Oral History 227-29

Robert Wolf Oral History Project

Interviewee: Robert Wolf

Interviewer: Arnold Bolle, Dan Hall

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Summary: Wolf recalls a national focus on "full development of public resources " during the 1950s and the resulting impact. He begins with the history of Region One in establishing national policy and moves into congressional activity, clearcutting methods and justifications, grazing, recreational beginnings, mining abuses, multiple use, reforestation resolutions in 1960, and the Forest Service failure to evaluate.

Hall: This is Tuesday, November 14. We're in the archives of the Mansfield Library talking with Bob Wolf today. Today's topic will be full development of public resources, 1957. Do you want to start, Arnie?

Bolle: Before that, about 1954, we had the big spruce bark beetle epidemic in the Northern Rockies, which started a big salvage program. There had been a previous one in the Mid-Rockies down around Colorado, where they developed ideas about what to do to get action. This one came in full speed because it was right during the postwar housing boom, and there was a market for the timber and also the technology to get into the forest lands. Spruce, by the way, had not been considered an important timber species before this, but this time it was successful. The forest products lab had developed harvesting [and] manufacturing methods. Before that spruce had trouble with ordinary saws -- it tore them up.

On the Flathead Forest, the first sale took place up on the North Fork of the Flathead and the bidders (the companies up there) had furnished a bid, but they had gotten together and decided they would not bid. They would force the Forest Service to pay them to get the timber
But one guy bid and, in fact, he later became the founder of the Plum Creek Timber Company up there, which had the first mill. He bid $1 a thousand. It infuriated all the others because it was so cheap. But he proceeded, and they built a minimal road up to the area and they made the first cut. They included some green timber in order to sweeten [the deal] up and make it a profitable sale. That was the first effort.

From that, they expanded rapidly. They found out they could do it, and it was clear-cut. They set the pattern and could cut this timber and then the others started to bid and the thing expanded and, in fact, it became a real operation. The district offices were festooned with awards for getting out thousands and thousands of millions of board feet and exceeding their goals. Everybody was wearing hard hats, working like mad and making lots of money.

From this developed the regional office timber people, John Castles and Axel Lindh, particularly, were behind this particular project; they decided that this system could be used on all the timber in Montana. They assumed from this that every tree that grew in the national forests of Montana was harvestable and should be harvested and so they developed this program of Full Development of Public Resources in Montana. I don't know if that's the official title of the report, but the idea was that they could do all this extra timber harvest which was ... provide all this timber needed for the postwar building boom and that Congress would make money on this, and if Congress advanced the money, they would get more money back than they gave, so it was a big deal for everybody. So this went to Congress and there's where Bob can tell us what happened.

Wolf: Well, the basic theory in the '50s under which most resource people were proceeding really stemmed from the public power debates of full development of resources. The
conservationists of the '50s were for the high dam on the Snake River and the anti-
conservationists, which were the power companies, were for the three low dams. The idea was
that more development was better development. The major conservation organizations
expressed this point of view, the Izaak Walton League and so forth.

The Forest Service was beginning to feel an increasing demand for its timber.
Interestingly, we don't have the figures in front of us, but this region was, early in the game in the
beginning of the national forest system (although the cut was very modest), one of the leading
timber producing regions. A lot of it was used in connection with mining. Region VI had a very
modest cut because it was isolated due to the absence of the Panama Canal.

Then Region I didn't really move ahead. Mining slacked off. The demand for timber
fell. You can find towns in Montana where there were mines, and you can look at the hillsides
around them and they were completely denuded.

Interviewer: They were using it to roast their ore.

Wolf: So there was tremendous cut of timber, some of it illegally cut, and some of it legally cut,
but quite a bit illegally cut.

Interviewer: Also, in the railroads there was a lawsuit over the NP [Northern Pacific] that ran
until not many years ago. It was finally settled.

Wolf: After WWII, there was a renaissance of interest in cutting and, as you say, spruce became
a subject of interest because of the attack of the budworm, resulting in the death of a lot of
spruce trees. What then seemed like a logical conclusion was that you could cut all trees at a profit. There was not any economic analysis of this. It was all intuitive. The administration simply wasn't very enthused about spending additional money on either timber harvesting or on the other aspects of national forest management. So the Forest Service budget was fought every year in the Congress with local efforts to increase the funding.

The second problem (a persistent one that we discussed in an earlier interview) was this question of lack of access. The timber industry was schizoid, in effect, on this subject. On the one hand they were flailing the Forest Service for not selling more timber; on the other hand, the large dominant landowners did not want open access for competing bidders.

