Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Dick Myren
Date of Interview: December 20, 2004
Location of Interview: Dick Myren's home in Auke Bay, Alaska
Interviewer: Jim King

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:
Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:
Most Important Projects:
Colleagues and Mentors:
Most Important Issues:

Brief Summary of Interview:

Proper names that I couldn't confirm are in brackets and in red font w/ a question mark -- [Jerry Pella ?]. A roaring fire, household background noises, and overlapping voices occasionally made the conversation hard to hear. These times are noted in brackets and in blue font w/ a question mark – [indecipherable – (what I think I might have heard) ?].

JK -- 5 6 7 8 9 10. This is the 20th day of December, 2004. Testing… testing…. So, 20th of December, '04, and this Jim King, in the living room of Dick Myren's house at Auke Bay. And Dick is gonna describe some of his experiences as a fisheries biologist in Bristol Bay, in the early '50s. Is that right, Dick?

DM -- Yes. Yes. I was a… attended university for fisheries, and I decided to drop out, and I took a job with the Fish and Wildlife Service. And they sent me to Alaska on a vessel from the Montlake Lab, for two seasons in a row. And what we did was follow the… in those days, the management of the fish… of the Alaska fisheries was from Seattle. And then, there was this big fleet of boats that would be anchored in Montlake, and in the canal there, in Seattle. And they'd go north each year. And they would do the same thing that the commercial fishery… that the industry did too, that they would come up from Seattle with their boat… their ships, and their equipment, and put in their nets, and return south in the fall. And….

Break in taping

DM -- So, anyway, they took us… for two years, we stayed in Seattle in the winter time, then went north on the motor vessel *'Teal'*, which was a 68 foot vessel, with 2 inch planking, and big [indecipherable] diesel, and an rpm of… I think it was 60 rpms. And they had a wheel… they don't call them propellers, they call them a wheel, they had a wheel six feet in diameter…

JK -- How many feet?

DM -- 6 feet.

JK -- Ohhh!

DM -- And, anyway, during my experience at sea and at… you don't… a rope isn't a rope, it's a line. If you say 'rope' your dead in the water. We had a real master on the… that ran the *'Teal'*…. Pete… Pete… Pete somebody. And he was really sharp. And he had, apparently, papers for all vessels, but here he was on a 60… 68 foot little… little… little boat. And a crew of five, including myself. Anyway, the two of the… the first two years, he… they would maintain… that vessel would came later in my experience. My first experience was at Bristol Bay. And I… my first year was the year… the first year that they fished without the sailboats. And I'm… so I don't have to put a date on it. So that… in fisheries, it was going into a transition from… power… the sailboats were converted to power. So they… they had power… in these… there… I think there were 20… 24 [indecipherable – boats there ?] or so… open boats that were the equivalent of two. And each… each equivalent would… would fish… nets. And they'd throw them out and fish. And they caught the fish from the boats, and then towed all the boats back, when the season closed.

JK -- So they put engines in these boats…

DM -- Yeah. Yeah.

JK -- … that had been sailboats?

DM -- Yes.

JK -- Most of those belonged to canneries.

DM -- Right. Most of them belonged to the canneries. And there was… there were canneries on each stream… the [Nushagak ?] and [Egegik ?]… and on the [Naknek ?]… let's see, [indecipherable -- was there a ?] cannery… yes, there was a cannery on the [Naknek ?], I believe, and then… in Dillingham… was there a cannery there? I guess there was. No, there wasn't…. Anyway, they transported the fish there - to the cannery, and, of course, the season would run just… a big part of the season would run a month or so… and then… it was red salmon, they'd all hit around July… 4th of July the run would be in full swing. And the red salmon… that was the most valuable of the canning species. I mean, it was abundant. Of course, king salmon was a very valuable fish, but isn't as abundant as the red salmon. And the red salmon has a high oil content, so it was a good fish to can. But, what I wanted to say was, those first two years, we… they… the organization was undergoing a shift in the… in its organization. It was… it was originally called… it was originally called the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. And then, when Clarence Rhode became… then it was… the power was transferred from the people at Montlake, in Seattle, to Alaska. And then Clarence Rhode would be the Regional Director over the [indecipherable] and the whole operation….

