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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 172-030

Interviewee: Richard E. Montague

Interviewer: Nick Sundt, Charlie Bragdon

Date of Interview: January 14, 1982

Project: Nick Sundt Smokejumpers Oral History Project

Note: There are two interviewers, and it is difficult to tell them apart. They both have been identified as Interviewer in the transcript.

Interviewer: —southern and northern, well, I guess mostly northern California, and all over the place. During the middle of the summer, did you have to go before Congress and ask for more money, or is there just a fund you can draw on?

Richard Montague: We have [an] emergency fund, and then we can draw upon it based upon our approval levels. We can actually...we don't like to use the word black check, but we do have full authorization by Congress. Then they go back, and we tell them a month later that we spent 20 million dollars on this last go-round of fires, and then they put 20 million dollars back in our fire [unintelligible] pot.

I: Wow, that's really nice.

RM: Yeah, it is nice, but what happened is when we get a big bust we keeping Congress informed, and saying, "Hey, we're spending about 14 million dollars a week, and if this thing continues you know what it's going to do to us." So then they're working on it. We're only dealing with the Congressional Appropriations subcommittee, so we're only dealing with about five or six congressmen. But they are the say, and they are the spokesmen that make sure all of the legislation is taken care of, so our appropriations bill. Now, some years back—I can't even think what year it was, I want to think it was '80, but I'm not absolutely sure—Congress just says, "You've had it. You've spent 120 million dollars fighting fire, we're not giving you anymore."

So then we had to go back to the regions and said, "Okay, we got to work on some of your winter monies if we have anymore fires." Because we got to be careful in a sense, with a blank check, you'll tend to not manage as well as when you're really tight. We're better managers now, and we're probably more proud of the way we're using our resources now because we've got our budgets cut. When everybody said we could have all the smokejumpers we wanted, we didn't have good interchange of smokejumpers like we did this last summer. You guys really didn't know what base you were working out of half the time.

I: No.

RM: See? But it forced us, by budget, to do that. Before, when I was the regional director of 4 [Region 4], actually would get calls from the smokejumper people and the district fire

management officer and the forest fire staff there—Gene Benedict—they'd say, "Goddamn it, you're letting Region 1 jump in Region 4. We should be jumping."

We'd say, "Yeah, but that's up on the northern end. They can get there 20 minutes faster, we want to jump them. In fact, you're ready to go to Redding. We're ready to place the order." We don't need to have that, "it's my territory, I have to jump." And somewhat in this picture, you didn't say it—and I was listening careful for it—but we've had a lot of problems with the philosophy of the smokejumpers, the philosophy of the helicopter people, et cetera, saying, "That's my territory."

We've had district rangers saying, "I own a helicopter, so I'm not going to call for a smokejumper. So I'm using my helicopter whether I need it or not," or "I'd rather use my district recreation people and walk them three hours to a fire because it finances my local people not because I can get a Region 1 jumper that can come over the line or a Region 6 jumper and be there in 20 minutes." That's the type of thing...that's why we're trying to bust down this—we're all firefighters, we just deliver them differently. There are better firefighters, the best firefighters we have—and I think we can say this—are our category 1 firefighters, and smokejumpers are category 1 firefighters. I don't think a smokejumper is better than a category 1 crew. There's better smokejumper units over at the smokejumper units, and there's better category 1 crews over smokejumpers and there's better smokejumpers over category 1 crews. But as a mass, or category 1—and that's why they're category 1—is they're a higher production rate, they're all self-contained...In other words, you could put a IR crew, some of the terminology—well, nobody can go in there and stay self-contained and survive like we can, you know, that's kind of your [unintelligible]. But you could've flown in a helicopter like a category 1 crew, and they would've stayed there and survived identically. So that's all I'm really trying to say. Now, it's not just you I'm picking on because we say the same thing to the category 1 crews.

I: Yeah, well, I don't feel like I'm being picked on. I'm not here to say, "Hey," you know?

RM: That's right, and so that's the only thing we're really trying to say. The person that is the dedicated firefighter, that leaves his home-base and doesn't come out until the fire is out, and that's the category 1 type person—he doesn't have to come back because he's got some restrictions, you know, "I got to back to a timber sale. I got to get back to something"—that firefighter is our elite firefighter and the one we can depend on. And the managers will use them under the worst of conditions because it's the best skilled, best physically fit, and everything. So we make the decision. So that's all I got to say on that. Let's meet your objectives.

I: Well, no, you raise an interesting question there with the finances, and this is something that I've always had a question about, and that is, the day-to-day operating costs of a jumper base or, I guess, of any specialized fire crew, is paid by the forest or the district or what have you—the region perhaps—yet the fire funds come out of a totally different pot. What I'm wondering

about is, if the cost of having an inadequate fire suppression outfit are born by someone other than the people that are managing it, what incentive is there to have an adequate crew on hand or to manage it well, or to...How do you work that out?

