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Interviewee: Pat Williams

Interviewer: Bill Cunningham

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Bill Cunningham: Pat, why don't we begin our discussion of your involvement in wilderness and public lands as a freshman Congressman when you first entered the Congress back in 1979? At that time of course you were seeking committee assignments that would give you more influence over public lands and, maybe starting at that point, how you were able to obtain the committee assignment, some of the issues that you dealt with in getting on not only the Interior Committee, but as I recall you also got on the Public Lands Subcommittee that had jurisdiction over wilderness.

Pat Williams: Well, when I was first elected my passion was and has remained education and to some degree issues involved with the workplace. So my major committee, as they called it in the Congress, was education and labor. I also of course recognized that in order to be able to be involved in the issues that were so important to the then-Western District in Montana I should strive to gain membership to what was then called the House Interior Committee. It is now called the Committee on Natural Resources, perhaps a better name frankly. In order to secure a seat on the Interior Committee, it was by the way more difficult than it was to secure a seat on the major committee, the Education and Labor Committee. Interior was sought after, Education and Labor in those days was not interestingly enough. So to secure a seat I had to find some friend, some angel—some angles to work it. And the three people I relied upon to help me were Morris Udall, who at the time was chairman of the committee, and whose politics, whose political philosophies I shared to a large degree. I also relied some on a senior member of that committee who was bombastic, energetic member of the committee named Phil Burton from California. Phil died unfortunately a few terms later, but he was a strong environmentalist and an active political giant, not just in California, but nationally. The third person I decided to rely on was the Majority Leader of the House, a fellow who later became Speaker, Jim Wright of Texas. And although Jim wasn't on the committee, as part of the leadership and as one of the primary people on what is called the Steering and Policy Committee, which is the committee that assigns members of the Democratic Party to their committee slots, I knew it would be important to have Jim Wright.

So I spent a lot of time working with Mo (Udall) and Phil and Jim and each of them did more than I had a right to expect to help me get the votes out of Steering and Policy to be accepted on the committee. But you know it wasn't just—I learned after a few terms—that getting assigned to the Interior Committee was not just about me or the fact that I shared some of these peoples philosophy or they liked the way I walked or whatever it is about these things that helps one. It really had more to do with Montana and so many million acres of unresolved wild lands out here under public ownership. They understood that a Montanan had to be on that committee, that Montana had a certain claim, almost a right, to a member of that

committee—that is to membership on that committee. And given that I also shared much of their philosophy with regard to public land and political matters, I was fortunate enough to get on the committee and I think again because of where I was from, because of the state, I was assigned to a subcommittee that was also very competitive—number of members wanted on it and that was Public Lands and National Parks. Once I got on that subcommittee I did not do what most members of Congress do, and that is move around and get on different subcommittees at different times. I stayed on that subcommittee and developed a lot of seniority on it by the time I left eighteen years later.

BC: Now, Pat, you mentioned that that was a very difficult committee to get on. What were some of the obstacles that you faced, you sort of touched a little bit on that, but what were the main obstacles that you faced in winning that committee assignment?

PC: Well, I'd have to think back on it, but it seems to me that one of the obstacles was in people wanting to know where I stood with regard to environmental issues. Votes on that committee were quite often close. Environmental issues have never been easily won in America. Almost regardless of which party is in power. I personally am convinced that the environment is somewhat safer in the hands of Democrats than Republicans, but environmental issues are hard won regardless of the party in power. So as I would go to the various members of the Steering and Policy Committee one of things they would want to know is, well, Pat, if an issue came up that was such and such—I don't recall, they'd conjure up some issue—generally how would you come down on that, would you vote yes or would you vote—how do you think you'd come down on that?" I don't actually think that they'd ask me if I'd vote yes or no on a real live ticking issue, but just generally.

