Hall: Today's Thursday, November 16. We're in the archives of the Mansfield Library and we're talking with Bob Wolf. This morning's conversation is going to be better housing for Forest Service field employees, 1957, with Senator Neuberger.

Wolf: As we've done earlier in this history, Dan, I discussed the '55-'56 hearings and I've also mentioned that Senator Neuberger's election to the U.S. Senate was a large measure helped by the former chief of the Forest Service, Lyle Watts, who was retired and living in Oregon. Forest Service employees traditionally, before the move out of the custodial era into the management era, resided in remote districts and remote situations. They were often required to provide their own horse and feed him and live in a pretty crude cabin. After the war, a program of additional housing (because of expansion of the Forest Service) began and the housing was largely inadequate. Some of the housing was parts of old CC camps that had been rehabilitated to convert them for residences, and they had stood idle from 1942 until 1946 or 1947 before people started trying to convert them into housing. Many of them were uninsulated, were in cold,
remote areas, and posed severe problems. A lot of the new, young employees of the Forest Service were returning veterans who'd gotten married and had small children, and so there were critical problems, and they kept getting worse and worse.

The same thing also was true in the Park Service, which was undergoing an expansion. At the same time America was urbanizing, so part of the expansion was taking place in the smaller towns and some of the medium-sized towns where forest supervisor offices were. There were two kinds of problems, both involving the question of housing and what had been a practice of generally providing housing, no matter how lousy, to employees. There was often no alternative in those situations. If you were going to have someone live in some of these ranger stations, that was the only housing for miles around.

As I said, Richard Neuberger had come into the Senate and Lyle Watts wanted to talk with him at great length about this problem, which he considered (and correctly) a significant morale problem involving the attitude of employees, the retention of employees and their ability to work. From my personal experience, I knew of people who had left the Forest Service because their wives simply weren't going to live in those kinds of housing situations and raise children. In any event, Neuberger talked with me about getting additional funding for housing, and the main roadblock, it turned out, was going to be over at the House of Representatives. Senator Hayden, who chaired the Senate Appropriations Committee, was favorably inclined. It just so happened that the Park Service had built some housing in Hawaii at a park, which the ranking Republican, Ben Jensen of the House Appropriation Committee, had seen. Jensen (who had been in the building supply business in Iowa prior to coming to Congress) thought the cost of this was outrageous. He was mad as can be at the Park Service over spending so much on housing.
In contrast, the Forest Service and its housing program had selected a series of standard plans, which it had produced with help from the Forest Products Laboratory, and all Forest Service housing was virtually the same. [chuckle] It was either Plan I, II, or III. Having gotten some agreement from Senator Hayden on adding money, the question was how do we get the House to do it.

I talked to Gene Wilhelm, who was the staff person on the House Appropriations Subcommittee, which handled the Forest Service. He was a former employee of the Department of Agriculture who had worked in their Budget and Finance Office and was known as a graduate of the "Jump School of Public Administration." Edward Jump was an outstanding public administration employee in the Department of Agriculture who trained a lot of the new type of budget people. Wilhelm was a sound, able budget guy.

I talked to Gene about the situation first to see if he had any thoughts on how the issue might be treated, and he told me that Ben Jensen would be the real hurdle, but that perhaps, if we could get Jensen mad enough at the Park Service, he might do something for the Forest Service. I forget who we got in the House. I think it was Don Magnuson, who was another member of the Committee and not related to Warren Magnuson in the Senate, but he came from the state of Washington. I think we got Don to say that he understood the Forest Service was recklessly spending money building housing and that he didn't know whether this was a fact, but it was something the committee ought to look into.

Jensen rose to the bait. In the meantime, I had informed Dr. McArdle, who was the chief of Forest Service, that Jensen was going to cross-examine him about housing, and he was going to allege that the Forest Service was building housing at great expense and luxury, and he was going to ask him about it. So Mac (McArdle) was prepared for the questions and, sure enough,
Jensen asked McArdle about it. It's in the hearing record for the budget for 1958, the '57 hearings. McArdle appeared to stumble around a little bit and express surprise. Finally, he said, "Why, we use standard plans for all of our housing, Mr. Jensen. We use stock window sizes, stock door sizes. We don't get any special equipment because we've got these standardized houses. While I don't have the plans with me, I'd be more than glad to provide them to you so you could see what we've done, and pictures of the housing and so forth."

Well, Jensen was so overjoyed to hear of an agency that was doing the right thing that then when it came time to mark up the bill and the chairman, Mike Kirwan, proposed additional funding for Forest Service housing, Ben Jensen said, "Certainly!" And he voted for it. [laughter]

I think $5 million, which was quite a bit of money, was provided for additional funding for housing for Forest Service employees, and it provided a significant amount of housing all around the country in remote locations. These were typical two/three bedroom houses, very modest, well located. That's the story of how it happened.

