INTERVIEW WITH AVE THAYER
BY ROGER KAYE NOVEMBER 21, 2003

MR. KAYE: This is an interview with Ave Thayer who was Refuge Manager of the Arctic Refuge. It was conducted on November 21, 2003. Ave, thanks for doing this interview with me. I'd like to start off with what brought you to northeast Alaska, and when you first came to Arctic Refuge what some of the perspectives were that that you brought with you.

MR. THAYER: I first came to the eastern Brooks Range during the search for Clarence Rhodes' airplane. I did not go to the North Slope. I concentrated on the valleys on the south side for a few weeks.

MR. KAYE: Were you flying an airplane then?

MR. THAYER: Yes, a little Cessna 180. There was a base at Fort Yukon. There was quite a bunch of us there. That was my first exposure to that region.

MR. KAYE: Before you go on, tell me a little more about the search. There were quite a few planes involved. How long were you involved in it?

MR. THAYER: I don't know how many planes were involved. There were probably about a dozen or so. There were some Grumman's, and Gooses, and 180s. I came up after the search had started as a general surveillance pilot; flying all of the probable routes and so on. Then after that proved unsuccessful, more planes were added and they began a valley-by-valley and lake-by-lake search. That was the point at which I came to Fort Yukon. I was at Fort Yukon for ten days. We went out to Galena and we were there, for I don't know how long, searching north and west of Galena along the west coast and in the mountains there. That was probably in October because we were flying in snow quite a bit. We were looking for tracks in the snow around any cabins, or trails where he might have been walking. I don't remember when that terminated, but I think it was in late October. The search was continued the next spring on a smaller scale.

MR. KAYE: Tell me about Clarence Rhode, what kind of guy was he?

MR. THAYER: He was an effective bureaucrat. He wasn't the typical one, but he was a bureaucrat. He had an appearance that was not that of the average bureaucrat. He had kind of a hawk-like look. He had that intelligent, beady-eyed look that impressed people and made them like him. Consequently, when he made his annual trip to the north with a Goose generally; he went around and stopped and talked to people he knew. I think they were pleased that he had taken the trouble to stop in there and chat with them and renew old acquaintances. They were still back in the village and he was the big-shot government man. Nevertheless, they didn't see him as that.

I think he was very effective in the area of public relations. I don't remember bad publicity about him, or hearing comments from people in the villages or cities complaining about him. He was generally accepted as a good and worthy leader. He had a very keen memory. He would remember where he had met people and what they had told him. He could give a big long speech with lots of numbers and facts and do so without the aid of notes. He was impressive in that regard as well. He was a genius as well. He knew how to get military surplus, for example. He pretty well equipped all of the radio stations with war surplus radio equipment. The transmitter we had at McGrath was exactly the same kind of transmitter that was on the ship I was on when I was in the Navy. Consequently, whenever it broke down I could fix it. He would sometimes fly the Goose back to Alaska loaded down with electronics that he had collected here and there.

MR. KAYE: Do you think he was anxious after a while to add what is now the Arctic Refuge to the System?

MR. THAYER: Oh, I think so. I think that people recognized its wilderness value. It wasn't such a matter of saying, 'do we make this a Park or a Refuge, or Reserve?' It was a matter of how best to protect the wilderness value of it. Then they had to work within the system and it ended up being the Refuge. Proper legislation would have done that too, or could have. They probably wouldn't have at this point, but they could have.
MR. KAYE: Tell me about the ideas and the approach that you brought as the first Manager of ANWR? Where did you get your ideas? What year did you begin as Manager?
MR. THAYER: 1969. You know, Jerry Stroebele asked me that and I think that's a very strange question. Because I think what needed to be done was evident. It was right out in front of me with the Wilderness Act and all of the other Refuge legislation. The old Refuge Manual that had been around for decades had all of the language that was needed to suggest that the wilderness values, sometimes they referred to it as habitat preservation, but that's what it amounted to; wilderness value. So I think it was obvious. There's never been, in the history of the world, any kid who was not a natural pantheist, or who was not drawn to wild areas. In every little town there was a pond, or a river or a woods or something where the kids were drawn. They would spend hours out there, sometime destructively, but nevertheless…. I am thinking of the Boy Scouts when I was one. Nevertheless, they are naturally drawn to wilderness values. Some people lose that when they become adults. Some people become selfish about it. They will destroy a lot of wilderness to enrich themselves, but they'll have a cabin out on the lake or out in the wild some place.
For that reason, I felt that there was no question of what to do for taking care of these wilderness values. That starts with law enforcement. The oil industry would camp at Peters and Schrader Lake in the summer and do surficial geology and base their helicopters there. This created considerable flack to say the least. One of the first things we did was to move them out of there. They had to stay west of the canyon. They didn't like that, but later on; individual employees told me that they liked it better that way. They were in less of a remote camp. That is probably the first major law enforcement action taken. Those people were working under permits and we monitored that as best we could. We had a fixed wing airplane, and they were all traveling with helicopters.
MR. KAYE: What kind of plane did you have Ave?
MR. THAYER: It varied. In the winter when there wasn't a lot of demand for planes we had three; a Cub, a 180 and the Beaver. There were all crammed into the hanger. Sometimes it was a problem getting them all untangled to get to the one you wanted. During the summer, I think we used the Cub for the first couple of years at least. Occasionally we used the 180 in addition to the Cub. In the past, surficialgeology companies had established temporary camps here and there in the Refuge. They had left a lot of junk. We identified that and notified them that we wanted the stuff removed. They removed it so we didn't have any court action. There wasn't any need for it. They responded, but I guess that was another law enforcement action.
MR. KAYE: How about wildlife? I know you were involved in some wolf hunting. There was some evidence of some illegal wolf hunting on the Refuge.
MR. THAYER: Initially, wolf hunting was legal. The State issued permits to aerial hunters. Then later on, at our request they refrained from doing that but there was still some illegal activity.
MR. KAYE: Why did you request that they refrain from this?