So it was clear that there were hurdles up that one had to get over because the people in power wanted to be sure that they weren't putting somebody who'd end up being a political enemy on a critically important committee. Another problem was that I had no delegation to work for me to get on the committee. You know, if you are from California and you want on a committee, you've got twenty members of Congress lobbying their friends on the Steering and Policy Committee to get you on the committee. Or ten of them go together to the Speaker and say, "Mr. Speaker, we supported you for Speaker, we need whoever on this committee. This freshman of ours has to be on Ways and Means or Interior or Appropriations or Commerce, whatever committee it was. I didn't have that, I had to go lobby it by myself and it's pretty lonesome when you're from Montana, you don't get a lot of help from your delegation because you don't have a delegation. Ron Marlene was there at the time, but Ron had, you know, zero clout with the Democrats and I had zero clout with the Republicans by the same token. So it wasn't that Ron didn't, you know I'm not diminishing Ron by saying that.

BC: Perhaps Ron wasn't real enthused about you being on the committee anyway.

PW: Well you know, Ron was already on the committee.

BC: Yeah, he was on the committee, he had two years jump on you.

PW: That's right, and that too was a bit of a hurdle because the Democrats knew that Ron was on the committee and therefore Montana, at least Eastern Montana, had a seat on the committee, but they recognized that all of this wild, then and still unresolved wild land in Montana, Forest Service land in particular, lie within the western district. So, they recognized that the western district had some claim to having a member on the committee.

BC: Pat, a couple of years later and I don't recall, you can elucidate on that, you took a leave of absence from the Interior Committee for—I don't recall the number of terms, but two or three terms? Maybe you can detail that just a little bit and discuss what went into that decision and then what happened when you did come back onto the committee in a more active capacity.

PW: [Three years.] Well, I think although I am not sure, but it was around 1982, and America had a new president, Ronald Reagan, who had the previous year, to the surprise of the majority in both the House and Senate, the Democratic majority, had passed a budget more like the one he wanted than the Democrats wanted. Suddenly the budget was in the news, the Congressional budget process was in the news, and became very important in this country and has remained the most important thing in this country ever since those days. That is what the nation talks about and it's where the Congress spends a lot of its time. Some seats came open on the House Budget Committee at about that time and I decided that it would be in the best interest of Montana if I were on the House Budget Committee.

So I ran, and after a lot of work, got elected narrowly to the House Budget Committee as only a two-term member of the House if I am remembering it accurately. So it was a pretty good coup. But the rules of the House required that I leave my minor committee. As I had mentioned earlier there's a major committee, there are major committees in the House and then what we call minor committees. The most powerful of all the minor committees is the Interior Committee, but the rules of the House made me leave that committee in order to take on the Budget Committee. I stayed on Budget for three terms, six years, three two-year terms, and then went back on the House Interior Committee in 1986, I think it was in 1986. Perhaps it was '88, '88 when I went back.

BC: Pat, let's back up just a little bit then, back into the first year of your first term and as I recall you sort of cut your legislative wilderness teeth if you will on the West Big Hole and introduced legislation on the West Big Hole. And the starting question there would be, why did you select that particular area for a single area piece of legislation given the millions of other acres of roadless lands throughout Montana in the aftermath of RARE II? The RARE II [Roadless Area Review and Evaluations] process of course had just been completed by the Forest Service and then it was turned over to Congress and began with a West Big Hole bill. I wonder if you could detail a little bit of that history and to begin with why you selected that area at that particular time. I think that was in '79, am I correct about that?

PW: Yeah, but I don't remember selecting that area out for an individual piece of legislation. My memory of it, if it serves me correctly, recalls it as having chosen that area in which to have the first Congressional hearing about resolving RARE II and Mo Udall, chairman of the Interior Committee, agreed—kind of to my surprise—to come out, not only did he agree to let me hold the hearing in Montana, but said he wanted to attend it himself. So Mo and I came out from Washington down to Dillon for the hearing. I spent a lot of time during the campaign and after the campaign, in my first months in Congress looking at the Forest Service proposals with regard to resolving RARE II, a matter which all these 18 years later has still not been accomplished. But those 18-plus years ago I looked at the recommendations, I looked at and considered the ramifications of not moving to try to resolve RARE II and designate to whatever degree we were going to do it, whatever number of acres, whatever the boundaries would be, I looked at the ramifications of not resolving RARE II, and very early on recognized the consequences of no Congressional action or delayed Congressional action in trying to get what Montanans have come to know as the wilderness question behind us. So I decided to take it on, begin with a hearing, see what it was the public understood and what we had to understand about their recommendations.