JK -- Clarence… ahh… clarification, Dick….

DM -- Yes.

JK -- My impression is that the Fish and Wildlife… or the Bureau of Biological Survey, from the Department of Agriculture, and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, from the Commerce Department, were joined in 1940 as the Fish and Wildlife Service, in the Department of Interior. But then it was… World War II came along, and it was after the War before the Fisheries people from Seattle were fully coordinated with the Wildlife people from Juneau.

DM -- I think so.

JK -- Does that sound right?

DM -- Yes. I… I… there was a big gap sort of between the Wildlife people and the Fisheries people. And it was partly to do with just the way… the structure of the operation with… the fishery people had to be on these vessels, and the wildlife people were, of course, in another area of operation. So that it was actually two agencies that had to get along together, I guess, is what I want to say. My… what I wanted to talk about was the use of… one of my experiences in Bristol Bay. I spent two summers there

during the red salmon season and the … and my duty was to keep track of the catches and the amount of the effort expended to make the catch, and then determine if they were not catching enough… if they were… if the… determining the abundance of salmon verses how… how… how… how well the catch… the fisheries was catch… making a catch. In other words, when the catch was a poor catch it meant there was a low population. And a low population would mean that the agency would have to require to… stopping the fishing season right now. Which meant issuing orders that would have to be approved in Washington, D.C., was one of the bureaucratic things - by law - and then the Fish and Wildlife Service would… originally it was the Bureau of Commercial Fishing and then it became Fish and Wildlife Service…. They'd issue an order to stop… stop fishing for 24 hours or so, to let some of the salmon through. And this sort of an operation went on over the… most of the… end of July was the peak of the run was. And was [indecipherable]. We had good knowledge of what the abundance of salmon were in the… in the… in the four runs. Let's see, there's the … I think there were four runs there in the [indecipherable]. And the other… runs. And… so, we could turn the fish off… turn the fishing off, so some fish could escape. And so, I… I took my job seriously. And then, after the second year, the agency decided that I… we had a new… let's see, we had a flock of PhDs come out of the schools, and they just literally turned… took over the total operation in the Bay. And that's the Bristol Bay, we call it the Bay. And I was regulated to southeast Alaska, and this is interesting, you know, this is typical bureaucratic move, that we… we… they had this… this blossoming… these blossoming new PhDs, that knew a lot about the techniques of theoretical… things, and they moved in, and clearly showed that I… either I had to improve my understanding or I was gonna… not gonna have a job. So I… so that was the… at the point where I got a leave and went back to Cornell to work and get a PhD, which I finally got after four years struggle. Anyway… so, I was pushed out of the action of Bristol Bay, which was really where the major… when you speak of the big fishery in Alaska -- it is the red salmon fishery, and the… in the [Nushagak ?] and the [indecipherable – rivers ?], near Dillingham. And that's… it would attract… oh, the notables that come up there around the 4th, and the high… high priests of the bureaucracy would be there as… I shouldn't call them high priests but more of… superior people would come to check to see if things were going all right. And of course it was a good place to come to get away from the [indecipherable].

JK -- And they could catch some rainbow trout

DM -- They could go up and catch some rainbow trout [indecipherable]. Yeah, I'm glad you added that Jim, because you know all about that. And that's exactly what they did. And under the… whoever… we're still… you see we weren't state yet, we were still federal, so we were we were subject to the way the feds did it rather than the state… the state did it. And, let's see, statehood came in 1959, and the years that I've been talking about are those years prior to '59, when… it was another world. And a world that vanished when… actually when the airplane arrived. Clarence Rhode was a, you know, a superb pilot. And… and he could… he could survey an entire inlet in an afternoon. Whereas, it would take four or five utility boats, that went from five to eight miles an hour, chugging around the Bay, trying to keep track of things, and not seeing very much

anyway. And so, it just wiped out the… Rhode's aircraft division just grew, and they started retiring the old vessels, which was the passing of an era, because… I really have great fondness for the work on those vessels, and going through from Seattle all the way up, through the Inside Channel, and across the Gulf, and then up through the Inlet… Cook Inlet, and then [indecipherable – Kachemak Sound ?] and Cook Inlet. And, it was all… being in the vessel, and time… it just wasn't modern, it didn't… we didn't… the airplanes weren't… weren't in force there, in terms of doing things. So, I saw the end of an age. And I'm glad that I did see it. Somebody ought to really write a book about it, because it's… it's a…. The book I'm writing is not really about that experience, but maybe I'll put a little bit in there about [indecipherable]. [I] keep rewriting the book. I keep rewriting the book. And maybe I could squeeze some of that in there, I don't know.

