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Interviewee: Myrl Nardinger

Interviewer: Clark Grant

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Myrl Nardinger: Hi, this is Myrl Nardinger, and I graduated in 1973 in range management. I was one of the very few people in range management. There was about a half a dozen of us, and everybody else was in timber or resources or recreation. I actually had attended the college at Great Falls [Montana] for three years, and then I came over here for two years, so I had nothing but forestry classes nonstop. I remember I was supposed to meet at Lubrecht forest, and of course I didn't read the instructions, so that was my first learning curve when I came over here. So when I got into Missoula and found out we were at Lubrecht, I turned around and had to go back about 30 miles. But that reminded me to pay attention.

When I was here, we had great professors. Mel Morris and Lee Eddleman, and Earl—geez I can't remember his name now. Anyhow. I guess I take a look at one class that I really didn't enjoy and that was agrostology. It was just a memorizing class, and I'm not good at that. Finally, I went and talked to the professor, which name I can't remember, but he just said, "You're one of the only ones that doesn't get this," and that was all he said.

I went to Morris and he talked to me and he says, "Just go to all the classes and all the labs, and we'll take care of it from there." So, I think they've had this problem before.

As far as field trips and that sort of thing, the spring trip down to Nogales, Mexico, which was a month long trip, was really educational, really enjoyable, and you worked your butt off. We got up at about 6:30, we put up the tents and that sort of thing, made our own breakfast. You rotated in what job you did, whether you set up the tents or whether you were the cook, tore down, maintenance, all that sort of thing. About every week we had a different job and this thing lasted for a month. We went down through Las Vegas and down into Phoenix, and finally into Nogales. Then we worked our way back through Idaho. I remember some place I think in—I'm not sure, Arizona or someplace like that—anyway, Lee Eddleman was the head guy and then Earl was also with us. He had a spot that he always had a chance to do a broad jump. You jump off this sand dune and I think he had the same spot. I don't know if he'd ever been beaten. I don't think he had. Well, I was quite good at that. He had jumped first or something like that and I got there and I beat him. Well, then there was an automatic second try (laughs). He jumped and I could see where he landed and I jumped. From my point of view, I think I landed exactly in the same spot, but he was the judge and he won by a hair. (laughs) Anyhow, Lee is still the head kingpin. I don't know if he still is that way. Maybe he got a little older and maybe the kids got a little faster, which they have gotten.

We had a good time. We walked around Las Vegas, which was probably a tenth the size it is now, and then went on down to Nogales and drank a few shots of tequila and beers and had a good time down there. Grant Godbolt (?) and I, we had a tendency to go on our own, and so as soon as we had a chance to get away from the crowd, which took us about 30 seconds, we were gone. Coming back—at that time, Montana didn't have Coors beer. Coors beer was a specialty item. We stopped someplace, and so I got all the clothes out of my suitcase, and bought a case of Coors beer and filled it full of Coors. That would've been a no-no. I would've probably gotten my butt kicked for doing that sort of thing. Anyhow we got back and in the process of unloading, one of the guys—students—was making wisecracks about what I had in my suitcase. I was in charge of unloading at that time and part of it was on top of a suburban that we were driving. I tossed his suitcase off in a wild manner and he kept—because I figured he was going to get to a point where Lee Eddleman would notice and want to check my suitcase. Of course, there'd be a case of Coors beer and that was all that was in there (Laughs). Anyhow, everything turned out all right and—but that month-long trip was just a really worthwhile endeavor. I think the teachers that we had were really good. I enjoyed it. I look back on that a lot, the years here.

I take a look at the botany class, plant physiology. I always remembered that class. I don't remember exactly what it was all about, but one of the things I remembered about it was that you had all these different cycles, the Krebs cycles and this sort of thing. I always remembered—even in nutrition, the class in nutrition—where if you took one item and changed it, not by changed, but short-changed it, say, it would affect some other thing in the system, whether it was for plants, or whether it was for cows, or whatever. I think that's pretty much what life is really all about. You got to keep it really balanced—life is really finely balanced to keep it running smoothly. That's in all cases.

I had a lot of fun at the Forester's Ball. I drank way too many beers one night at the—down at the, I can't even remember the name—Heidelhaus. Oh golly, that was a fiasco. One guy I think got thrown out because he was taking, drinking the beers, tossing the glasses on the floor, and stomping on them (Laughs). Of course he had these big logging boots on, and they were all—that's the way it was. Of course, we were the—guys in the range management, we were called "Prairie Fairies" and of course the timber guys were all "Timber Jocks." We were always giving them bad lines. We went on their field trip over to the coast and, I always remember, we were driving in the bus, and Godbolt (?) and I and somebody—one of the professors, I can't remember his name—we were the minority, of course. They said, "What's that flower?"