We brought that hearing to a place that I thought would be contentious because I did think we ought to start in a contentious area so that we would get both sides of the issues in the Congress. It was one of the most contentious hearings, Mo Udall later told me, that he had ever attended. Only hearings in Alaska, he said, were as difficult as the hearings in Dillon. It was extraordinarily clear that a huge number of people in that jam-packed auditorium on the Western Montana [College] campus, that a huge number of those people had no concept—not their fault, because the issue was new to them. They had no concept of what RARE II was, why we had to resolve it, what was meant by wilderness designations. They came, a great many people there came, frankly, not to find out what the issue was, but rather to simply tell us what they thought it was. And so Udall and I listened for hours. I'll never forget the place being literally ringed with police attempting to keep order. The place had that look of the lynch mob to it. People who were opposed to even the word wilderness, let alone the consideration of it at the time, probably outnumbered the pro-wilderness people, the environmentalists, if I remember by 3 or 4 or 5 to 1. It was a raucous crowd. Nonetheless it was a very informative meeting.

I have, I note in hindsight, had a number of people—I suppose a couple of dozen, three dozen, come up to me in the years since then—and tell me they were at that meeting and almost all of them, almost without exception, only two or three exceptions out of the 20 to 40 people that have come up to me through the years, have said to me, You know, Pat, I came to that meeting not understanding what wilderness was, not knowing what those designations meant. In fact I've had a half-dozen people or so say to me, You know, I actually equated it with some type of communist scheme at the time. They said, I came and I carried pickets and I yelled at you guys, you and Udall, and they said, I came away just angry as hell, you know, we didn't think you were listening even though you were attentive and we thought you were going to lock up the land and none of us would ever get in it again. But they said it was a good hearing because it

made us think about the issue, it made us be involved in some discussion. And almost to a person they've changed their mind about it, including some of the leading advocates from the Big Hole Valley itself.

Some of the ranchers who later either called, wrote or came to Washington asking me to in fact put the West Big Hole range in wilderness, to designate it wilderness whereas just a few years before they were at that hearing saying, "This is Communism." So it began what has been a long learning process for all of us, not just people who used to be my constituents, but for me as well. But that was a historic, I personally think it was a historic hearing in the life of environmentalism in Montana.

BC: And as an educator you certainly accomplished one basic purpose and that is of education.

PW: Yes, I hope so.

BC: No question about that, I think we're seeing the payoff maybe slowly over these past few decades.

PW: We've had a lot of hearings since.

BC: A lot of hearings, a lot of water has gone under the bridge, hasn't it Pat?

PW: Yes.

BC: Well, the West Big Hole then as you elucidated was sort of the entree to the broader issue of RARE II and the allocation of the remaining roadless lands on the national forest. But before we turn more into that, why don't we talk a little about the Rattlesnake and your recollection of that history and how that came to be.

PW: The Rattlesnake, from my standpoint, was one of the least contentious of all the wilderness proposals that were brought to the Congressional delegation and to me personally over the years, during the years. Rattlesnake wilderness proposal was the product of citizen participation in and around Missoula. And lots community informational work had been accomplished, which had convinced a majority of citizens living in the area that having wilderness out their backyard, having one of the only urba— in effect—urban wildernesses in America, would be of enormous benefit to the community, and to the community's ways, and to the community's water, and to the community's education, to the community's recreation and on and on. So by the time the proposal was brought to us in the delegation it was a done deal at home. Compare that with the West Big Hole proposal. The community was against wilderness in the Beaverhead back then. But it just appears later in the community in and around Missoula was very much for wilderness because the campaign of information had been being conducted for years in the community of Missoula.