RM: Okay, here's how we balance our budget on our fire protect levels. Everybody says, "How do we know whether we have too much money or not enough money?" So what we do is take our cost of pre-suppression, all costs. That's all prevention, detection, the whole thing, plus suppression costs—that's nationally—must equal what we call net-value change, and I'll explain that. That really is our resource loss and resource benefits, okay? So that's minus-resources and plus-resources. Now, you hear a lot of talk nowadays that there's some positive benefits for wildlife, et cetera, okay?

We look at this. We actually chart it for the expected year. What from my viewpoint, and you're only getting it from my viewpoint and from Washington['s] viewpoint—it's not so much Dick Montague even though it's led by me probably—is that the district ranger looks at fire as every year is his worst every year? They built everything on their worst year, so if we do our analysis—if we do our budget analysis—on 10-year increments using 20 years of data, but 10-year increments—decades—if you had your second worst and your most worst year ever the first two years of ten years, somethings got to happen to be a rainy year someplace. But everybody gets funded now. Not at the worst, but at the average period of time. So all of these charts I've shown you is really the average conditions. So you're funded an organization and we can say 20 smokejumpers and two air tankers, and we'll keep at a local force kind of thing. Okay, you're funded from this period of time to this period of time, based upon the expected average year. Now, if that expected average year changes, because we know that you might have 10 years bad in a row and then go 90 years. We all know that. So what we look at is if it does exceed our expected year then the Washington office, fire severity pot, will pick up the difference. That's when we go to Congress.

I: Okay, but you're just talking about money. But okay, I'm sorry, you're not finished.

RM: Resources. We fund resources to meet that, okay? Now, the difference, is I think where the district rangers look at it differently—and I'm going right to the district ranger now—is that if you have your worst year, and I'll pick Redmond—Redmond area, okay? They are your responsibilities. Then we got Missoula up here, that has an average year, but, damn it, they started getting rain, so then these resources can go up here to help. So that's why we move things around. You understand the shared resources. So what we do then is fund this increment, and then gamble that we'll take away from one and move to another or we'll go to our fire severity pot if we can't take away, if both of them have bad fire years. Then we move out. So that's what the regional directors and myself start negotiating about July of every year.

I: So, in other words, you're counting on getting crews, shipping crews, in from elsewhere and just increased mobility to take care of any kind of shortfalls that might occur in the system? But that takes time and there's an expense to that. How is that balanced off against the cost of the

local guy? If I have a choice of, say, having 20 jumpers or 40 jumpers, well, more than likely I'll just go ahead and take my 20 if I feel that I can always get some troops from somebody else.

RM: That's right.

I: But that takes time to get those people there, and I'm just wondering, what incentive is there for the local person to go for a margin of safety in a way?

RM: Okay, now—

I: Because the money is not going to come out of his pocket—

RM: You're leading right in...you're asking perfect questions, okay, and I really want to deal with that. Because we're looking in on a national thing, and yet we have 54 sample forests. Have you heard about the budget analysis at all?

I: No, I haven't.

RM: There's 54 sample forests out there with different fire regimes and there's at least six per region—minimum six per region. Our sample ones, they went through analysis and they started out at the very bottom, and the district ranger says, "How many resources does he need?" This is the district ranger, okay? He filled his organization. Then the forest says, "We need this kind of an organization to go on," so that's the forest. The region says, "We need these amount of regional resources to share among the forests," so they added that on, so that's the regions. Then we put on the national resources for every unit, or the national share. Okay, here we go, we can take a ranger district, the regional resources would be your smokejumper program—

I: Inter-regional crews—IR crews.

RM: IR crews. Well, the IR crews are national, air tankers are national. What we've done then, so we've built the numbers, where before under the program prior to the budget analysis, this guy tried to plan them all himself and everybody had too many. Everybody had too many. So we built it upward, so these 54 or 52 category-1 crews plus six available from smokejumpers—but we kind of say we're not going to drain the smokejumpers more than about six crews at any one time—that is enough crews nationally to meet all of the fires based upon our computer printouts and all of the data we've set down in our game plan is the worst we'd ever need. So now we're saying, "Who's going to host what?" So we then have allocated the category 1 crews around the nation someplace to cover. And we move them according to the fire severity, 15-day periods. So we hope to be just before...actually Missoula had their big problems this year, we started moving crews into their area and making them available. Sometimes we didn't move them, but we had aircraft stockpiled there. We brought the Elektras in, and we brought the Convair 580s so crews were ready to go.

I: I remember.

RM: Yes, see. That's what we're all doing as your daily fire weather goes in from your fire stations goes into Bissey (?), Bissey starts saying, "Gee whiz, it looks like if something does happen here they're going to be short. What do we got to start doing to plan for?" So we're doing the planning in...the district ranger's feeding information to here and if the forest fire staff thinks he can't meet their needs, then he goes one level and this keeps going up. There's these pots that we draw from. Now, let me show you, and you probably have...have you seen the smokejumper's study?