So the Forest Service was really caught in a terrible dilemma and a tough situation on this. Leaving aside any question of economic values just in terms of plain operating structure, the industry was whipsawing them and the Forest Service was struggling as to how to respond. Two things really happened. I'm not exactly positive as to how Charlie Tebbe got involved in this, but he was a regional forester. I think it was on one of his trips to Washington when the regional foresters would call on a Congressional delegation. He had a meeting with the Montana delegation and I participated in it. There would have been Senators Mansfield and Murray and Congressmen Metcalf and Anderson, some of their staff, particularly Vic Reinemer, Britt Englund and Ray Dockstader. Mr. Tebbe made a very straightforward presentation, which was not in the nature of an overt request for funding, [laughter] but it described the problems that he was confronting. Out of that, the Montana delegation decided that what they needed was a special report on the potential to fully develop the resources of Montana's forests, public and private. This was really a forerunner of the program for the national forests, in a way. It kind of grew out of some of the things that had been done in the Timber Resource Review. Charlie
Tebbe said he would try to do this. My recollection is that he ran into opposition within the Department of Agriculture, which caused the Montana delegation (I think there are some letters of record on this) to write to the secretary of agriculture and virtually demand that this study be done, citing the significant problems that existed due to the spruce budworm and other similar things. This left little alternative but to go ahead and do it.

So there was a committee print piece that the Senate Interior Committee published, "Full Development of Montana's Forest Resources," I believe was the title. That was going to be the basis for the Montana delegation pushing ahead on getting the funding needed to do what they thought needed to be done in Montana. My recollection is that Gale McGee of Wyoming heard of this great endeavor [laughing] and so he wanted to have a similar program started and a paper done on Wyoming. Senator Philip Hart of Michigan was also warmly interested in natural resource development. His administrative assistant, Bill Welsh, was one of the really top-flight administrative assistants on the Hill. Bill Welsh heard about it and thought that this would be a good thing for the Upper Peninsula. So I helped put together the outline for Hart, so the Department of Agriculture had to produce one for Upper Michigan [chuckles]. But those were three forerunners. They were then printed as committee prints and they were used then as a basis for pushing ahead. Ultimately, as the Forest Service proceeded with the program for the national forest, this was one of the catalysts that promoted that.

Bolle: For years, the Forest Service has been saying, "There's all this potential timber here. Someday all this is going to be needed." By Gosh, the day had arrived. Now they could realize it. It [program for national forest] came out and it, of course, was not only set up in terms of "now we can manage these forests, because we can now start cutting this timber and getting it
into good growing stock" and all the good things that forests traditionally were preaching but, at the same time, it was the best possible way that they got over the budget and got into a higher level and became the biggest agency in the Department of Agriculture.

Wolf: Related to that, the traditional position of the Executive Branch was that what went on in the Executive Branch on the budget was secret, was not public knowledge. What an agency asked a secretary, what the secretary asked of the Bureau of the Budget, what the president decided to give them, was not suitable for public knowledge. The budget process was a closed process. And on the Hill the budget process was a closed process. The budget process was a closed process in the House. The House hearings, when the agency testified, were closed. The budget justifications were only available to a small, select group of people, those on the Appropriation Committee and a few of us on the authorizing committees. They were not generally available to the public. The agency would leak them to friends, very discreetly. But these were not considered to be public documents until after the House had held the hearing where the agency testified. The Senate hearing then was of the nature of an appeal to the House action, and usually the Senate hearing was held after the House reported its bill, not before. That's all changed now. The whole process has opened up.

Senator Gale McGee, probably about 1958, was on the Appropriations Committee and decided that he wanted to know what the Forest Service had asked of the Department and what the Department had asked of Office of the Budget and what the results were. He blasted away at them on the floor of the Senate. My recollection was that he called the director of the Bureau of the Budget "the one-eyed bookkeeper," [laughter] which produced a very unusual response. Again, the director of the Bureau of the Budget was a presidential appointee not confirmed by
the Senate, and traditionally had stayed out of the political limelight, never responded to any criticism. You could throw bombs at him and he wouldn't say a word. But Maurice Stans, who was by then the budget director for the Eisenhower administration, broke that precedent, changed the rule and decided to respond.

For instance, when I worked in the Bureau of the Budget, the budget director would not respond to any criticism made in Congress. He was the president's man. I thought it was a sound position (and I still do) that he should really be the inside man for the president on the budget and not an outside guy making speeches and doing the kind of stuff Stockman's done.