The delegation, however, was as delegations are wont to be was divided on exactly what the boundaries and language of the Rattlesnake Wilderness bill should be. And so while Congressman Marlene in those days pretty much left the design up to the three of us who represented all or parts of all of Montana or western Montana, Marlene representing eastern Montana. So he left those decisions primarily to the three of us—that is, Senator Melcher at that time, Senator Baucus and myself. My recollection is that Senator Baucus and I were closer to agreement with each other than either of us were with Senator Melcher with regards to the precise boundary and language that should govern the Rattlesnake Wilderness and National Recreation area. There was quite a bit of contention with regard to motorized use through a corridor of the Rattlesnake.

Senator Melcher was supporting motorized use, and he wanted a corridor punched up through an extended middle of the wilderness area. Senator Baucus and I—and frankly the community—resisted that. In the end something much closer to what the community I think and Senator Baucus and I wanted prevailed than what Senator Melcher wanted. So we developed the Rattlesnake Wilderness Bill. There was an interesting thing which troubled me to the end of my career in the Congress and that was that I wanted to create it under the name “The Rattlesnake Wilderness and Education Area” and given that a great University is here with its wonderful environmental science offerings and the forestry department, timber industry located in Missoula, as is Region 1 of the Forest Service and the Lolo National Forest headquarters is here. So it occurred to me that this wilderness area could be used, and the national recreational area below it, to the south of it, could be used for education purposes. The Forest Service was a bit resistant to that primarily because they had never done it before and so Senator Melcher agreed at the last minute to strike the education portion of the Rattlesnake from the bill and did so over my objection, although it was sort of done in the middle of the night when nobody was noticing. But we never were able to restore that, I’m hopeful that someday the area will eventually be re-designated and used appropriately for education pursuits.

BC: Pat, were you instrumental though in trying to get some good committee language stressing the educational value of the Rattlesnake. As I recall you did something—

PW: Yes, we did. There is Congressional intent and the area has been used somewhat for educational pursuits. The Forest Service difficulty is that they can’t join much in that because they’re not actually directed to in the body of the bill or in the title of the bill, to do it, and so they can only spend so much time, energy or money. They are very limited as to the efforts that they can make.

BC: Let’s go on. Of course the Rattlesnake did become enacted, which took place as I recall in October of 1980. So again, very early in your career in Congress you had a pretty good bill to your credit. You did allude to something and maybe we should discuss it a little bit, and that is the differences that existed within the delegation and that apparently would center around such things as motorized use or to what extent the roadless lands should be developed for

different purposes, logging, road construction, whatever. It certainly seemed to conservationists working on this issue that always there is sort of a major obstacle with Senator Melcher relative to these issues and that the support was really coming primarily from yourself and from Senator Baucus. Is that your perception and would you care to discuss any of those dynamics that existed within the delegation that sort of created the mix of legislation that was later dealt with?

PW: Sure, speaking of people, it really ought to be noted here, I will just name three people and leave out several dozen others. Arnold Bolle [former dean of the UM School of Forestry] was the person I dealt with most often with regard to the Rattlesnake and trying to build a legislative record of which we can all be proud and which would end up in eventual designation of the area. We were able to do that. Cass Chinske [former City Council member and executive director of Friends of the Rattlesnake] and was an important local person and then the fellow that's sitting here interviewing me, Bill Cunningham, although he was dealing with wilderness on a statewide level, was also critical in the formation of the Rattlesnake Wilderness. With regard to the delegation, it was clear that Senator Baucus and I were more in tune one with the other than either of us were with Senator Melcher. Senator Melcher was not anti-wilderness, he was not anti-environmental in my judgment, but it did seem to me that he was less environmentally attuned than Max or myself.

Senator Melcher was slower to agree, he came to agreement slowly. I've gotten to know John awfully well through the years and had known him for a long, long, long time before I even was honored to become a colleague of his in the Congress. Part of John's delay and question-asking was that John always wanted to understand the issues to the last degree. He wanted to know at least as much about every issue as his staff did. He would take the time—I would like to think I did as well—but part of John's what seemed to a lot of people to be plodding nature was really his effort to get the answers absolutely right in his head before he would move on and so, you know, to give him his due, it wasn't all just obstinance, stubbornness which I know a lot of people have stacked up against John. It was his determination to have a full grasp of the import and effect of these issues. But, you know, as much preparation as had been done by Montanans before they ever asked us to develop and pass a wilderness bill with regard to the Rattlesnake, as much work as had been done on it did not satisfy Senator Melcher. He still insisted on having hearings and asking questions and changing a lot of what citizens had agreed would be most acceptable to the Rattlesnake and in some ways John did change what had been a citizens' initiative a great deal before he would allow it to move through the Senate.