I: No, I haven't. That's something that I'd really, at some point, I'd really like to go through that whole thing if I can.

RM: Yeah, I was hoping I could find an extra copy for you. This isn't fair to talk to this this way, but the very first part of the study for smokejumpers, going back—not regarding the numbers of smokejumpers yet, but just dealing with the basis—and all it was saying is that we drew circles, which was the typical response times from the center of every base. You've seen these kinds of fire statistics and data. We found out up in the Idaho area—where it was red—that meant this base, this base, and this base, and there's a center—yeah, I guess that'd be just three—but they had overall coverage. Well, this just means there's multiple coverage. Same capabilities. In other words, you could get there from any of this base as easy as you could from any of this base. The yellow means two bases only have the same coverage time.

All we were really saying—and then you look at the national forest in there and you can say, "Well, gee whiz, look at all of this uncovered area." Well, that isn't really jumping territory. So Boise, which was probably down in here someplace, they had all these desert flats that you don't jump in. It was the McCall area that really had the most of the jumps, and McCall could cover everything...McCall could almost get down to Boise. Grangeville, et cetera. All we said now, "Look, the smokejumper is the highest, most expensive firefighter we got in our organization. The aircraft doesn't cost as much as a helicopter, but the training towers and the facilities are millions of dollar facilities and they're outdated, et cetera. So if we're going to build good top-notch places, where should they be and what kind of coverage?" So the study went through all of these things and said, "Hey, you got a lot of duplication, so if you invested your money in Redmond, Redding, McCall, and Missoula, Montana, you then probably could build four with the money that's been...you can't build, you can't even maintain the eight, nine places we had, so just put all of your money into McCall, and just have principal bases there. Then when the lightning storms or the weather or such, take your airplanes and put them out, spike them out, move them around. They don't need all of the towers from all of the facilities. All they need is a place to get out of the sun and go in." So that's basically what the study says.

I: So, this is the revised right here, this is what—

RM: Yeah, yeah. So all I'm really saying is that it's pretty damn obvious that there was overlap. Then we started saying, "Well, you know"—a few of us said—"you can computerize, you can do all of these things, but we know better." Then, so, the last two years we've really been testing it, and we're finding out that, in some cases, we should have been using this base sooner. Yet, we got strip problems at Grangeville, we got facility problems at Grangeville to [unintelligible].

Unfortunately, Le Grande is one of the better sites, but it's in the center of nothing. It really shouldn't have been there in the first place. Boise was the best site, and it shouldn't have been there. We wished we could have had an airport and a facility like Boise up at McCall, but we can afford to download because of...download numbers of jumpers weight-wise and be at McCall rather than flying the extra 40 minutes up to where the jumps really are. Boise has now [unintelligible]. Boise had a large helicopter program, and they meet the coverage. The key point is when our net-value changes, when our losses start really getting bad, we really got to deal with it. One of my best friends and the biggest arguer of all of this is Don Biddison (?), do you know him, the supervisor of the Nez Perce and has Grangeville?

I: No.

RM: He said, "I used to have two category 2 crews, I used to have a large smokejumper program, and I used to have two helicopters back in the '72 planning. And look what you've done to us."

We said, "Now, you know, '72 and it's now '82, how many...what have you lost since we've done?"

"Well, I haven't really lost much."

I: You mean in resources?

RM: In resources. "Well, I had fires."

"But what have your fires done?"

"Well, they haven't done that much."

"How much timber have you lost? Did you lose revenues, et cetera, et cetera?" That's what the budget analysis looks at. Now, it's based upon projected and then actual. Okay, Now we go to Cave Junction, and we look at what the Cave Junction jumped from. Now, I'm not just talking about this year, I'm talking about ten years' worth of Cave Junction—

[laughter]

Glad you had the door locked. [laughs]

Cave Junction was going one- and two-person jumps. They were doing three-quarters of their jumps were practice jumps or jumping someplace else. Redmond could cover all of where they needed to jump, Redmond could cover in the same timeframe. So that's what the study was really saying. But you're dealing with individuals, and if someone called me up today and says, "I want you now to move your office from Rosslyn [Virginia] to Maryland," I'd be upset.

Because I'd say, "But I live on this side. It's a longer commute." So, I understand that, but you've got to do it sometime and that's the reason for the study. It wasn't the most effective thing for us, and we didn't have enough money to finance everything to meet the safety standards we felt we needed to have, so if we're going to invest our money to have professional standards the best we can afford, then where should they be. So that was the analysis that did that. That's the reason for the study.