Bolle: Seems to me that, as far as it's possible, it should be built on facts, without influencing the facts at this level at which you really get the facts. Then you can start arguing, when you really get on a solid basis. Otherwise, you're questioning everything, and you might as well not have any facts.

Wolf: McGee opened up the budget process by forcing the release of this data. Senator Hayden, the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, supported him. And McGee put all this stuff in the Congressional Record and then said, "Look, this is what the Forest Service is asking for; this is what the department thought they ought to have, and this is what the Bureau of the Budget gave them, and here what we have is a truly imbalanced budget, an out-of-balance budget, instead of one that has full resource development."

The other thing, though, that's important when you're looking back, comparing with the conditions in 1989, is that the issue of environmental concern was not part of it. It was assumed by foresters, and I think by a great part of the public, that what was being done on public forests
was good from an ecological standpoint. It was probably because (and this may be a bias), in total, what was being done was rather modest compared to the level of activity today, and so there weren't as many people agitated about the changes in the cover of the land.

Bolle: You know, in justifying it, we've been saying all the time that these things could be done - that would be so good for the forest to cut off all that old stuff and get younger trees, bigger trees, going. It would produce much more per acre, and the whole basis of professional forestry was based on this idea of growing things better, improving and getting better genetic quality on the land, good orderly roads and trees that were occupying everything. The whole professional knowledge at that time was sponsoring this. Now the thing that went here that I think presented a problem, this pattern was set by the spruce salvage program, in which they cut everything, including green trees and everything else. Just clear-cutting, that was the thing. Clear-cutting had been advocated under certain conditions. So spruce was not necessarily ... anyhow, here it worked. But it also turned out to be the most economically efficient way to go for the timber industry. So, in going on with the program for the forests, clear-cutting became the accepted method. In fact it spread out and there's where it ran into troubles, in the Bitterroot, why it was being used and it was not [the] silviculturists' universal recommendations by any means, though he was squelched when he protested. It went on and of course the ultimate case was on West Virginia where they were clear-cutting on an uneven native stand where the recommendation was entirely wrong or out of keeping with silviculture methods. So there were things that developed with it that brought protest. I think if the Forest Service had been more aware and if they had been considering the environment, and had been more careful with the systems they used, this would not have caused the primal uproar that it did. Also, it led to over-cutting
considerably. In the President's Panel on Timber and the Environment, the recommendation there was to cut all the old growth in the National Forest in 20 years and then we'd get all our timber from private lands. Well, I was asked to review it and for Montana. We'd have been out of the timber business for about 50 years instead of 20 years like it looks like we're headed for.

It had some serious problems in the Flathead where I was doing some research at that time, the ASQ was 40 million feet. The actual cut was about 20 million. They never thought they'd get to 40 million. Well, when this happened, they went all the way up, and in 1969 it peaked at 200 million, and they exceeded that in the cut. Since then it has been going down. I stopped and saw the supervisor a few months ago and he told me that they were lucky if they were going to get 40 million again. They were right back down to where they started.

Wolf: There are a couple of other aspects, though, of this issue that relate to this. In 1955, as I recall, the Forest Service had underway a significant drive to get additional funding for recreation. They wanted to be able to retain a certain portion of receipts and use them for recreation, and the Eisenhower administration would have no part of that. It developed scant interest in the House and the Senate. While Milt Bryan, who did the legislative footwork for the Forest Service, was running around getting people to put bills in to do it, they just never went anywhere. Multiple use was not in law; it was a phrase that we used intermittently, but it certainly had no defined meaning. It only began to spring up as a counter to the Park Service effort, and later to the wilderness movement effort, to take chunks of national forest and move them over into the national [parks]. So the classic attack on that would be to say that the Park Service was engaged in single use.

The third significant thing is, I don't recall any financial or economic analysis that was
ever done on any of these propositions. It was all intuitive judgment. Therefore we proceeded as though we had almost a revealed truth that development was good and it was going to be financially sound.

Bolle: That was the basic idea.

Wolf: Nobody did that sort of analysis -- not even these fuzzy cost-benefit analyses that add up the non-commodity values and the commodity values. All of it was intuitive.

Finally, there was a general view that older stands were, by definition, on the verge of decay, decadent. There was not, as I look back, good definitive research showing what part of the forest was in what sort of condition. The general view was that a big tree was on the verge of becoming a dead tree and a dead tree was a menace. It was a totally different atmosphere, and the public, generally, and the conservation organizations, specifically, had a warm symbiotic relationship with the Forest Service, because the Forest Service wasn't viewed as totally commodity-oriented.