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

BC: Would you say the subject we were just talking about, which I would refer to as Senator Melcher's propensity to put his mark on legislation, was that something that you saw happen again and again with other proposals or was the Rattlesnake an isolated example of this?

PW: No, John wanted to be sure that any legislation, particularly any legislation which he signed, had more of his mark on it than simply his signature. That is not necessarily a bad thing though. I think the reason that some people would object to Senator Melcher's mark on a bill was the manner in which he did it. John has a razor-sharp mind and he's steel trap-like in his insistence that his way be followed and in politics that determined, insistent, take-no-prisoners approach, is objected to strongly because politics is after all the art of compromise. While Senator Melcher had many strong things to talk about and had many good attributes, his willingness to compromise was not in keeping with what you need in order to get things done in the Congress. I always said that even when John was in the House—I worked with him when he was eastern Montana Congressman—and I always said then without knowing John Melcher would ever end up in the Senate that John would be a better Senator than a House member because in the Senate power is the use of the brake. Power is negative, it's used negatively in the Senate, that's what filibusters are about, that's what holds on bills are about. You use threats, you use your ability as a Senator to stop things from happening. Whereas in the House positive is all accelerator, power is all positive. You have to do things, you have to pass things to be powerful in the House. To be powerful in the Senate you just have to threaten to stop everything. So I always said that John Melcher would have made a better Senator than a House member and in the end he did. He made a pretty good senator. He got his way over there. But despite John and my friendship it sometimes made working with him uncomfortable, but in the end, particularly if you were on John's side on an issue, you were always glad he was your ally because he quite often got his way.

BC: He was known for tenacity certainly and in that sense he was a very effective legislator.

Going back to compare the inner workings of the delegation with the delegation that existed before you came to Congress—and I'm thinking of when we had Senator Mansfield and Senator Metcalf, it's often been said that we've not seen the kind of cooperation within the delegation since that we had in the Metcalf-Mansfield era. Would you agree with that assessment?

PW: No I don't. I was working on Capitol Hill when Arnold Olsen and Jim Battin were in the House—well, I was working on Capitol Hill when Arnold Olsen and John Melcher were in the House, but I was a very close Congressional watcher prior to that when Jim Battin had the seat before Melcher. I was back there when Olsen and Melcher and Mike Mansfield and Lee Metcalf were there and I personally—I think if any of them were here they'd say I was wrong frankly—I'd give you my own personal frank view of it and that is that I don't think that delegation got along so well. I know that Mike and Arnold barely talked, and John and Lee were enemies. They only didn't talk, they were enemies. When I was there, Ron Marlene and I were

almost complete opposites politically, but we got along personally. We were so different politically that we didn't chum around together and we didn't go to dinner together, but we were very congenial to each other. If some issue was dividing us we wouldn't talk about that issue, we'd tell each other a joke and just try to get along. By the same token I got along very well with Melcher, very well with Max, and later very well with Conrad Burns. So I disagree with the notion that the old delegation with Metcalf and Mansfield got along better than any of the delegations since.

BC: That's good. Why don't we jump to your recollections surrounding the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Bill, I knew there was one that I had forgotten before we return our attention to the statewide effort or the efforts to pass statewide legislation. The Lee Metcalf Wilderness Bill was enacted in 1983 and obviously a great deal of effort preceded that and could you detail that for us? Do you recall for example whether you actually introduced legislation for the Lee Metcalf or was it initiated in the Senate? How did that process begin and how did it end from your perspective?