I: As you increased the distance between the bases, which essentially is what's going on here as you're eliminating redundancy, what you're also doing is you're reducing the amount of time it takes for one base...I mean, you're increasing the amount of time it takes for one base to reinforce another. For example, when we're jumped out at Redmond, immediately we have, or very quickly we can get crews from C.J. or from North Cascades and stuff. I'm just wondering, I don't know how important that is.

RM: The big question is why, and we still have some barriers to break down on why do you take North Cascades to replenish Redmond when Redding could go? But it's a regional boundary, and on...What I'm saying is we still have those little bit of barriers left, but we've improved last year and it was so good that you hardly knew where...But we still have a feeling that if it goes into McDonald's (?) shop, the first place he looks is his own shop instead of saying, "Hey, McCall or somebody, help us because we don't have to come all the way down."

I: And probably because he has to deal with those guys all of the time.

RM: It's easier to deal with them. And McCall probably wouldn't turn loose of them because we might have, tomorrow, we might have a fire. So what we're really saying now is there's so many smokejumpers, and that's what's in the pot, and if you send your smokejumper you can keep, let's say, 25 percent for your local coverage, and we'll get somebody else for you. Now, here's a good case-in-point: last year was one of the best tests, again, of the need for smokejumper numbers. And I don't know the numbers we had last year total smokejumpers. Three-sixty would be something in my mind, I might be all wet but that's a figure I had written on a desk drawer early in the season. I don't know how the budget filtered down, and some of the supervisors didn't fill all of those. But we only ran out of smokejumpers during the Missoula bust once, and it was only for a four-hour period. I got a couple—this is my viewpoint now—I got a couple inquiries saying, "See, we ran out of smokejumpers!"

The question was, “Okay, how are we deploying them?” And he explained them to me, and I said, “Well, what if we give you a large helicopter and a ten-person crew? Can you deliver those ten people in, pick up the ten smokejumpers so they can jump on smokejumper fires and get them off of total mop up, et cetera?”

He said, “Yeah.” And within four hours, which was in late-evening type of thing, we had them back the next morning, We had too many jumpers again. But we weren’t deploying the jumper the way the jumper was supposed to be deployed, and we weren’t deploying the helicopter the way a helicopter would be deployed. Now, our philosophy now is to use the jumper, and the philosophy I think will be for many years—until we come up with better repelling and better aircraft that we have envisioned—we’re still going to have the smokejumper and the numbers will remain about the same, plus or minus a few to meet those areas that they’re the only way to get in there. But I hope we’re not jumping smokejumpers on some of the territory I saw, even in some of your slides, where there were the big fields that a helicopter could’ve landed in the—

I: Oh, no, those are...a lot of those are practice—

RM: I know that, yeah. All I’m really saying, if the fire boss called and says, “Hey, I need 20 people because I’ve got a spot-fire, and I need them for about four hours,” the only way to deliver them is by smokejumpers because you couldn’t get a helicopter organized to do that. Because we don’t have a helicopter that will take 20. So you can drop them out, pick up the spot, walk out, and then the helicopter can shuttle you or the small planes can land and pick you up. The point being is it’s the mix, and we’re dealing with the mix. We’re not saying, “One’s competing against the other.” We’re saying, “What is the overall mix that we need?” So that’s what I’m—

But we’re down—

I: [unintelligible].

RM: Excuse me, let me finish this one thing. We’re down to only 60 percent of what we need in everything: air tankers—I I won’t say that in air tankers because, politically, we’re forced to keep that amount—but helicopters, initial attack forces, and for sure, the smoke jumpers are down in those numbers. Yet, our resources losses are not changing any more than it was when we had them.

I: You’re saying you’re down 60 percent from what you used to think you needed, or, you say, from what you need?

RM: Well, we think we’re being fooled in this five- or six-year period that...we had a fairly good fire season. We haven’t gone through the...we’ve had bad fires in only certain areas, but we haven’t had any problems in the last five years where everything was a fire at once.

I: Like in '77.

RM: Yeah. We only have a few of those types of things. So that's where we're at. We actually have ground tankers where they just can't afford the trucks anymore—F.O.R., et cetera—and decided, "Well, okay, we're just going to not have ground tankers and we're going to put five people on a helicopter and put five people in the middle of the forest, and that's the only fire organization they got. And they're going to rely on the smokejumpers to back them up as reinforcements." They haven't lost much since they've done it. What it probably meant is that it wasn't too bad then. So that's all I'm really trying to say is that I'm not trying to paint a picture that...The administration, Congress, is basically saying, "We will take a little more losses of resources and gamble than we're going to give you all of the money up-front and then you still have big fires and still spending our [unintelligible]." Okay, enough said. Let's talk about what you want to talk about.

