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Oral History Number: 276-006

Interviewee: Bart O’Gara

Interviewer: Wendy Hall

Date of Interview: June 25, 1991

Project: UM Wildlife Biology Program Oral History Collection

Wendy Hall: Continuation of questions with Bart O’Gara on June 25, 1991, at his residence.

Starting off with question 17 on the sheet. Bart, how has the Wildlife field changed during your career?

Bart O’Gara: When I first came into the profession, emphasis was very heavy on Fish and Game Management enhancement of game populations for fisherman and for hunters. This was partly because we had come through a period of very low numbers—especially in big game—and they were working on bringing them back. I wasn’t in the profession very long when endangered species became quite a large issue and then there was quite a broadening within the profession. There was more interest “watchable wildlife” and biodiversity. The profession has moved from a rather narrow game-oriented perspective to one that is looking more at the total ecosystem. This is not to say that game is not important. It is still providing most of the funding for state agencies, but there has been a big broadening.

WH: What positive and negative impact did different federal presidential administrations have on the wildlife field during your career?

BO: The first president that I was aware of having an impact on the field—when I had been in the profession long enough to be aware of that sort of thing—was the Carter administration. During that administration they strengthened environmental laws greatly. They hired a lot of wildlife professionals within Federal agencies. They started Environmental Impact Statements for projects that might detrimentally affect wildlife. That was a real positive period.

This, of course, was followed by the Reagan administration. During that time, they weakened some of the environmental laws that had been put into place and they reduced the number of wildlife professionals within Federal agencies. This was a case of one administration building something up and the next one tore it about three-quarters of the way back down.

The Bush administration has been somewhat intermediate. There’s been some improvement there.

WH: What impact have the various wars that the United States has been involved have on the Wildlife field during your career?

BO: Since I’ve been in the profession, there haven’t been any big, full-scale wars like World War Two that took almost all of the talent away from the profession. Vietnam and the recent Gulf

wars may compete for funding, but they haven't had a lot of effect on the profession. They've had some really bad effects on habitat and the ecology of the areas where they were fought.

WH: What role, if any, did you take in influencing the game management policies at Yellowstone National Park?

BO: I really can't say that I influenced policies at all at Yellowstone or that I was in on the controversies. During the time when the controversies were at their peak, I was doing my PhD research in the park and it behooved me to just keep my mouth shut and do my work.

WH: Since, you've had quite a bit to do with the National Bison Range, how does this question apply to the Bison Range?

BO: On the Bison Range, I suppose that I turned some thinking around on the predator problem. They were blaming the loss of mountain sheep and pronghorns primarily on range conditions. Some of my research with students there showed that it was primarily predation and not habitat that was causing the problems.

WH: Were there any other refuges or national parks where you've conducted your research that you have influenced?

BO: I wouldn't say to any great extent. I've had some studies in Yellowstone and in Glacier. Those studies are considered in their overall planning, but they haven't had any big impacts.

WH: What controversies, if any, were you involved in having to do with Yellowstone?

BO: As I said, during the big controversial times, I pretty well stayed out of it. I was working for John Craighead after I got through with my PhD work and he was in the middle of the controversy. It seemed better that I simply stayed out of it.

WH: I think that's all the questions I have for now.

[End of Interview]