PW: I know the bill began in the Senate and I don't recall whether I put a companion bill in the House or not. My recollection is that we did not have a companion bill in the House, that the Senate had the marker bill on it and that we just carried that bill all the way through. My recollection of the most contentious of the areas in the Metcalf was Jack Creek. In looking back on Jack Creek there were two primary issues which weighed against putting Jack Creek in the wilderness. There were actually three issues. One was the possibility of a power line running through Jack Creek from what would be Big Sky area down into the Ennis area. The second thing that mitigated against declaring it wilderness in the Lee Metcalf bill was the eventuality that a road might one day join the Ennis area with the Big Sky area and the Gallatin Canyon therefore. And the third issue was an issue as I recall about bug kill. I think the pine bark beetle had gotten into the Jack Creek area, if I remember it right now, and killed a lot of those trees. If it wasn't the pine bark beetle it was an earlier infestation which left a lot of dead and dying trees. Given those considerations the delegation, including me, opted not to put the Jack Creek in wilderness, but to in effect have the wilderness areas, divide them out leaving a corridor running between them. At the time it was my considered judgment that was the best thing to do. I since came to believe that was a mistake. That I was mistaken about that, that we should have joined the areas and made them whole. I think it would have made a more intact eco system, allowed for and encouraged animal corridor migration and I think also it would have done a better of preserving watershed there. But the delegation didn't do it. But the Lee Metcalf is a shining example of a good wilderness bill, one that passed without enormous contention, and of course one that was named after a senator who really was one of the early conservationists in the Congress of the United States.

BC: You sort of alluded to the fragmentation of the Lee Metcalf wilderness, the fact that the long held dream that I think maybe Senator Metcalf began with and that certainly many people in Montana had of a unified Madison Range wilderness from the Spanish Peaks south to the Yellowstone National Park. That dream was shattered with the fragmentation into four

different parts, not only through Jack Creek, but then further south at Cabin Creek, although that was added as a recreation management area as you know. Do you feel that the Lee Metcalf Bill as it was enacted is an appropriate tribute to the memory of Senator Metcalf?

PW: Yes, I do. As I've said if I were king and could go back now and redo that, I'd draw those lines differently, but I do think that the Metcalf bill was an appropriate recognition of one of the earliest conservationists in the Congress and a fellow who was himself a great bear of a fighter for the environment and for everything that lived on the land. Lee understood, I think better than sometimes many people gave him credit for understanding, he knew about compromise and that at the end of the day you had to get something done. You shouldn't do it if it was wrong, but neither should we allow—Lee thought neither should we allow the perfect to be enemy of the good. But if you could do good, you ought to do good even if it wasn't perfect. So that is what we ended up with the Metcalf bill. Of course we were all delighted to be able to name it after one of Montana's greatest senators, a person who I guess Mike Mansfield believed was Montana's greatest senator, Lee Metcalf.

BC: Yeah, I remember when Lee died in January of '78 that Mike's comment was that Lee was the best partner he had ever had.

PW: Yes.

BC: A man of few words [Mansfield], he got right to the point with that statement.

Is there anything else on the legislative history or some of the things that maybe happened that you feel might be significant with respect to the Lee Metcalf bill? Again, it was sort of smack dab in the middle of all the RARE II stuff, it was enacted before the first delegation's introduction of a statewide bill for Montana. Was there any attempt to clear the slate on a few areas like that before jumping into the statewide scene?

PW: Well, that is the delegation purposely tried to finish the Metcalf before we took on the struggle with RARE II and what's become known as the 393 lands. We did want to try to, as you say, clear the slate, make as many designations as we thought advisable before going to RARE II. It's probably wise that we did because had we become bogged down in RARE II first in those early '80s nothing would have been designated. We would have achieved nothing because the public would never have understood that we were setting RARE II aside to go to a different product. The confusion in the public's mind about, well, the RARE II lands are different than these other lands, I think would have never come clear and the public would have never given the delegation license to do the Rattlesnake or the Lee Metcalf had we struggled for a few years first with the contentious RARE II issue.

BC: Well, I think history has borne that out, Pat, because we have not been able to designate one single acre of wilderness in Montana since the Metcalf Bill of 1983, not one acre.

PW: And that's the point.