JK -- Well, some things that were going on there… the fishermen, when they sold their fish, had to make out a fish ticket. And you guys were gathering those with boats. So, how did that happen after the airplanes came?

DM -- Well, we still… they… they… they had… the tickets simply were held at the fish [indecipherable] station, and then somebody, either by a boat or a plane, would pick them up occasionally. That's how they… that's… it was just a question of… you didn't need a whole… you didn't need the whole fleet to do it. You could [indecipherable]. And the information was faster, because you could go out in an airplane and see… see if the fish were there, rather than having to rely upon radio… radios and people telling what's there. And so they… they could manage the fish much… much quicker decisions could be made to stop fishing if the fish weren't present – once the airplanes arrived on the scene. And, in one way it was an improvement; in another way it knocked out a very colorful part of the Alaskan fisheries experience. Of course, Bristol Bay was a lot to survey in itself that had its own… own problems. And one of the things I would like to try to get down on tape here, if I could, is… is the… is the way I was, more or less, pushed out by… bureaucracies, you know, it's a… they don't stand around and wait to say 'we'll hold your hand' or anything. But, once the… I had been out more… in charge of the fish ticket recording in the… in the… in Bristol Bay, at the… at our base at King Salmon. And the operation was run… the biologist – Burt… Burt… somebody Burt…. Anyway, the biologist would make the decision to… Washington, D.C., to close the season. And then they would issue an order, to take 24 hours or so, to do… and then… so we… that's how we more or less managed the fisheries. Once the airplanes got into the picture, there wasn't the need for… well, you know, my type, and so, they simply didn't have me come to Bristol Bay anymore. And the PhDs would go up to Bristol Bay every summer, and enjoy all the commotion… the excitement of the red salmon [indecipherable]. And I would be sitting back in Juneau, wondering what happened.

JK -- Well, somewhere in that period, the station at King Salmon was built into a sizeable installation.

DM -- Oh, yes.

JK -- And also the Brooks Lake… were you involved in with the Brooks Lake Research….

DM -- We had… that was… that… no, I wasn't. The Brooks Lake Research was one of the arms of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and they had a… they had a biologist there that was… not… always in the management part of the Fish and Wildlife Service. And the Research Station was in another section of the Fish and Wildlife Service, so, we didn't cross a lot. We did cross paths, and I'd talk to him about things, but they had their own agenda; they had their studies. Whereas my… my work was seeing what we… doing two things – one - we made stream surveys, determining from the air, looking down from planes, trying to guess how many fish are in the stream, get an idea of the size of the run. And the other thing was to keep track of the numbers of fish caught [indecipherable] fish tickets. And that's what I did for two years.

JK -- So who are you flying with when you are doing these…

DM -- Well, Meek's was one of them. There was, you know, one of them that was killed in that airplane… air accident. And Gus… Gus… Gus… Gus… he survived the crash, with Meek's…..

JK -- Hilsinger!

DM -- Hilsinger! Gus Hilsinger was one of my compatriots. In southeast Alaska. After [indecipherable] you only know it's in southeast. And I became in charge of the Little Port Walter Research Station. I'd not really prepared [indecipherable]. I was not a biologist. I really… I had not been trained that way. I'd gone to a school for fishery but I'd not… I'd been more in the enforcement and statistics branch. I did more statistical work than biological work, anyway. So, I didn't accomplish much more there. In fact, I went back to Cornell, to get a PhD, so I could compete with the people that had displaced me. After four years, I [indecipherable] came back to Alaska. And, let's see now, where should we go from here?

JK – So, what were… what was the pilot who came from Skagway that… flew with you?

DM -- Oh, yeah, the little fellow. Little fellow… big pilot… very… very, very wonderful pilot…. Oh, I can't think of his name. He… he was one of the survivors that held on through the whole… all the years and flew a Grumman Goose right to… right through the time they stopped flying them. But that was the work airplane of the fisheries, and very useful.