I: Well no, I mean I want to talk about what you're talking about, I just have some further questions along there. Presumably, something that's always drilled into our head is initial attack—and I've done heli-tack too—but the thing that's drilled into our head is that the reason why we're there is because you have to get to the fire before it spreads and every minute counts and that's why I use...we try to spend as little time as possible getting our suits off the rack, getting in the airplane—all of that's supposed to happen really fast. Now, the fewer people you have at a base and the further the bases are apart, the longer it's going to take to get jumpers from one base into the territory of another, and, presumably, what that means is that you're going to have some kind of cost paid in terms of fires spread. In other words, every minute goes by you're going to get a little bit more...Is there any way to include that in the calculations, or what's included—

RM: It is. It is included.

I: So how do you do that? How do you figure that out? Do you look at all of the fire histories, and when they fill out those forms you figure out rate of spread and computerize all of that or—

RM: Well, what we do is we game it in these sample forests. We game, we assume that...Well, let me get another chart. We deal in charts. Let's see, I've got something to go up and talk to the directors with next week, but I think I have—

[Voice fades as interviewee moves away from the microphone; Break in audio]

RM: —the percentage of fires over ten acres is kind of our measure. That's a trend thing. It doesn't tell us how bad things...And one of the best fire-funded years, I think, was the year we had the most resources.

I: '78?

RM: Yeah, '78. We were catching almost 96 percent of our fires. Okay, that's 96 out of 100, that's 4 fires that got over—out of every 100—got over ten acres. Then we jump down to '78—we were one of the best-financed years we had—and of course weather has a lot to do with this, so don't use the years, but that was one of our best-financed years, was 93 percent. The year before we were very poorly financed and it was the same percentage of fires, but, again, that's weather. Weather relates more to it than numbers of people. We found that out.

Then in '80, which was a very poor fire year nationally, we dropped down to 89 percent and that starts scaring us in trends, but that's the effect of the new fire management policy, allowing some of those fires...because that's every ignition, this isn't—

So, the escape fire analysis is saying ten acres aren't bad. Twenty acres might be good. So we start taking it back and looking at some of these other trends, what has happened to our fire fighters? And this is the amount of money that we have spent, and again, '78, we spent 200 million dollars and our budget—this line here, comes across here—basically says somewhere about 185 [million] is where we were balancing out. In other words, we were spending more money than we were losing when we go above this line. So we've been maintaining about 185 million dollars a year nationally.

Well, now, the proposed '83 budget drops way below that, and now we're telling Congress, "You've got to expect some losses."

They said, "Well, we've got to think that over."

But they've been generally about 12-15 percent under, so we tell Congress, "This is what the rangers are saying, this is what the forest supervisor is saying, this is what the losses will be, and we've got charts and figures to show about what it will be."

They said, "You know, we don't really care, providing the resources losses are not something that we can't live with." So it's not something that this office says, "You can't have any more smokejumpers," what we're just saying is Congress is saying that this is all the money we get. And they give it to us by kind of increments, too. So we use these relationships, and we said, "Okay, let's look at the number of fires, average fire size. What's happening?" All it really did say and all of these trends and all of these dollars was that our average fire size now is about 20 acres, and it dropped down to ten during those real critical years. Now it's back up to only about 27 acres. Now, we went from a 20-acre fire to 27-acre fires on trends. Now again, that only means if just one of those fires gets away and is a hell-buster and wipes out the whole thing, it's just, it's actually two percent of our fires that's doing all of the damage, okay?

I: Well, see, that's what I...How can you figure that in? There's no way you can know then.

RM: But, we're, regardless of the budget, we're running two percent of our fires are doing all of the damage every year for years, okay?

I: Well say like some of that bug kill gets away. Where's all of that in—

RM: Well, some of that's positive.

I: Okay. Oh yeah, I guess it is.

RM: Yeah. It's positive to the point that it's reducing the fuels. If not, we'd have to go in and reduce it ourselves, and it'd cost a lot of money. We'd never afford to do it. In some cases in lodgepole pine, it brings a better market when it's burnt and cured than it is when it's green because it warps. All of those things, that's what other resource markets are telling us. So I understand what you're asking, and it's really frustrating to us here too, because we keep thinking that we're our brother's keeper, but what it really is saying is, "How much of the other resources..." I guess, let me say it this way: the way the chief came to our department, says, "We want you to be our insurance consultant. We're going to have a 100,000-dollar home, and we want you to give us advice in this budget analysis how much we should spend for insurance based upon a 100,000-dollar home." What we'd been doing is providing 150,000-dollars worth of insurance, but he says, "We, being tight, and with all of the other budget currents, might say we only want 80,000-dollars worth of insurance, but we don't want to lose our home." So, then, where are you? Got to start moving around.

So that's what this whole budget analysis has done. So we take the figures every year, and they come out and, well, let's take '81, the year's over. We told Congress and said, "We think 185 million dollars will meet what everybody says is needed, and it will be the most cost-efficient based upon the expected fire year we expect." We don't say it that way, but it's the fire year we will expect.