BC: Although we've come very close, thanks to your efforts. You might want to evolve into that whole process and start. I'll give you my recollection that I think there was a delegation bill for RARE II in Montana of somewhere around one million acres of wilderness that was first introduced about July 1 of 1984. I might be a year off, it might have been 1983. I honestly can't remember if it was '83 or '84, but we're talking the first of many bills. Maybe you can describe how the delegation was actually able to introduce one bill, whether that was an appropriate way to begin the process and then some of the things that happened after that.

PW: Well I don't remember the year, '83 or '84, I suppose for an oral history it would be helpful to the listener if I read my files and pursued it with some accuracy here, but that's right it's right in around that time. The delegation had worked for the better part of a year to see if we could agree upon a bill which we would all then become signators to and introduce in our respective chambers.

BC: Pat, if I might interject one recollection of mine. You and the other members came to Montana and held three field hearings in preparation for that bill. One was in Anaconda, one was in Great Falls and one was here in Missoula and they were extremely well attended hearings and I suppose that you gathered mountains of data and testimony in the hearings

PW: And maps.

BC: And maps, so maybe just throwing that in to—

PW: Sure, the public was and always has been deeply, significantly involved. That's probably in 1983 in the wilderness process in Montana and to give it the proper flavor, we not only had, oh, probably 20-plus hours of hearings in Montana on that bill, the developing of—you know, I don't recall if that was on the developing of the bill or on the bill itself, but it made no difference because what we were really doing was looking at developing a final product.

So we had all those hours of hearings and then the delegation members would take these areas, the four of us— and Ron Marlene was involved in this process—we would divide the state into areas and then we would take an area at a time and for weeks we would spread maps out on the office floor, one office or another of the individual members of the delegation, and you know with ties pulled down and coats off we would get on our hands and knees and literally on the floor go over all of these areas, pointing out mining claims, looking at the testimony that Montanans had given us, looking at letters, we had everything filed by area, by watershed, by wildlife corridor and we'd take everything into consideration and then see if we couldn't agree on where the boundaries for an area ought to be. Then we would turn those over to our staffs and they'd check everything for accuracy to be certain we were excluding mining claims that were near the boundaries and so on. We'd know where the snowmobile trails were, and where people would still—even though there were no roads in the

area—where they'd still go on some of these old beat up long forgotten jeep trails. We'd have travel plans from the Forest Service in front of us, just mountains of information.

My point here and what folks need to know is that each member of the delegation labored over these maps, we became workers with regard to wilderness about these maps and we all got to know the areas pretty well. We used to kid about how somebody could take us to Montana and drop us down in an area and we could find our way out. I'm not sure if that's accurate if that actually happened to us, but we always felt like we had that kind of familiarity with these areas. Then we came to a point with which I was not particularly comfortable and that was that once we signed on, once we had all of the areas, we knew what the language was going to be, we developed a bill, we agreed to sign it and introduce it, the agreement was that once we did that, we would accept **no** changes from anyone. I didn't like that. I thought no that's not the legislative process, I mean after all any member of the House of Representatives or the Senate has a right to try to change a bill and maybe they have the right to convince us they're correct, at which point we would change our own minds. But nonetheless, the delegation agreed that—

BC: That's an interesting ground rule, how did that come to be?

PW: Well, I think primarily it was Senator Melcher's idea, who just felt that this was a Montana decision that should be held tightly by Montanans and no one else should be involved and that if we could we should even avoid ever going to a conference committee. We'd just pass the bill through the Senate, get it accepted in the House and not have any changes. We eventually had to abandon that because it wasn't realistic, but that was the agreement going in.

BC: Your gut feeling was right about that, wasn't it?

PW: Yes, absolutely. In any event that was the first bill the delegation could agree on and I guess actually it was the last bill the delegation agreed on, first and last. We did have a bill that went down to President Reagan—passed and went down to President Reagan—but it did not have the full agreement of each member of the delegation, whereas the first bill that was introduced did. Congressman Marlene signed and agreed to it along with Senator Melcher, Baucus and myself.

BC: The first one you introduced?

PW: The first one.