JK – Yeah, his name slips my mind now, but -- I did get a tape with him, an interview, so….

DM -- Oh, you got… so, you… yeah, alright. You'll get it… it might come to me soon here. Yeah. I… I went to Little Port Walter and then and maintained a [indecipherable – weir there?] for a couple of years, and realized then that I needed to come back to school

and more education, if I was going to stay and practice fisheries [indecipherable]. I disappeared from the scene for a few years. I came back, the pipeline was getting geared up, and so we established this very powerful sampling technique in Port Valdez. And we… Port Valdez was the… the center for shipping the trans-Alaskan pipeline oil out to south… from Port Valdez, and from their tank facility they constructed there…

JK – Excuse me a minute, that was [Emmet Saldine ?].

DM -- [Emmet Saldine ?], that's right.

JK – You flew with him, huh?

DM -- Flew with him. He was a crackerjack pilot, there was just … he flew… you know he became a teacher, he was so good. He would teach… he became a teacher for the… instructor for the rest of them. And they would fly, you know, on instruments, and all that kind of stuff. And… and he was just an excellent flyer. And he survived. That's the proof of the pudding -- when they survive. Because a lot of them didn't! And I recall, I had this number in the back of my head, about the time that I left Bristol Bay, I think… I think I had known 24 people that had been killed in airplane accidents -- and that was just halfway through it. And… but [Emmet… Emmet Saldine ?] survived and died a normal death.

JK – Just a year or two ago.

DM -- It was just… yeah, that's right. Yeah, he had… I think he had cancer, didn't he, or something?

JK – Uhhh, he had some… nerve kind of…

DM -- Nerolo… yeah.

JK – … thing.

DM -- Oh, yeah. Well, he was really a fine pilot. The other one was… I can't think of his name, but he flew… during the War he flew an [albatross ?]… one of them… one of those…

JK -- Al Kropf

DM -- Al Kropf! Al Kropf! And he would fly… I would fly with him to Little Port Walter, which isn't a nice place to fly to, because of bad weather, and every time I'd fly down there, I'd cross my fingers. And some people were killed there during… when I was there. But [indecipherable] a doctor and his son. Decided he knew more about flying than he did, and went down there, and decided to fly around the outside of the island. And got into some fog apparently, and crashed out there. And I don't think they ever found the body of the son or the plane, or anything, but….

JK -- Was that the dentist you're….

DM -- That was the dentist. Yeah.

JK -- Ohhh.

DM -- Yeah. Yeah. And… I remember seeing him in that plane you know, and…

JK -- Riddell.

DM -- Riddell. Yeah, Riddell. Yeah, they… you know, they know more than they… you know…. They don't know as much as they thought they knew. And the thing with Al, you know, he was so… such a professional that he would be one to take a flight with, he would always have everything that he could get out of the weather service about projected weather and every… or anything that you could get. And he would… he was just a professional flyer that lived… lived through it, you know. As did Emmet Saldine. And, anyway… so, that says a lot for him.

JK -- Well, somewhere in this period you're talking about now, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries went back to the Commerce Department. Isn't that right? And… and Fish and Wildlife became Bureau of Sport Fish and Wildlife.

DM -- Oh, there was some… yeah. And I… I'm not going to be able to tell you how all that worked out. But it… there is juggling that went from Bureau of Commercial Fisheries to the Fish and Wildlife Service, and then went back to… back to the… as you said, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. Which then became the… then became… grafting… it was grafted on… then it was the National Marine Fisheries Service after that, I think. And it was just typical bureaucratic shifts of wind [indecipherable]. You know, [indecipherable] obviously the things that you have to change to keep track of things. But, one of the things I want to talk about is my experience in Port Valdez at the… or the piper terminal… or the pipe terminal was. And we established this large… we found this bed of ***Macoma*** clams, which is a little clam that has two set of… two feeding siphons one that siphons and (that's blinking - is that all right? Does that mean it's alright?)

JK -- Yeah, I got to turn the tape over.

DM -- Okay, go ahead.

JK -- So hang on a minute.