Then over at the Senate, of course, Senator Hayden readily agreed to that amount of money, whatever that House figure was, and that was it. Ben Jensen went to his reward in Heaven never knowing that the Forest Service [chuckling] had been part of this effort to get additional money and that they never had done any of the things that they were alleged to have done.

Hall: Let's go back here to the Park Service housing in Hawaii. Was that really truly a case where it was outlandish expense for housing?

Wolf: I would say it's all relative. No. The Park Service (as I recall the situation) had tried to
design and construct a house that fit into the environment of that park, to the setting of that park. Anyone who's involved in building houses always knows that unless you use absolute standard plans and don't deviate, estimates of the cost of building a house, the architectural design, people can vary quite a bit. But it was not an inordinately expensive house. It cost a little bit more than Jensen thought was necessary. But you have to bear in mind Jensen's idea was that anything you did had to be the lowest cost item. I doubt that it would have been possible, except under these standard plan concepts, for Jensen to think that the government had done the right thing.

There was quite a bit of debate during that period about government expenditures, and these sorts of things, relatively small, tend to attract attention and get jumped on as though they're major causes for the federal deficit. But no, I would say the Park Service probably hadn't spent an inordinate amount of money. It was more than some members thought they should have spent. It certainly wasn't an opulent mansion.

Hall: Did this law that went through, then, did that apply to all federal agencies?

Wolf: No. This was a special appropriation to the Forest Service. It was done in the appropriation bill, just an amendment to the appropriation bill adding more money for housing for Forest Service personnel.

Hall: So it did not require that the Forest Service provide housing for their employees that had to work in a remote duty area?

Wolf: Oh, yeah. They were going to build the houses in remote locations, mainly in ranger
stations, places where they needed housing for their people. In addition, at the same time, the Eisenhower administration was enforcing increased rents for housing that it provided to public employees. For a long period of time, the rent actually paid by a Forest Service or Park Service employee was heavily subsidized. It was very low. Some allege it still is where there's housing provided. But the argument was made that these people were living in a remote location, there was no other housing, they had high costs to get to town, get food and get back, et cetera, medical services et cetera, and therefore, the subsidized housing was not a subsidy. The Bureau of the Budget during the Eisenhower administration put into effect overall standards for military housing and civilian housing when provided by the government to government employees. A series of rates were set which varied with the distance from the nearest town or city, the nature of the housing, the number of square feet, et cetera. They were trying to move rentals up to a market value rather than a subsidized rate which had been arbitrarily set.

The first Forest Service house my wife and I had was a two-room house. You could throw a cat through the walls. I think in 1949 we paid $12 a month for rent. We were 45 miles from the nearest town in a ranger station. Some of the other people on that ranger station lived across the road in parts of an old CCC camp. Their rents were low and their housing was worse. These were buildings that were never intended to be full-time residences. The ranger had an older house that was well built, probably built in the '20s and a very solid, well-built house. There were three other houses at that ranger station that probably had been built in the '20s and were much more modest, not intended for wintertime residence. Then there was one new house that had been built, and the rest of it was all CC housing, buildings converted to homes that weren't really designed for that.

The housing situation was critical. In contrast, we had a lovely big huge garage and barn
at the ranger station [chuckling].

Hall: So none of the federal agencies were actually required, then, to provide housing for their employees?

Wolf: No, except it became almost a necessity if you were going to employ someone. For instance, we had fireguards. These were residences used in the summer, the fire season, way out in the forest. These were usually a single house with a corral to keep a horse in, and perhaps some structure to put some hay in. These were occupied just during the fire season, the summer months. We had one-room cabins in conjunction with lookouts. Those were occupied during the summer by the fire lookouts. We had fireguard residences, lookout facilities, all these [for] very limited short-term summer use. Then you had the ranger station, which had been very small in the custodial era, usually one or two full-time employees residing there, and some other buildings where summer employees might reside. Some of them were barracks-like because of (being) fireproof. After the war as the business of the Forest Service expanded and they needed more year-round staff, these facilities were simply inadequate.

Hall: How extensive a problem was that of retaining employees based on the housing problem?

Wolf: I would say particularly in that period it was a substantial problem. The employee that was torn between his job and the reaction of his family, there was a different kind of person out there. Most of the women had not grown up in that kind of an atmosphere. They were brought up in an urban setting, a suburban setting in pretty comfortable circumstances. They were often
college students or college graduates, as were their husbands. They weren't a family that had lived in a rural atmosphere, barely graduated from high school who lived in a substandard housing situation.

I remember the wife of one employee who had grown up in a logging camp. To her, this wasn't a difficult situation. This was better than the way she had grown up. She didn't find it a problem. Several other women spent considerable amount of time making significant complaints. My wife had been an army nurse but had grown up in an urban setting. We got out there and we had a wood stove to cook on and the heat in this small two-room cabin, a small wood stove, and by morning the water used to be frozen in the dog's dish inside the house. We used to sleep in long woolen underwear. My wife was fairly adaptable. [chuckling] She didn't applaud it, you know.