Bolle: Before that, they were the "fine guardians;" they were highly respected because they were our protectors.

Wolf: Then one further point, to try to set the era into its perspective: there had been significant grazing controversies over grazing fees and grazing permits. The conservation community stood shoulder to shoulder. In fact, it had been out in front virtually of the Forest Service making sure that the stockmen (who were being led by then-Senator Barrett of Wyoming) were not able to
prevail in having a wide-open license to graze.

The grazing issue had been a festering wound ever since 1910 [Bolle interjects agreement] and had continued over the years and it had been exacerbated by the fact that the BLM's grazing policies were so much more lax -- that the stockmen were constantly playing one against the other. The Forest Service had a higher grazing fee in real dollars than the BLM had by far -- about five times higher. They had a variable fee. In fact, the so-called "grazing fees" that were formed in the '60s, in retrospect, turned out not to be reformed but retrogressive. So Forest Service efforts to improve grazing land, which was half the national forest system, was really one of the focal points of concern in the conservation community. [Bolle agrees] So, while we foresters talked mainly about timber, internally in the Forest Service they were looking at these issues also, and they were seeking to maintain their position of getting the grazing lands that they administered also in better shape. Even though the early grazing fees were high, they didn't cover costs and they certainly weren't a fair value of the forage. But they were far better than the BLM fees.

Bolle: In the Rocky Mountain area -- in the rangelands -- grazing was the main activity in most of the forests. In my early work with the Forest Service, I was on range surveys. We made a lot of range surveys. It was a wonderful job -- we really got out in the backcountry. But then worked with the Forest Service, the main thing was checking up on the grazing, and following it through, and watching it very carefully and doing it. I think a great deal of progress was made in improving range because the range has been there, and the cattle have been there and when Pinchot got the forests and the first thing he wanted to do was pack them all off. He had to make an accommodation, which he did. But then I recall, at that time, the Forest Service was looking
at lands where adjacent nearby BLM lands were just grubbed into the ground. There was no control at all. I remember everybody dumped their stock in there and it was just a horrible situation.

The Forest Service person recommended they didn’t take these lands over. The Forest Service was doing a range research, had experiment stations out in Miles City, down in Arizona - I forget the name of the famous range. I’ve been on the area, but throughout they were the ones that were doing the range research and the recommendations and, in the early days, were planning, hoping to take over all the public lands for their administration.

Wolf: With the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act, which had a long evolutionary history (14 years in passage), when it was under consideration, the Forest Service was seeking to be the manager of those lands. And the stockmen, of course, were opposed to it because there was still that open wound where the Forest Service charged grazing fees and regulated use, and when you transferred or sold your permit to a new permittee, the Forest Service would then institute a cut to take care of the overgrazing. And ranchers were selling their permits to the new permittee based upon, let’s say, 1,000 AUM per grazing unit and the new permittee would be cut to 800.

Bolle: I was alternate ranger out in the Basin District of Deerlodge Forest out of Butte just after I got out of school. Almost all my work was checking on range allotments. Two timber surveys and two timber sales. One was some mine properties for a guy who had a little mine operation - took me about half a day. Another was for poles for a rancher down the other direction. That was the extent of the timber activity on that forest. Of course, that was after they had been cutting it all off to roast their ore, and it was before the days lodgepole became an important
timber tree. There was recreation there along the highway and off the roads. By the way, you mentioned the recreation. About those periods, recreation was just not a word that was supposed to be in the vocabulary of being considered as important. I was with the SCS in those early days, and we did a lot of work helping people lay out ponds, farm ponds, livestock watering places, and a lot of things. And I remember Ed Graham, who headed wildlife nationally, wrote a bulletin about the value of these ponds and the various things they did for the livestock and so forth and so on. He also recommended their recreation value and that was unique. When it went up, the people [there] said, "We're not authorized to be involved in recreation." It was just a word you didn't use.

Wolf: The farm ponds were considered to be for livestock-watering and on-farm water conservation. There were a few people talking a little bit about stocking fish in them, but that wasn't pushed, and recreation as a concept was not. But also in terms of the national forests, wildlife management up through that period was largely predator control. You look at all the early reports of the chief, when you get to wildlife, you see a discussion of predator control and mainly predator control as it affected livestock.