End of tape – Side A
Beginning of tape – Side B

JK -- Continuing with Dick Myren's description of work with the National Marine Fisheries, and… we got up to the pipeline…

DM -- Yes.

JK -- … period. So, go ahead Dick.

DM -- Okay, well, the pipeline was being… was through, and they had the oil facility there, and so, they were fearful that they would pollute the Auke… Port Valdez, so we set up a biological sampling station, which was a large… a fairly large patch of mud… mud… mud… inter-tidal… primarily a gravel and mud [indecipherable – sand ? or salmon ?] bar and… sand… sand and gravel mud mix – mostly mud, and…

JK -- Kind of glacial outwash?

DM -- Glacial out… yeah. It was below a glacial stream, and it was fed by glacial waters. So, it was the result of the deposition of the glacial silt really… current formed the… the ground in the inter-tidal beds that were… that contained the organisms like… such as clams. And one of the clams was a little thing a ***Macoma balthica***, which feeds on the surface of the mud. And it has two siphons. The one siphon sweeps around the… sweeps around the clams… where the clam is… just very… just this… very tip of this shell sticking out. And they are only about big as your large thumbnail or smaller. And they sweep around… fluid off the surface of the mud – primarily. They also feed with a… from the… from the overhead water, but the one siphon operates on the mud. And so, they were an excellent organism to use to take up traces of pollution. If there was any pollution in the surface, the plankton and anything that would have begun any deposition of… attachment of oil to anything, would be deposited… would be picked up in the clams. So we set up this sampling program. It was very sophisticated one; one that's in… usually given in textbooks, so, as far as the way you [indecipherable] variance in the way you analyze the data. And [Jerry Pella ?] who was a [indecipherable – biometrician ?] at the Auke Bay Lab, set up the program…

JK -- Who was that?

DM -- [Jerry Pella ?] [indecipherable – [?] Pella ?]. and he set up the protocol for the sampling and then…. So, for the next [indecipherable] 30… 30 stations in the inter-tidal zone, just in-between where the terminal dock was, with the tankers, and the rim of the aggregate, the… at the head of the Bay. And I forget the name of it, but we're right in-between those two places. And it makes a place of a… of pollutants came from the… from the terminal, they would be swept around and past our bed, and it would be… it would turn and go out… turn towards the north… the current was such so that it would make a circle. And then it would sweep along the north shore… shore of… shore of Port Valdez and out. And so, we had a sampling program that [indecipherable] would be a… the numbers of organisms, in plots, to see if they would change when the pipeline terminal went into operation. We were able to make the first pre… pre-pipeline terminal… we had two years of observations… and quantitative observations of the

density of these ***Macoma balthica*** in our study plot. And we could… we sampled the plots three or four times a year. And had a very good grasp on the… what the normal… what the fluctuation of the population size was, in the ***Macoma balthica,*** before it before the pipeline terminal started discharging the effluent. The effluents were from the de-ballast plant… they had to process water because the… the ships when they come in… and they would be full of ballast water. After they… and they would have to… they'd be emptied… they'd come up and they empty… be full of… be full of ballast water, and the ballast water would have to be discharged in the in the inlet, so they could put the oil in. And it was the ballast water which was the primary toxicant agent. It would kill the marine life if indeed there were toxic compounds in that ballast water that were known to be toxicants. So anyway, we had this program that went through and picked this up and… and it did show that… we had the three study periods and the first showed we had a fairly relative, steady population. Then it… there was disturbance… when they were putting the pipeline in there was the dirt from the… from the… making the… making the ballast facility. And that went on for a couple of years. And so, we had the pre-pipeline, and then the disturbance period from the constructing the pipeline period. And that was for two years; took them about two years to get it through, you know, the… get the… to get the tanker facility constructed. And then the… from then on the facility went into operation we had the third… third period was when the operation went into gear and… and it… then… the release of toxicants was a daily procedure. So, we… and then after that we had… so we had two years of pre- ***Macoma*** distribution, ***Macomas*** on the beach. And then we had… then we sampled that for, I think about, 15 years after the bilge plant went into operation. And it showed declines in the… showed declines in the ***Macoma balthica*** population. And we couldn't… we couldn't isolate… we couldn't say it was… it was from the… we couldn't… we proved that the population declined. The upshot of it -- the population did decline after the ballast plant operational, but we couldn't isolate those… it was not a natural fluctuation and the… and… and only due to the… to the ballast facility or the… it's… the arrow pointed at the fact that everything changed after the ballast plant went into operation. And I suspect today… I'd like to go up there, now, and see… see if there are any ***Macoma balthica*** left at all, in that river… in that area. Because, they've had a long time now to [indecipherable]. But during the period of the… when they did monitor, the population did change and… and so, there was a possibility that it was being polluted. But you couldn't run out a natural fluctuation. So, there's a lot of [indecipherable] typing to get everything isolated.