Congress says, "We'll give you 178 [million], we'll drop you 7 million dollars." We projected we would spend 100 million-dollars worth of FFF (?). Now, this is luck, I'll tell you, but we spent 99.7 million dollars. And we've been able to predict within three percent of our FFF expenditures nationally. Every time somebody spends a lot, somebody doesn't spend anything. We've been able to stay within three percent of that expenditure now for four years. That's all we're really saying. But it impacts you as an individual, it impacts somebody else as an individual, and your overall job. But what we're really saying is we had underutilized you in the past. As a smokejumper, we underutilized you as an air tanker. We had situations where we had one region, on an air tanker chart I'll show you, last year at this time all of the directors met and I made a pitch to them that, "Hey, we've got a Region 3 air tanker that's a C-119 by Hopkins and Power—contractor—that works from April 1 to July 8 in Region 3. We have Missoula that has a Hopkins-Power C-119 from July 4 to September 15. One is paying 80,000 and one is paying 84,000 for these two separate contracts. There's a three-day overlap, how about having

one contract from April to September, and let's try bidding on it?" The bid price came in under what any one of those would have given.

I: Yes, but it could have gone the other way, too. You could have had one real expensive one instead of any expensive one.

RM: But the competition was there. What they're really, what the contractors were telling us is, regardless of what happens, you can have a 120-day contract or a 30-day contract. We have to pay our insurances, we have to pay our pilot all year long—at least nine months and everything. So, you just divide the days into the...and that comes out to your daily rate. If you move it out, we have some opportunities to make ten percent. We'll fly them more, we'll get more mobility, we'll fly more and make money. We can bid cheaper. So, you're right, but we saved 800,000 dollars on helicopters alone this year by going to some of these marriages.

Now, we doing the same thing in the smokejumper program. We're sharing smokejumper aircraft. We're considering very strongly getting one forest service smokejumper aircraft and put it like a Twin Otter or something—buying it or leasing it ourselves—and have it on a year-round contract. That'll probably start in Region 3 and go around. It won't be we'll have one region do that and host it...well, they're already starting to do some marriages and sharing, et cetera. But we've got to get out of the DC-3 program someday because we'll eventually run out of parts for the darn thing. And we probably don't need as many smokejumper aircraft as we have, but we need to get into some smaller aircraft so we can take the one- and two-person jumps. If you look at the analysis that we've done on an average number of jumps in the last ten years of all bases—but we did them by each base, all bases—it average either four-person jumps most of the time or two-person jumps. But we don't have aircraft to take the four and two. We do have some King Air, but we don't have enough, so let's take some looks then.

We're now looking at the single-engine 206 to allow for some of these jumps. West Yellowstone ran for years and there was more search-and-rescue and helping lost hikers, so two-people jumped, so a small plane. Take the Twin Otter and move that to Redmond, where they need it. That's what we're doing, but everybody owned or possessed...I don't want to use the word "owned" because they didn't physically own, but they possessed their airplane and they just kind of kept on to it. Now, we're saying, "Hey, let's take a look at what we need." Some place we need to keep the capability of a 40-person jump. What base is most logical for that and where should we contract for a CASA 212 or a larger 130, or something like that? It that is a need.

We'll send the primary base first. Here's a good example: McCall is supposed to build from its original—boy, the numbers will get me here. What was McCall before they combined? Was it 43 jumpers, 44 jumpers? Then they took 27 from Boise and mixed it to about 67 or something like that. But then they were supposed to take—according to the study—they were supposed to take Grangeville's 17 jumpers—17 to 27, again, the budget goes up and down—and then they were going to take La Grande's jumpers and all go to McCall. But that means we'd have to

expand McCall's facilities more than just what's still needed, regardless of what they have. We'd have to build a whole new...we call it "Redmond facilities" because that's kind of the model. We're talking three or four, eight million dollars, you just don't know. Every year we delay it's another million because of inflation. But then McCall has a limitation on the strip, but still the strip is good enough. Maybe we'll have McCall about a 60 or an 80—a smaller base—and we'll shuttle from Missoula because it's only an hour away. As soon as McCall starts drawing down, we'll shuttle in from Missoula. That's better than spending eight million dollars for a facility because Missoula has the facility. So that's really what we're saying. We can afford...It only cost us about...To move people around, it only costs about 200,000 dollars nationally. But it cost us about 20,000 dollars a person, so that's only ten jumpers to have the capability of moving nationally. See what I'm saying? Even though there is that cost, but it just...I guess that's all I'm really trying to say. We can afford to do a lot, and we move them 90 percent of the time, and it's chargeable to the fire and it's not the up-front money. Then it's the true cost to the fire. So that's kind of where we're at right now.

I: Okay, let's—

RM: You probably need to start wrapping up some of this study.