Bolle: Yeah, you bet. And in Montana at that time there were a lot more sheep than cattle, so the predators were a lot more serious. They took sheep a lot easier.

Wolf: They were alleged to be more serious.

Hall: I have a question, if I might interrupt. Where did this interest by the Forest Service in
recreation come from that took place in the '50s?

Wolf: In my view, in the '20s and '30s, there were relatively few roads in the national forests and to the extent that there was any limited timber cutting (and we're talking about total sales of approximately a billion board feet a year), they were flume [logged or railroad logged] ...

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. people did a lot more walking and hunting and fishing, walking to do that, than relying on vehicles or going out on horseback on a hunting trip and so forth. Most of the recreation was locally oriented toward [Montana] residents, not nationally oriented.

The parks, to the extent that they provided recreation -- a lot of the recreationists that came into the park came by railroad. They were fairly wealthy. The parks were genuinely catering to the more wealthy user, not to the local user, and the motor vehicle was certainly not a significant factor in American life at that point. Far more people traveled by train than traveled by car.

But after WWII and as the road system had developed and was expanded into the forest and used for protection, that opened the forest up initially to some recreational use. Then, as timber cutting proceeded, after WWII we proceeded to use more truck logging than any other kind, and so there were more roads being opened. Along the lower parts of drainages in the main arteries, particularly where there were good streams and lakes, recreation began to develop.

The one other exception to that was the summer home permit. New York State had done
this in the late 1800s on state lands. Pinchot was aware of this, and one of the first things he did was institute a system of granting summer home permits to people, the theory being that these people residing in the forest would be part of the protection force, and they would be interested in protecting the forest. Pinchot also, contrary to some of the assertions, favored national forest homesteads on land that was truly agricultural within the national forest. This was part of the old Jeffersonian agrarian concept that you had farmers working the agricultural land and up above the timberland was being managed carefully to provide a constant flow of water so that the farm would continue to be productive and everybody would live happily ever after.

So this whole concept of recreation evolved out of the change in our transportation system and the changing interests of people in doing things. The better the transportation system became, the more diverse it became. With the automobile, [there were] more opportunities for urban people now to go into the forest.

And where early forest recreation, to the extent that it existed, was largely hunting and fishing. It now became camping, hiking, hunting, fishing and skiing, winter sports as well as summer activities, boating where there were lakes, demand to put in boat ramps, et cetera. All these things began to evolve as more and more people went out to enjoy outdoor recreation. So, while outdoor recreation could not be found in the initial charter of the national forests, and didn't appear until the 1960 Multiple Use Act, it became a fact of life that people did go out and go on public land. As Dr. Bolle mentioned in one of the earlier interviews, the timber industry (as it got timber sales and opened up areas through roads), actively sought to prevent public use, not only on national forest lands, but on their own lands. But the general American sentiment was "public lands are public lands." Then there was another group that was a key factor in this that we haven't mentioned and that was the so-called miners, the people who went out and filed
mining claims. There was always the picture of the old, bearded character with his mule loaded
down with every conceivable thing and his sluicing pan hanging by the side of the mule rattling
along, going out finding a gold mine. Early mine explorers did do a lot of penetrating of
heretofore-unvisited parts of the national forest system, looking for minerals. And for those of
us who worked, even as late as I started in the field, it wasn't uncommon for us to come across
Prince Albert cans nailed to trees with paper in them describing the boundary of a claim. That
was the way you put your claim up, you used a tobacco can, these little tin -- they were about
three by five and an inch thick -- tobacco cans, because they had a top that closed, so you could
nail them to the edge of your mining claim, four of them on each corner and that would be the
proof of your claim. You would go into the county seat and register the claim, but the on-the­
ground proof was that plus some blazes. It was considered a crime to disturb them. The cans,
that is. [chuckles]

Bolle: Some argued that that was a form of recreation too. I remember prospecting when I was
a kid, and I'll tell you, it was exciting. You'd get in the wildest country you can possibly find,
look around for gold. You just figure any time now, you may find that mountain of solid gold.

Wolf: There were, later, a lot of abuses of the mining law of 1872 by people who really had no
interest in developing mines, but who sought to acquire national forest lands for other purposes.
There's a classic study, and I regret I don't have it; I'm sure it's in the archives of the Department
of Agriculture/Forest Service. It was issued in 1953. I don't remember the exact title, but it was
mining claims on the national forest. Report on the problem of mining claims on the national
forests by the National Forest Advisory Council USFS, January 1953, 123 pages (no number for
the report). It had about 200 pictures of specific mining/alleged mining claims that were fraudulent, with the structures on these claims that ranged everywhere from hotels and stores to whorehouses. The whorehouse was on Tonto National Forest in Arizona. The reason I remember it is that there were lots of jokes at the time about the Lone Ranger. [laughter] But many claims were fraudulent.

