ecosystem approach," and absorb the responsibility for ESA on public lands to the extent possible. And that's the new policy, which now, at least in my opinion, makes the preservation of biodiversity the overriding management objective on federal lands.

Freeman: How did Dale Robertson respond to your participation in the Gang of Four, since that was rather out of the agency's domain?

Thomas: He said "Go do the best you can."

Freeman: John Gordon had commented that he was a little peeved at Dale for doing that. I don't know how he put it, but it was subtle. That's why I ask. I wonder if he was up in arms.

Thomas: John Gordon was a larger figure in forestry affairs that I was. Dale never said anything to me except that I should do the best I can. Robertson asked me to do the ISC. So I never discussed the activities of the Gang of Four, except to brief him on the results. Now keep in mind there was a rapid evolution of thought about old growth going on. All the action in the Northwest (ISC, SAT, Gang of Four, and FEMAT) evolved into the Columbia Basin effort. These were the seedlings. What we tried to do in instituting the Columbia Basin effort was to learn from all the successes and all the mistakes that had been previously made in these and other efforts. For example, ISC, SAT, and Gang of Four were conducted behind closed doors. That was recognized as inappropriate by the time the Columbia Basin effort started. However, subsequent events have shown that fully transparent processes are very difficult to execute with any efficiency. Now under ISC we had observers: Dave Wilcove from The Wilderness Society, and Larry Irwin, who represented an industry-supported research group that facilitates research for the industry. By the time we got to the Columbia Basin effort, I was Chief of the Forest Service. I said, "Look, I don't want this done under tight security. We are not hiding anything." Doing something like this is a lot like making sausage. You will enjoy the end product much more if you don't watch it being made. This is not exactly a clean assembly line process. There are discussions and arguments and debates, assessments and the facing up to biases and prejudices—all of those things. It sometimes seems "crazy" when you get down to it.
Freeman: How did the Option 9 process come down. What is the story behind that?

Thomas: When we got to the end [of FEMAT], there were eight options on the table. And the options that seemed likely to pass legal muster produced timber yields of less than one billion board feet. Some, including me, were stunned by the low numbers. We tried to create an array of options all the way from very strong environmental protection to high levels of timber production. And then, when we wanted some intermediate one that cut close to the line, we could not come up with any that did not go "off the edge" on the two sides (protection and production). Obviously, we had to set some level of timber production, yet maybe it would not stand up to legal muster. The option with absolute protection of the environment probably would not be politically and economically acceptable. We needed a full array of options. But when we got through, we simply did not have any that were feasible that included production of more than 600 to 800 million board feet.

It seemed to a number of team members that we had not produced a full array of choices. Jerry Franklin, from the University of Washington, rather passionately declared that we had not yet done the job. We were all tired and completely exhausted. Franklin made a plea: "Let's try one more option." He took the lead in the development of Option 9. The team was pooped, but he got up and said, "Come on guys, one more time." Thus Jerry Franklin "fathered" Option 9.

Freeman: Was there disagreement on that? I had heard that there was disagreement and you essentially said that you did not want anything to do with it, but sounds like you were very highly involved.

Thomas: (Nods negatively). That is absolutely not true. I gave all the support I could, and I participated in the effort. The other rumor out there is that we received orders to do Option 9. We received no such orders. Katie McGinty, head of the Council on Environmental Quality, granted the time extension I requested, but was not particularly happy about it. I put every effort I could into facilitating the development of Option 9. It was my job to get the right team in place and keep it focused. There was some moaning and groaning about "oh my God, we have been at this
7 days a week, 14 hours a day, for 60 days, and here we go again." But everyone "sucked it in" and went back and produced Option 9. Of course, that is my perception. One of the things you probably know from your interviews is that you are talking to a lot of people who are telling the absolute truth, and yet some of the accounts do not agree. One of the things that may have fed those rumors was the fact that Franklin and I had been long-time competitors—friendly competitors—to be the top scientist in the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Station. But it was always friendly. I was full of bright ideas and he was most certainly full of bright ideas. We sometimes debated, in public and elsewhere, but I have the absolute highest regard for Jerry. I am sure he would say the same for me. We are not alike; we see some things differently. I am an animal ecologist, and he is a plant ecologist. He is impeccably honest, a bit egotistical just as I am—and just as every top scientist is. If I had to go to hell and take six people with me to get back, he would be one I would take.