The housing conditions were difficult. We used to have to leave the water running all night. It came from an irrigation flume. We had to leave it constantly running or else it would freeze. After we were there several months, in the spring, we got a refrigerator. Before that, we didn't have a refrigerator. Then REA Power came in and we got an electric stove for cooking, a small electric stove. But that station had not had enough power originally. REA was a big factor in those days, so rural areas didn't have a lot of electricity. A lot of the power was self-generated with a small generator. These were the significant changes, and certainly you look back now and you think that electric power was well established as it was in urban America. It wasn't in rural America.

Hall: [inaudible]
Wolf: Yes. This is Blair and your first name is David?

Hall: Dan Hall. [introducing himself]

Wolf: Dave works for Congressman Baucus (Oh, Senator Bacus! Max was a Congressman.). Anyway, we were talking about Forest Service housing. That’s the setting in which these rural areas were, with inadequate power, inadequate roads, inadequate housing. We went fairly rapidly from the homestead era, through it and out of it. A lot of the forest homesteads within the national forest, to begin with, were on sub-marginal farmland. The big sweep of housing, or settlement, around the turn of the century on these national forest homesteads, were not being farmed anymore by 1920 because of the short growing season and inadequate soil, so what you had was a rural decline.

On the Ochoco National Forest in the Big Summit District there was a big prairie in the middle, a big depression. It was over a township in size and grassland. The remains of the original settlements there -- when at the turn of the century [they had] a schoolhouse and maybe 20 families -- have all disappeared in the space of 20 years. [They] came out, made their homesteads, tried to farm, went broke and left. The ranger stations were all that really remained out in some of those remote locations.

So the Ochoco situation was no different than (that of) many other forests where the sole housing out on the forest was that provided by the Forest Service. The telephone system was a single line ground line system put in by the Forest Service.

Hall: This was for employees?
Wolf: [There was] no AT&T. Ma Bell never got there.

Hall: With your experience then with the BLM, was there any problem with housing for BLM employees at their remote duty stations?

Wolf: The OTC office BLM, in the first place, had an extremely small staff and the BLM offices were in small Western Oregon towns like Salem, Eugene, Roseburg, Coos Bay, and Medford with no government housing. The BLM wasn't organized as an agency until '47. It was at the Grazing Service before that. There was another division called the Cadastral Survey Division, and then there was a third called The Land Office. The Land Office was located in cities and towns, a couple in each state. They never got out in the field, because when you got public land under the public land laws, you went in, you certified that your name was Dan Hall, you were a citizen, you'd settled on (you described the legal description), you'd reduced 1/8 of it to cultivation, you'd lived on it for three years and built a habitable residence, and you had a document with you that was signed by three people, all of whom were lying, and you got your patent. The only time the Land Office employee came out to look at it was if somebody else challenged it and said, "Wait a minute. Nobody's living on that land." Then they might come out and look at it and say, "We're not going to give you a patent. There isn't even a house here."

The surveyors worked during the work season out in the fields surveying, but they didn't have their families with them, and they didn't live in the areas they were surveying. They were mobile; they moved around from area to area conducting these surveys -- usually huge areas were surveyed, a township at a time. The Grazing Service didn't get organized until 1934.
It had a handful of employees. They were located in small towns. Until 1947 their major job was simply issuing the permits to the ranchers.

The Taylor Grazing Act had two classes of permits. What you had to do under the Taylor Grazing Act was come in and show that between 1929 and 1934 you or your predecessors had illegally grazed (the word "illegal" wasn't in the law but it was illegal) X number of livestock on this area. The act provided for an advisory board of ranchers. The ranchers would look around and say, "Hall's lying. He never had that many cows out there. We'll only give him a permit for so much." On the other hand, they might say, "All right. We'll say Hall had 100 head out there, and we agree with him." At any rate, [the ranchers] set up these permits and that allocated the range. The Grazing Service did nothing but issue the permits. They didn't go out and inspect the range.

The other class of permittee was called a Class II permittee. He was a guy who couldn't prove that he'd illegally grazed stock, but he thought he had a right to, and so he got a Class II Permit that said, "If there's ever any grazing, he'll get a chance." Those Class II permittees are still waiting [chuckling] to get permits. So the BLM didn't need field housing outside of the small towns. Their offices typically would have one employee and a clerk, usually a woman, and they issued the permits and that was about it. It wasn't until after WWII, until the early 50s, that the BLM began to do some range management. So they didn't have a housing situation. The Park Service did. The Fish and Wildlife Service did because it managed wildlife refuges, so it had to provide housing. But the Geological Survey did not. But the three major land managing agencies, Forest Service, Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service, did provide housing for personnel. The BLM did not. Remember when you talk about the BLM, before '46 you're talking about three separate agencies, surveying, grazing and Land Office.
Hall: I think that'll do it.

[End tape]