The professor says, "It's a Yellow Bell." Well, it wasn't a Yellow Bell and Godbolt (?) promptly reminded him of that. Anything from road signs on down from then on was—they were Yellow Bells. (laughs) Oh man, but anyhow, we had a good time. We stopped in to the Olympia Brewery and had a few—quite a few. They were pretty lenient on that sort of thing. That was a good trip too. I remember going over into the Quinault Indian Reservation. I always remember that—those Cedar trees, piles of slash ten to fifteen feet high. It was a total mess and it probably still is to that day because it was just pretty much zero clean up. Long story short, the

Forestry School was something that I really remember, probably more so than the three years I spent at the college in Great Falls. Although that was a fun trip too. It was a very worthwhile endeavor that's probably affected my life a lot and just overall the way I look at things totally. I'd recommend it to anybody. So, thank you.

Clark Grant: I have one more question if you're willing.

MN: Sure.

CG: I'm curious why you chose range management and what does that entail?

MN: Range management I looked at from a standpoint of—possibly when I initially got into it, I knew a person, Franklin Liberty, who was in range management and I think he was in Bozeman possibly. I can't remember now; that was forty years ago. I looked at it from the—working with ranchers and cattle. Montana is a big cattle operation and I thought, well, maybe that would be something I could do. I just thought it had a larger application for the private, as well as the government standpoint of view. I looked at it from helping to manage large ranches at the time. Did I get in to that? No, I didn't.

After I graduated—well, actually before I graduated, I worked for the Burlington Northern Land Department out of Miles City [Montana] doing range surveys. Burlington Northern owns millions of acres of ground, through North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington. The government, back when the railroad tracks were put in, at that time Northern Pacific was given 40 miles on each side of the railroad track, every other section, to put in the railroad track. They received that land for nothing. When they got to Eastern Montana, the hellhole of the whole world, they said, "This is not worth anything, so you're going to have to give us 80 miles on each side of the railroad track," which runs through Miles City, Billings, on up through Missoula, on out towards Glacier Park, into Washington, over towards Pasco and the like. And so they got 80 miles for putting in the railroad track. That's eighty miles on each side, so you had 160 miles every other section. They sold off a lot of the ground, but they still have a tremendous amount of ground.

When I was working there in the summers of '72 and '73, there had been people, students, who had helped do these range surveys. There was nothing. A lot of that ground hadn't been looked at since the early 1900s. It was amazing to look at the original people who did the surveys and drawings, take those drawings, and you could put it over the top of the air photo and they were almost identical. This was all done by hand and by eye back in the 1900s. But most of the time what we were looking at those for was to find a little note where there was a homestead because we'd immediately go over there and try to find any artifacts that might've been left, like, who knows what? We found an old woodstove one time and that sort of thing. That was enjoyable and that's how I got into range management because I felt that there was more opportunity in the private sector.

CG: Are you now retired?

MN: Am I retired? No, I'm not quite retired. I'm trying to. Ironically, after I got out of the Forestry School, I had an opportunity to go to work for the—I think it was the BLM, in Sidney, Montana. I didn't take that job and in the process, I answered an ad in the paper for an irrigation company looking for a person. I thought, Well, I'll go work there until I find a job. Well, that was in 1973. I now own an irrigation company with my wife and we're in the process of selling it and retiring. It's been good to me. But I have used my range—things that I've learned at the Forestry School in range—in the irrigation business. Just from the soils and the—I can take a look at a field. There's very few fields that are still native grasses that you irrigate nowadays. The soils aspect that I learned here is helpful in my job now.

CG: This really is the last question.

MN: Sure.

CG: What, if any, advice do you have for students going through this school nowadays?

MN: I think it's got a real opportunity. I think it'll open doors that you will never have thought of. I can think of a person, who is the same age as my daughter, Jesse Motes, who graduated from the Forestry School, went to the Law School here, and is now a high-powered lawyer because she has the experience in the forestry and recreational aspect, as well as a law degree. She is in Anchorage, Alaska now doing very well. That's from the aspect, when you first started in the service in the Forestry School, I don't think she ever planned on getting into such a situation like that, but it does open doors. If you have an inclination, I think that the forestry, as well as the range and recreation, is going to become more and more important because that's just the way it is. Our natural resources are going to be—people are going to be paying more attention to them. It's a very enjoyable job for me. I mean, any job is going to have its downside, there's no doubt about it. I don't care what it is. But overall, you look back on it and it's been real enjoyable for me. Although, I was not directly related to it, but aspects of it did help me in my business.

[End of Interview]