Freeman: I have one last question. It has to do with the FACA [Federal Advisory Committees Act] case. The Northwest Forest Resource council charged that FEMAT began before the Forest Conference. Is that true, and is that even consequential?

Thomas: Yes, they had talked to me about heading the team, before the conference. But, so what?

Freeman: What did FACA do? It did not really shut down FEMAT after it was decided you were in violation of FACA.

Thomas: No, the Courts did not decide that until long after. FEMAT had already wrapped up its work.

Freeman: That did not seem to have shut down the FEMAT...

Thomas: Remember, Judge Dwyer did not make that decision until months after FEMAT had concluded its work. The judge said technically there was a violation of FACA. We argued strongly that we were not in violation as everyone who worked on FEMAT was paid by the
federal government. Our attorneys told us that would "FACA-proof us. I think the Judge's interpretation acknowledged that all participants were paid by the federal government, but several participants were paid by the federal government through their universities. And therein lies the technicality. If I remember, industry originally filed this with Judge Jackson in Washington, D.C., because he was much more favorable to the timber industry than Judge Dwyer. But Jackson referred the case back to Dwyer, stating the matter had been Dwyer's all along. Dwyer said FACA was violated, but so what? You will have to read the case, but that is my interpretation. Yes, the Administration (Jim Lyons) contacted me before the Forest Summit. In fact, we were renting space, putting computers in place, recruiting staff, etc. But I never did understand what that had to do with a FACA question. The President of the United States had ordered us to get ready.

We were not exactly sneaking around. The President fully understood that in order to solve the problem he had to take a management option that already existed and put it through the formal process, or produce an array of options that ensured, up front, a coordinated plan by all involved agencies—Forest Service, BLM, Fish and Wildlife Services, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Nobody had yet done that. And he well knew, or at least Lyons well knew, that considerable new information had emerged since the last time through the drill.

So what was the appropriate course of action? Bring all the new information to bear in an inclusive fashion, then push it through an EIS that included the multiple agencies. Then you have a product that will stand up to legal scrutiny. This was the intent of FEMAT. We got the job done. The President picked Option 9. And, Judge Dwyer declared that all legal requirements had been met.

**EXCERPT FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK WARD THOMAS**

March 11, 1997

Freeman: Am I getting you right when I say there was a split between the scientific community and the Washington Office as to what ecosystem management was? Is that true?
Thomas: No, I would not say that. I would say there was something of a split between the research community and the managers in that regard. The research community was telling managers they had to take on a different approach (ecosystem management), and they had to make some adjustments in the way they did business. This was difficult for the Forest Service to absorb because it had been the superstar agency for most of the century. When you have been on a long-term winning streak, change is hard. The Forest Service did not increase its constituency base. The agency downsized. Public opinion shifted toward environmental protection and recreation. And the Forest Service was slow to adjust to all of this.

Also, there was an "old guard" that did not want to change. They had a point—we were the superstars, the best in the world at what we did. Others had studied the Forest Service—even private industry. When suddenly the rules changed, the superstar agency took a while to adjust. These were very, very good people who were used to a clear mission and accomplishing great things, then being rewarded and praised and loved for their achievements. Many in the agency had a hard time coming to grips with the speed and degree of the changes, which were taking place in quantum leaps. The people in charge likewise were responding too slowly to the changes. They were essentially caught unprepared.

Neither had the Forest Service prepared its long-term constituencies for change. A political situation had developed that was different from anything the Forest Service had ever seen, and this new situation involved our entire society. There had been a time when professionals were rarely questioned. Now our society questions everything. In the past, the Forest Service put forward a vision, listened to the public, and made decisions. By definition, the Forest Service was right and proceeded with action. Who could have visualized there would come to be a "conflict industry" with "hired guns" on both sides of every contentious issue, and they would spend all their time trying to bring the agency down no matter what it did.

It has been a combination of all these things—and it has been very confusing.