I: Okay, just to switch tracks here. All of this makes sense to me. I'd like to look at it closer because I'm not sure...I'd like to think about it a little bit more.

RM: I want to look and see if there's a source to find one more, if not I'll get your address and I'll mail you one.

I: Because I can always return it or whatever.

RM: This is my only copy here, but there's supposed to be four or five other copies around the office. If the other gentleman would have been here today like originally had planned, they would have been here and handed you one and so on.

I: Okay. Now, from the jumper down at the bottom though, the average jumper has no idea of what's going on. I mean, that there is...I don't think that most jumpers even know that there is a national jumper study. Most of them have no idea why bases are being closed, or why one jumper goes to one base. In fact, what happens is that a lot of rumors get started and pretty soon what happens is that morale starts going down, and when morale starts going down in an organization like this—

RM: Things go—

I: Yeah. And your costs go up. People get careless, they just don't care about the quality of the work. I'm wondering whether there's anything that...whether there's been any effort either here in Washington or at the regional offices, to actually to go down to—at some point—go

down to the jumper at that level and try to get some information to them about just generally what the policies are on the smokejumper program nationally and what your problems are?

RM: I sound defensive here, but I will say this: we had an I and I, or Informant and Law of Action Plan. Now, I don't know how it was implemented, I can only talk about how it was implemented when I was in the region. But I, personally, went to every base and sat down with the jumpers. But the point that—in defense of the other regional directors—the hardest barrier to beat in the whole part of it is the idea that it wasn't accepted by the smokejumper leaders. They're like any management. They're the first-line supervision, and as your smokejumper leaders and the foremen who were affected the most—and I can understand their concerns—were doing more to shoot down this study instead of explaining the study. So that is one of the problems we're...unless some one person goes and talks to everybody during the summer. But this should be part of the orientation package. It should be part of the very first...you come to work, here's your role, where you fit in, we're proud of you, this is how we want to use you, here's your future. All of that stuff should be in the beginning. That should be part of the foreman's orientation as well as the fire staff. You're not going to get the regional director there, but maybe you'll get his representative.

I: Or just some reports. I mean, it says, "This is what we found out." It's not like, I don't think it's a matter of coddling or babying, but just these reports—

RM: Help keep people informed.

I: Yeah, I mean, these reports, I'm sure, would be really informative.

RM: Every one of your smokejumper leaders have at least four of those reports.

I: Oh, really?

RM: They've showed up...What I'm saying is they've showed up against management, not for management. They were supplied to every smokejumper base. They studied it, they challenged it, they disagreed with it from their own individual viewpoint.

Are we taping this now?

I: Yes.

RM: Yeah, I guess the only thing I'm saying—and I don't mind it being taped—I'm just saying, the point being is we're getting further into the study than I want to deal with right now, because all I'm really saying is that there is a very important role by all of us to be able to share the information. I think most people will reach the same conclusion. That's what I guess I'm trying to say. Whether you're Democrat or Republican, you can't agree upon the administration that's in power, and that's what we're kind of dealing with right now. This part of it, if I'm a

strong Republican, hell, the president's doing a great job. If I'm a Democrat for my whole lifetime he'll never do a good job, never satisfy me. That's kind of what we're in with the smokejumper study.

I: But there is...The reality of the situation is though that certain decisions are being made, and, to some extent, the success of those decisions and the execution of those policies is, to some extent, dependent upon the cooperation, even if it's reluctant at first—

RM: Yes.

I: —it does depend, to some extent, on the cooperation of the people at the bottom and the people in-between.

RM: That's right. That's right.

I: I guess all I'm saying is that if people at the bottom knew somehow, if they had that information, it would make a tremendous difference. Now, I don't know if there's anything that...if that's something that's really a regional or a base's responsibility or problem, or whether that's something that can be fostered at the top here, but it's just a question of morale.

RM: Good input.

I: Whatever.

RM: I think they need to know more what the future is, not rehash the decisions. I think that's the key point right now: where are we going? Because they've seen cutbacks, the cutbacks are some...the numbers of smokejumpers had nothing to do with the study because the study just dealt with the base. Now, we are in a process of doing a study for the type of aircraft best suited by individual bases and overall needs. We're just in the process of doing that, of which we had smokejumpers part of that. For sure, the pilots that were involved in smokejumping were part of it, as well as fire planners. Then we have the budget, and the budget analysis that we've been dealing with here is that that has done more to deal with the numbers than anything else. So that's the smokejumper's share of what needs to be cut in comparison with costs for land management planning, costs for fire prevention, costs for everything else, and just inflation. But, see, the general people are seeing reduction in bases, reduction in numbers, and they're perceiving that we're having more fires than ever, but we're not. Our trend, basically, is fires have gotten larger, but we haven't analyzed yet is because of our escape fire situation analysis, saying, "The most cost-effective way to suppress the fire—and it's the most efficient way—is to suppress it by letting it burn a little larger and getting it to natural barriers, or pour a lot of retardant and never get over ten acres." That's the type of thing we got to look at. But we're weighing in and monitoring that. But the budget itself has done more to determine the numbers than anything else in aircraft and in smokejumpers.