Bolle: So were many of the homesteads.

Wolf: Yes. But people who didn't want to be held to reducing 1/8 of the land to cultivation, which the Homestead Act required, would file a 20-acre mining claim. Then they would dig a little hole in the ground, and they would say they were exploring for minerals. So they didn't have to plant a crop and show that it failed.

Bolle: They were supposed to show annual work of $100 ...

Wolf: Yes. But Congress kept passing a commutation of that. Every year they'd pass something that said, "Well, you don't have to do the $100 worth of work." But this whole concept of development evolved slowly over time and it has got lots of twists and turns in it. Currently people who haven't looked at this history wonder how we get to where we are. But each of these steps, in my view, seemed logical at the time, even though the results may not be very beneficial.

Bolle: Going back, though, to where we started, the full development of forest resources, this really did mark a considerable change in the Forest Service to a temporary orientation in primary
product in the national forests, which is still with us. And this is perhaps the cause of legislation and everything else -- the Forest Management Act, the RPA, all these things have come out as a result of overemphasis of the Forest Service on timber production.

Wolf: What you're really looking at in that era of the '50s is the painful emergence of the Forest Service from the custodial era to the management era. It was a time of tremendous cataclysmic change within the Forest Service as they struggled to shape a new identity. This was a change from the theory of multiple use to the facts of it, which in itself was a painful adjustment. I would agree that timber became the dominant vehicle in the minds of most resource managers for achieving multiple use, although to this day you cannot find in a timber sale outline the specifics of the multiple use benefits that are going to accrue by cutting a specific tract of timber. You can only find the most general suppositions of them in the current crop of management plans.

Bolle: The Full Development Program, New Program for the national forests and so on, got the Forest Service well into this business. Then the protest of uses led to RPA and the National Forest Management Act. Of course along with it came NIPA and the water pollution and other acts, like the Endangered Species Act, and a whole series of things that tended to reduce the Forest Service authority or freedom of decision on what they did. The Forest Service considers each one of these a limitation on its freedom to act, and so I guess that leads us to the present controversy.

Wolf: We might want to just do number 12 here, this Andersen/Mansfield Act.
Questioner: Before you do that, I have some questions here before we get a change in here. In the concepts of multiple use, then how did they fit into full development?

Wolf: Full Development presupposed intuitively that you were going to have a multiple use approach, that you were going to enhance (and I use the word "enhance") wildlife benefits, water benefits. You would have improved watersheds, improved water yields, improved outdoor recreation opportunities, which are the two other multiple uses associated with the forest beyond the question of preservation and soil values, retention of soil values, grazing to some extent is associated with some types of forest, but it's more of an open range issue.

But it was assumed that you were going to get all these benefits because what you were doing was, you were taking the old decadent forest, in theory, and converting it now to a growing vibrant forest with rabbits and deer jumping.

Bolle: With joy.

Wolf: Yes.

Hall: We have a question for you, Dr. Bolle. You mentioned at the start that the concept for this came around after World War II. Specifically, I wanted to ask you, did Evan Kelly have any role in this full development of public resources?

Bolle: It came just after the period of his tenure as regional forester. There was a big postwar
demand for housing. Returning soldiers were a major factor. This whole period [war] was a period of forced savings. There was rationing during the war. People couldn't spend their money, and so they saved it -- the people in the war work and so on. People had gone overseas, and coming back there were a lot of companies getting established, and they had money, and there were also availabilities for loans and so on. There was money to burn for building and housing was being encouraged. At the same time we had the technology to get up steep mountains to build roads, put in trucks harvesting material -- harvesting machines -- and so on, and manufacturing plants. Everything, including technology, was way up and, of course, the prices made it profitable for mills to get in and operate. It was sort of a multi-faceted thing that all came together.

Before that, most of the timber in the national forests was in no way economic to harvest. There wasn't any way to get it out. You didn't have the equipment to get up on those steep hills. All the timber came out of the bottomlands, and the other thing was that timber beforehand had been mostly on private lands in the valleys. Our valleys around Montana were pretty well cut over by that point, and so the timber that remained was on the national forests. In fact, there were figures coming out showing the forest contained a majority of the construction timber. It wasn't because they'd been holding out in it -- it was because everything else had been cut. What was left was there [high country]. So these figures came out trying to prove that the Forest Service was holding back and didn't want to release these things. Those were strange, interesting times.

