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Richard Heber Bishop

Cathy Harms, interviewer

Scott Brainerd, videographer and interviewer

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Dick Bishop talked about his personal background. He was born on October 31, 1937 in South Dakota. His parents were Charles Bishop and Dorothy Bishop. He grew up in Minnesota. He attended college in Brainerd, Minnesota. He graduated from the University of Minnesota in wildlife management in 1961. He received a masters at the University of Alaska. He wanted to come to Alaska to trap fur bearers. His schooling was a backup. He grew up in a rural area and became interested in trapping. He came to Alaska in 1959. He had worked for the Minnesota Conservation Department on fish service work. He worked at Bristol Bay for the Fish and Wildlife Service. He also worked for the National Park Service. He talked about books he read in his youth which influenced his choice of career. His brother got him interested in trapping and also hunting. Another brother and his mother became interested in hunting. Hunting and trapping were common in the area where he grew up. He talked about another trapper who was an influence on him. He said he wasn't familiar with wildlife and fisheries management when he was growing up. He talked about his graduate work at the University of Alaska. He hunted and trapped when he was in graduate school. His advisor, David Klein, advised him to start looking for a employment. He said his graduate career gave him an opportunity to explore the subjects that he was working in and interested in.

Bishop talked about his wife and marriage. His wife, Mary, was a zoology major. She was working on a graduate degree in zoology. They both worked at Lake Itasca one summer. His wife was also interested in moving to Alaska. He also served in the Army Reserve for six years. He was a clerk typist in the Army. He wanted to get into first aid. He did his reserve obligations in Fairbanks. He and his wife have three sons, Dan, Sam and Douglas. All of his sons live in Fairbanks. One of his sons is a journalist with a natural resource minor. All of the boys are interested in the outdoors.

Bishop talked about his first job with Alaska Fish and Game. John Burns needed help monitoring the walrus harvest in the Bering Sea. It got him interested in marine mammals. He was employed in 1965 as a temporary with Fish and Game. Bob Rausch asked him what he wanted to work on. He wound up working on moose studies. It was an opportunity for him to see wildlife management and research in operation. He worked as a temporary until his thesis was completed and he was hired as a biologist. He said he earned a livable wage. He was aware that federal employees had locality pay on top of their salary. He said at that time things were still formative. The state was young. In 1968 state administration changed. The game director had a different idea about administration. It was more dispersed. It was a bit controversial, but he felt there was a need for greater communication in the outlying communities. He talked about wildlife management at that time and the changes over time. He was focused on

wildlife management in Alaska. The challenge was to try to have an effective program that conserved the resources and served the public. Serving the public meant providing hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities. There was a lot of survey work at that time. He spent a lot of time in the back seat of a Super Cub. They looked at population and movement. At that time the perception was predation didn't have an effect on prey populations, including wolves. It turned out that it was demonstrated that wolves can affect prey populations. A lot of the research about low predation effects was done in Canada where there were low numbers of predators. The controversy about predator-prey relations and wolf control was a struggle. He talked about the book, Never cry wolf. When he was working on moose populations he was getting an idea about moose numbers and survival. The state was in a fight with the federals about wolf control and bounty. Fish and Game wanted it to go. He told Bob Rausch that it was an interesting coincidence that in areas with low calf survival there were also large numbers of wolves. He wondered if there was a connection and was told not to tell the public that information. It wasn't long after his comment that Fish and Game had to undertake some wolf control in the Tanana Flats. There was pressure from outside to protect the wolf.

Bishop talked about advice for young conservationists. He thinks it would be good for wildlife biologists to start out with a broader education. He thinks in terms of academic training there should be training in communication and people management. He eventually got into administration. There is a political aspect to the job, too. He wound up being preoccupied in the effects of policies of state and federal agencies. He talked about Les Pengelly who was a teacher in Montana.

Bishop said he spent a lot of time on the telephone. He also spent a lot of time on airplanes. Radio collaring was just starting when he began his career. He thought the most important tools for the new biologists are their eyes and ears because he said nothing can beat experiencing being on the ground first hand. When he was trapping he learned about natural history.

Bishop talked about his most interesting project. The work he did on his master's degree was most interesting. He got a lot of satisfaction with regard to the predator prey issue. Bill Gasley and his colleagues had a good test of what was going on with predator prey issues. Prey populations could be limited or eliminated by predators. There is a place for predators. Another interest was working with state rights and regulating fish and game programs. It was his biggest challenge in his profession. He talked about the effect of ANILCA. The federal law at that time established subsistence use priority which is in direct opposition to natural resource uses set up by the state constitution. He believed that equality under the law was equal treatment of all people. Alaska is the only state that has a provision that overrides the federal law. It is still not a completely settled issue. He advises up and coming wildlife biologists about special interests.

Bishop talked about the high point of his career. He said getting predator prey management straightened out successfully. The low point was a period of time dealing with predation issues, subsistence issues and the politics surrounding the issues. The administrative attitude was oppressive at one time and depressing to the people working in the division. He thought it had a lasting effect on the enthusiasm of the staff. He said the division has substantially recovered now. There is a freedom to pursue contentious issues now. He said there are many challenges but people in wildlife management are enthusiastic.

He said he never considered himself ever in danger. They were stuck in fog on the tundra one time. The helicopter couldn't find them for a while. There were minor mishaps. He said the people he worked with

were enthusiastic about their work and upbeat. Humor contributed to the morale of the teams. He recommends keeping a sense of humor. Humility is needed.

He discussed his contributions to the field. His master's work (life history and other aspects of harbor seals) was significant because of the timing. He said people followed up on the work. He was involved in hiring some of the people in the game division. He feels that the people they had working at the time were first class people as they still are.

He talked about the three people who were the most influential in developing the field of wildlife management. He mentioned Darwin. He was gratified to be able to meet legendary people in wildlife work. He met Olis Murie, Paul Errington and Adolph Murie. Other people who influenced him were Victor Shefford, David Meach, Bill Gasley, John Burns, and Ron Summerville. He talked about what makes a great wildlife manager. He thinks it is important to be open minded and objective about new information. You also have to be skeptical about old information. It is imperative for wildlife managers to examine results and conclusions with a degree of skepticism. It should be objective. It is important for wildlife managers to respect everyone's opinion. He recommends people be aware of fads.

He shared his reasons for becoming a wildlife professional. He thinks there has to be a discipline to provide the information for keeping those opportunities alive. He thinks that the future of wildlife issues lies in the viability of the ecosystems we see every day. He related the disappearance of the meadowlark in North Dakota because of the lack of edge cover which is being used by agriculture. He was a member of the Wildlife Society. He thinks being a member during his employment gave him a source of technical papers and other information. He said as a young person because of his nonprofessional interests it influenced his choice of career. He valued his education in his career and in life.

He commented on lobbying in Washington, D.C. for the state. He said it was a high and low experience as a wildlife biologist. He was dealing with the promulgation of ANILCA by Congress. He said it was an incredible education for him. He commented on the use of political strategy during that time. He worked for the Alaska Fish and Game from 1965 until 1989.