JK -- So, you're retired now, but the study has gone on? Or it's… it died when you…?

DM -- No. No. It remained… it stayed… it went on after I retired. [George Perkins ?], who's really an excellent field man, and he lived in Valdez for many years, he did the work. And he was really… he really was a scientist… he… he was a scientist, very well educated, very intelligent person. But he worked for me as a… just an aid. And he did… he did… I met him, he was in Valdez when there were only about 100 people in the town. And he would fix the refrigerators. And he knew… he was a handy man, [indecipherable] he could fix anything. And that's how we… I mean, he lived off the land. And he was… just… could survive on nothing. And then, when he… when we became more active and maintained our study, George became a regular part of our

seasonal employment. And we used his [indecipherable] and he's [indecipherable] as a scientist… he wasn't really a scientist then, and he was just a fix [indecipherable] what he did for us… And [indecipherable]. I talk to him, you know, once in a while, I call him up and say hello to him.

JK -- But, Auke Bay doesn't have any money anymore, to go back and check those plots, or…?

DM -- Not now. No. It… I… I… it'd be interesting to try to re-establish them, and just see what's there, you know. That'd be very, very interesting.

JK -- Is there a way to find the exact plots?

DM -- Oh, yeah. One can find them [indecipherable]. It was large enough so that the plots are right where… the plot area where the sampling was done, is large enough that you can, you know, you can identify the [indecipherable]. I can't say we can find the exact point where we put the little scoops in, but we could come close enough to….

JK – Huh.

DM -- You know, it'd be very interesting. So anyway, someday, maybe somebody, some guy that gets some PhD money, can decide to go out there and see if they can make the oil people look like monkeys. See if there's some pollution going on up there, and….

JK -- Seems to be a lot of… what… emphasis on not doing that sort of thing to oil companies now.

DM -- Yeah. Yeah. That's right. They're… I think times will probably change when the… when the people really realize the world really is coming to an end, and we're have… we're speeding that end to a fare-thee-well. We're not taking our time to get there. We're making… getting there as fast as we can. So much for my philosophy. But, that's what I believe, deeply. And it's too bad that the Bush Administration, and others, can't understand that were headed for doom, and that there's nobody looking after us -- except ourselves, and the more [indecipherable – clysters ?] at the controls, the worse off we're going to get. And we've got to break out of those people, and take what we know in our hands and apply it rationally. Or the future generation… and apologize to them for what we've done to their lives and… and… [indecipherable]

JK -- Do you want to say anything more about Clarence Rhode, and Dick Schuman, and… oh, they sort of….

DM -- Well, I… you know, it would sort of seesaw. There was a contest there, between the, you know, the aircraft people and the boat people. But then, that blew over finally when they… the boats disappeared and Rhode's aircraft dominated. And… but then was this old residue of competition. The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries had this old tradition. And the… and the Bureau of Commercial Fishers, they got… and the Fish and

Wildlife Service, under Clarence Rhode's direction, you see. And then, they had their own Region, which they didn't… they didn't have before, so… he was sort of the King of the Alaskan Region. And that just exasperated a lot of the people that worked under the old rule. And… I didn't stay there too much longer, after… I realized that I needed a better education, and so I left. [indecipherable] and went back to work for the laboratory. And the ***Macomas,*** which I did [indecipherable]

JK -- Well….

DM -- I don't know. Does that… how much time have we put on this thing? Does it… do we have to quite or not [indecipherable]

JK -- Well, I think we did pretty good, with what we did the other day. If you think of something else, why, we'll crank up again.

End of tape Side B