Wolf: It's not too dissimilar from the story of the talents -- two sons who were given a certain amount by their father and one went and squandered his and then came back and said to his
brother, "You got all the wealth in the family," forgetting that he had squandered it, and then demanding that his brother split with him. [laughter]

Questioner: That ought to cover that. Do you want to get on with public resources?

Wolf: Well, we might just back up and use this opportunity to include here this one on Reforestation Resolutions 1960 that the Anderson/Mansfield Act revisited, because that's also part and parcel of this thing. A lot of these things are interconnected, not on purpose, but just the way events were unfolding.

The early view of foresters was that you didn't cut timber unless it would re-grow, and natural regeneration was expected to do most of the work. Reforestation was not a perfected art by a long shot by 1905 or even by 1920. But more and more it became apparent to foresters, when they cut timber, that natural regeneration was not necessarily always effective. While there was uncertainty as to whether it was a result of cutting practices, or the way logging was done, the view emerged that the solution would be to plant.

So reforestation became one of the underpinnings of forestry. By the 1930s when the Depression hit, the Forest Service leaped at that situation with vigor and the CCC program had reforestation as one of its key activities. Also, there had been significant forest fires, which consumed large blocks of timber, and for many of those areas the only apparent solution was to plant trees on them rather than letting nature take its course -- even though nature might do an adequate job, all things considered. But reforestation became a popular thing.

After WWII, as I recall, in 1950, Senator Anderson and [Senator] Mansfield sponsored the Anderson-Mansfield Reforestation Act, and that's a schedule [for National Forest]
reforestation, (subsequently ignored by the executive branch) [chuckle] but that was to overcome
the fact that reforestation was not automatic. The KV Act, or Knutson-Vandenberg Act, of 1930
had authorized, when timber was cut, the Forest Service could retain a portion of the receipts to
reforest the cutover contract area. But even there, the receipts were inadequate because of the
low price of stumpage. The fact that if the Forest Service assigned too much of the stumpage
receipts, it diminished the payments to the counties and the counties objected.

So the Forest Service had developed what became known as a backlog of lands that
needed reforestation. Silviculturalists had identified these lands and it was a matter of growing
concern on the national forests where I'd say 90 percent of the reforestation needs stemmed from
fire and 10 percent from inadequate KV collections; might even be 95/5. Anderson and
Mansfield got this act on the books, and it was promptly ignored by the budget process.

With the 1960 election coming up, they decided that this would be a timely point in
history to note the failure of the past eight years of the incumbent president and administration.
Those things do motivate some members of Congress from time to time. [chuckle] I was asked
to review the planting records. I went back all the way to 1920, and we looked at reforestation
on the national forests. I was able to advise Senators Anderson and Mansfield that the record of
the Eisenhower years was worse even than that of the Harding Administration [laughter].
(Harding was not the most popular president of the United States; he had some scandal
associated with his administration.) That led to a Senate resolution on reforestation and in the
report it was observed that the planting record of the Eisenhower administration was worse than
that of Warren G. Harding, which was a very low point.

This stumped the administration somewhat; they were very unhappy about this
comparison. It is my understanding that this had some effect in breaking loose a program for
the national forests, which was subsequently submitted to Congress. [chuckle] Senator Murray was the chairman of Interior Committee and he very graciously agreed to having this resolution reported to the Senate as a joint resolution which required no further action but gave it enough publicity that it became part of the [Democratic] conservation plank. Now I might add that in that era Lyndon Johnson was majority leader in the U.S. Senate and he had every expectation that he was going to become the next president of the United States. He had a solid 400 democratic electoral votes in their convention. That was his minimum; that was his average and that was his maximum. [chuckles] To his chagrin later it turned out that Jack Kennedy had more. But Johnson was proceeding under the theory that he was staying in the Senate, tending to the business of the Senate and establishing the record upon which the Democratic Party would recapture the presidency. There were a whole series of things and this was one of them, where Johnson was looking for a conservation plank, and the Democrats had several elements of the conservation plank, one of which was a reforestation issue; the other was the El Sarena mining claim issue. This was related to Lyndon Johnson's interest also. You have to remember that Anderson and Mansfield were very close to Lyndon Johnson and favored him to be the next president as compared to other potential candidates. So that was involved in this also.