I: Okay, well I—

RM: And that's what management has no control.

I: I've got a question that's on a different subject, and it's...I was just wondering if... It seems like in all of the federal agencies that there's been a policy of affirmative action, and it seems like maybe just lately it's gotten to the Forest Service, or maybe it's the funnel down time at the level that I'm familiar with—I don't know what the reason is—but it seems like that it is hitting there now. I wonder if that is true. It seems to be more evident in the last year, from what I—

RM: Last three years have probably been...The last two years of the Carter administration was where we really were organized toward the affirmative action program.

I: Is there definite number quotas that have to be implemented or...

RM: It's my understanding now different regions are operating. They've put their own quotas on themselves. There's a presidential executive order that talks about how the approach should be. But I would say that the regional foresters set their own quotas, and how they feel that they can actually meet it based upon their ability to recruit and the capabilities of maintaining a certain skill level at the same time. If it takes a smokejumper three years of some kind of firefighting to be a smokejumper, you can't instantly start somebody as a smokejumper. I'll say, that was the hardest thing we had to get women smokejumpers. They had to be prevention or do some of the things everybody else did, heli-tack for three or four years. I don't use those words "three or four years" as a rule, but generally, to be able to be eligible for the 5 or something, you needed to have some prior experience to be a smokejumper—fire-fighting experience. Then there's the kind of the unknown in the physical fitness requirements.

I: What do you mean the unknown?

RM: We at the Forest Service—under the Missoula equipment development—have some proposals of the capabilities of women, capabilities of men, and their fire-fighting abilities. Now, when I say the "unknowns," is that we haven't—other than Brian Sharkey's most recent strength and agility testing—we really don't know what percentage of the time a fire-fighter is really out there reaching, and so some of the skills that women can't do as well as men, and some of the skills women can do better than men, are really the most essential in fire-fighting. Brian Sharkey's most recent test appears to have answered some of those questions, and so that's kind of where we're at right now. But it's not enough that we can say, "It's absolute. We will not hire any person under this weight and height limitation because they can't." We find every time we say something like that we find somebody with that same height and weight limitation does something better than somebody else that's bigger and better. We can say on an average that's what it indicates, so that's what we're at.

I: Kind of a related question is...Now, I've only been jumping for a couple years—we didn't even have a rookie class last year—but my impression from my own rookie experience and from talking to a lot of other people, is that you have your written requirements, which are minimal just to be able to train. Then you've got a lot of other things that aren't really written, but they're these kind of codes that are used to...I guess the word would be "weed people out." One of these is attitude. Well, you want somebody that works real hard without supervision. The training, in a way, is designed to identify those kinds of people—people that aren't going to work real hard or, for some reason, aren't going to...I'm not sure if I want to say "blend in with the group," but—

RM: Team players.

I: Yeah, yeah, something like that.

RM: Yeah, I've heard that talk.

I: Yeah. That appears to be an important thing in maintaining the morale or maintaining the *esprit de corps* that you have in a jumper unit. And to the extent that that is important, I'm just wondering how you deal with something like that in a situation where you're trying to implement an affirmative action program where there's a lot of pressure to simply make the formal requirements the cutoff point, and then beyond that...We had a woman last year who was a rookie, and just from what we saw it looked like the people that were running the training went way out of their way to not apply a lot of those unwritten codes. In other words, it kind of—

RM: Only thing we can apply, legally and technically, is what's written, documented, and advanced. I guess that's the only way I can really respond to it. I know that certain foremen have expressed desires that...it's like a certain football coach, "I want a team that plays hard and willing to play hard. And I don't care if he's a better player than somebody else over here, if he's not willing to work as a team, I don't want him." Well, to date, we don't have that authority to make those assumptions, and that's about already each one of us know how people operate in the field and it's hard to tell. But they really don't have that authority.

I: Well, there also is an...I don't believe it's written that you have to be able to carry the pack—a certain weight of pack—and I was wondering, it's not a written code, but I think it's a pretty important part of the job to be able to carry a pack out in a reasonable amount of time.

RM: Isn't there a standard though that, like, your gear had to come out in a given timeframe and travel so far in certain terrain?

I: No, there's not.

RM: The reason why I...Again, I'm not that technically knowledgeable about it, but the woman smokejumper at McCall had to do it twice because she didn't meet something. I always assumed that was a regional standard—

I: I think it is.

RM: —and there was a weight limitation, and I do know that the field process with that person that there wasn't a lot of defined things and there was a lot of assumed things. It was only the defined ones that we should live with and could live with. I think that's the key point.

[End of interview]