BC: And that was a number of years before the bill that you referred to that went to President Reagan, which would have been in 1988, and which the President pocket vetoed right before the election. It of course killed it. Did that whole issue and maybe the wilderness specifically in your view play an important role in Melcher's defeat for the Senate reelection?

PW: Well, I'll give you my view of that, which I hope isn't tainted with political bias. I don't

believe it is. It's a two part answer. First, is the direct answer to your question as I understood your question, Bill, which is did the veto of the wilderness bill contribute in any significant way to the Melcher defeat? I think it did not. Most people would disagree with that, but I think as one goes through and looks at the polling data, you know you get inside the polling data and look at how the precincts voted in the John Melcher-Conrad Burns race, I don't find that one can determine that the Reagan veto of the wilderness bill had a lot to do with the Melcher defeat. Most of the collapse in John Melcher's vote was in farm country in eastern Montana and it wasn't in places where the wilderness bill was important, although that's not to say that people in eastern Montana when Ronald Reagan vetoed the wilderness bill that didn't put additional weight to the fact that, yes, Senator Melcher somehow is no longer in eastern Montana and no longer is interested as he ought to be in agriculture problems but you know is sort of out there in the west worrying about environmental problems. You know it may have had an effect that way, but the direct effect I don't think was as bad on Melcher as people tend to believe.

The other part of this that I want to comment on is that I think that the Republicans, however, had a very different view of this veto. They thought it would defeat John Melcher. They thought that a popular President, Ronald Reagan, creating a veto would be harmful to Melcher and I believe that the veto of the Montana wilderness bill, the only veto or a RARE II wilderness bill in the history of the presidency, was done for cynical, political purposes. Now if one disagrees with that then one ought to go back and take another look at the Conrad Burns political ads starring none other than Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan cut ads based on the veto. And there is some indication he cut the ads before he even vetoed the bill and indicated that in the ads something to the effect if Senator Melcher had lost touch with Montana—you know, me moving at the last minute to save Montanans from a guy like Melcher wouldn't have been necessary. And the Reagan veto statement about the bill, the President sends up veto statements even when they pocket veto bills, and the Reagan veto statement was ludicrous on its face. I mean it was filled with misconceptions about the bill itself. So I think the Republicans did it in an effort to defeat John Melcher, but I don't really believe that's in the end what happened to Melcher.

BC: Pat, looking at the evolution of statewide wilderness legislation from the very first delegation consensus bill clear on up to the bill that you introduced after round 16 to provide the impetus for the withdrawal from logging of the 1.7 million acres by the Secretary, looking at that 16-year history roughly, the legislation seemed to be getting more favorable toward wilderness preservation. Why is that?

PW: Well, you know politics is people, politics is personalities and there isn't some great clinking-clanking machine called the U. S. Congress, a bloodless instrument, that turns out legislation with no human imprint on it. I think bills got better, the wilderness bills got better under my value system, here I'm using the term better meaning they were more refined, the boundaries of wilderness were larger, we were protecting more watersheds in the end than we were with our proposals in the beginning, we had more concern about wildlife corridors,

migration corridors, such things as winter calving grounds for elk, in denning for grizzlies in the end than we ever had in the beginning. I think part of the reason for that as I say was that the humans involved in the process including me became more knowledgeable as the years went by. After all, you sit through hundreds of hours of hearings, you're bound to learn something even if you are a member of Congress. Something is bound to sink in and it did.

I've said just before I left and since I've left the Congress this last year or so that I didn't enter the Congress of the United States as a conservationist. But I sure as hell left as one because the learning process was such that one came to understand the value of this six million acres of essentially roadless land that's still left in Montana and I guess almost twice that left in our neighboring state of Idaho. And those lands have to be protected and so as the years went by the delegation, at least in those days, matured as having a greater understanding of environmental matters and as a result, the wilderness bills—the seventeen different wilderness bills that were introduced—were almost without exception each better than the previous bill. One might say, well then we shouldn't pass wilderness at all for a hundred years because eventually that bill will be perfect, but that again is to make the perfect the enemy of the good. We ought to get on with doing something good.

BC: Exactly.

[End of Interview]