Bolle: From another standpoint, the heavy use of clear-cutting, of course, also required more planting. There was also another very interesting fact. Over the years, when it looked like the reforestation issue opened up and was likely to lead to more money, the acreage needed got bigger fast. When people were condemning the Forest Service for the stated conditions, because there was so much land that had not been reseeded, why, it shrunk! The amount of acreage needing reforestation was a very flexible figure. [laughter]
Wolf: Yes, it did. And it still is a flexible figure. But clear-cutting wasn't all that prevalent yet. The main concern was that the combination of fire and inadequate KV collections -- you see, the theory was the KV collections would cover it. But they were inadequate, and so that plus fire plus failures (many failures which were not understood) added up to this rather significant backlog of lands where the rate of stocking was well below what the foresters thought was desirable if they were going to maintain or increase the level of cutting. You also have to recall that in that era most foresters believed that (again without any financial analysis) we could double the cutting levels on the national forests without any environmental risk and in a financially effective manner.

Bolle: This is in support of clear-cutting in that you cut all the trees off. It's like farming, like [cutting] a cornfield or something. And in most cases the old forest was less than adequate -- the stocking was irregular and the trees were all shapes and sizes and not the best quality. So you want to replace them with a quality of tree that had high genetic quality, the very best kind, [set out] well spaced and everything right, so you could fully increase the site and so that you could greatly increase the whole operation. This was all good, and the whole idea of clear-cutting [inaudible] so clear-cutting was a good word.

Wolf: A phrase I've used to describe our attitude at the time was that "Idle acres are the Devil's work." (a play on "idle hands") We really believed, as resource managers, that unless we had fully replanted a cut acre promptly after cutting and had those trees growing at a fully stocked rate, that original sin had been authorized.
Bolle: It was man's responsibility. God had given us this challenge. He had given us a world that was not exactly perfect, but it was for us to make it perfect; that was our responsibility.

Wolf: But also coupled with that was the view that technology could overcome any natural impediment. But this also prevailed in terms of our outlook towards nuclear power and a lot of other things that we could overcome all these things. Small wonder that we didn't think that we could probably suture up the San Andreas Fault so it would never crack. [laughter]

Bolle: And control Communism all over the world too.

Wolf: It was part of this thinking that we'd brought in stock that wouldn't grow on the places or species that were off slightly, and that we did all kinds of crazy things under the impression that we were improving the world.

Hall: How successful was the reforestation program?

Wolf: I don't think there has really been a good evaluation by the Forest Service that goes back over and looks at plantings done in let's say 1960-70-75 and looks at them today and analyses the degree of efficiency and whether it's improved or declined. I know of no real analysis of that, so any view I expressed would be intuitive. I'd say that the answer to that could best be found by doing that sort of a survey, going back to those lands that were planted in those years and, on a good sample basis, and seeing what the results are.
Hall: How can there have been no studies that show such a thing?

Wolf: The Forest Service just hasn't done it. They've been doing other things, but as far as I know I have never seen any research or national forest system analyses of specific forests in those terms. The management plans as they're being presented do not provide that sort of data; they don't provide that sort of picture. In fact, one of the major shortcomings of the national forest management plans, in my view, is in the current crop they almost act as though there was no yesterday, only tomorrow, because they don't evaluate the past. And there is a record there. There's 78 years of management of some level, which is available to examine, and under the NFMA they are supposed to have done this, but they haven't.

Now, the critics of the plans have seldom raised this point. They never have, frankly. They've attacked the future, what they think is going to be the future, what they think is going to happen, rather than attacking the absence of evidentiary proof of the condition of things.

Bolle: Interesting process in the management plan, why, level of needs to see the problems identified and then the practice to do it and then [inaudible] asked for to do it. But nobody goes back to see whether what they did was effective and could solve the problem. With replanting I think each district goes out and makes some kind of check to see what they got, which is pretty sloppily done generally. I don't think anybody has gathered that information and gone back at a later time. They might go back after two years, three years, five years, to look at it. But they don't carry it through to see what finally occurred.
Wolf: NFMA requires that they make a survey of the situation at the end of the third year after planting. The law is really only spelling out the minimum. An active resource manager would look at these stands and keep track of them as they come along to determine not only whether he was getting what he expected but what adverse or beneficial things affected the stand during its life and what action, if any, he should be taking.

Bolle: I think perhaps bigger landowning companies do a better job just for their own records, and as a result, their whole planting program is becoming quite sophisticated.

[End tape]