MR. THAYER: Primarily to protect the wilderness values. Flying around, shooting wildlife from airplanes is just not appropriate. A trapper can go up there and trap to his heart's content. But with wolves, mowing them down from the sky didn't look good at all. Also, they weren't really all that numerous from what I saw from tracking. I don't think there was a severe impact on the wildlife so they certainly were not causing real problems there.

MR. KAYE: This was the wolves?

MR. THAYER: Yes.

MR. KAYE: Was there any controversy or issue when the Service prohibited aerial wolf hunting in the area?

MR. THAYER: As I recall we didn't actually prohibit it as much as we asked the State to refrain from issuing those permits; which they did. The person of charge of Fish and Game at the time was annoyed by that but it was not a serious thing.

MR. KAYE: Was there any variance in opinion between you, representing the FWS and the Fish and Game type people, on what approach should be taken to this area?

MR. THAYER: Considerable I think. Their view on hunting was much different from what it is now. Their view on hunting now is in much more accord with what the feds feel. We felt that there should be considerable restriction on hunting. Quite a few of the Fish and Game guys felt that hunting should be liberalized and that there should be more access, and increases in kill limits. But I could see over a period of ten years specific individuals in the Game Department changing their view on that. It was not because I was so persuasive but from a maturing process I believe; from experience.

MR. KAYE: Were they becoming more aware of other values that a wilderness area could hold besides just hunting?

MR. THAYER: Yes, exactly. And several told me privately that the Refuge should not be open to hunting at all.

MR. KAYE: Really!?

MR. THAYER: I agreed with that of course!

MR. KAYE: Do you remember, or would you care to mention who those people were, and why they felt that way?

MR. THAYER: The one I can think of offhand was Scott Grundy. I think it was just a maturing process. When he came out of college, he had an idea that was fixed by the college of how game should be managed. Then he started to see other values. I took him up there twice I guess. So he had a chance to see it and I think that probably helped.

I was probably not the very best person to have here to work with the Fish and Game Department. I knew a lot of guys who were in it, some of whom had worked at Fish and Wildlife Service before Statehood. I had my vision of wilderness management and they had theirs of wildlife management. It was just never an easy relationship. We didn't get into heated debates. When they were up at Barter Island during the Polar Bear season I helped them in fueling their planes. I talked to them. It was nothing personal, but there was not a lot of inter-agency camaraderie. I think probably some other manager could have done a better job on that. But that's the way it worked out.

To get back to reading; I read Seton and devoured every word.

MR. KAYE: This was Ernest Thompson Seton? And this was as a kid?

MR. THAYER: Yes. I did, just like every other reader did. But I hadn't read Thoreau. When I was at Kenai in 1958, Spencer spoke of the Muries a lot of times. I really didn't know who they were. I just hadn't been exposed to them in any way. As far as the reading goes, it has to go back to Seton I guess.

MR. KAYE: Tell me about Ernest Thompson Seton's influence on your childhood, or your sense of the wilderness; your wilderness management approach.
MR. THAYER: I grew up the Sawtooth Mountains in Idaho at a time when Idaho had less than half of the population that it has now. I lived in a defunct mining town, which was quite a ways from other towns. The opportunity to be out in the wilds was considerable. Seton made sense to me. I agreed with everything that he said, I'm sure.
MR. KAYE: Which books were they, and what did he say that made sense to you?
MR. THAYER: It's been a long time since I looked at any of those books, but there was *Two Little Savages,* and what else.
MR. KAYE: There was *The Woodcraft Manual for Boys*.
MR. THAYER: Yeah, I read that.
MR. KAYE: There was a whole series of eight or nine.
MR. THAYER: I think I only read about five.
MR. KAYE: What did he write about that you remember? What stuck in your memory?
MR. THAYER: Nothing specific. It was just the overall view towards wildlife. As I recall there were places where he was expressing what was on a woodchuck's mind. Wildlife managers are a little doubtful about that sort of thing. But the point is that Seton was no further off the fact than an awful lot of the wildlife managers. The hunters for example attribute all sorts of attributes to wildlife. They are no more accurate than Seton by any means. Seton was just the other way. And as I was saying, every kid is a pantheist. That's a fact worldwide. Even in darkest Africa, little kids are out running around prowling around in the woods and getting snake bit. It is something that humans are born with. And this is not surprising since we are a mammal.
MR. KAYE: So this wilderness idea that you brought to the place was a bit in variance with the Fish and Game people who were production oriented, would you say, towards wildlife?
MR. THAYER: That would be it, exactly. But I didn't invent the concept of wilderness but it's perfectly natural that since is exists that I would sooner or later come to my senses and recognize it. When I was in the Navy during the War, I didn't sit around and think deep thoughts about wilderness. I didn't think of it even once. Although my friend and I did propose to the Captain of the ship when we were in Hong Kong port just after the war, that we be permitted to go on a back packing trip. He threw us out of course, but there was that continued interest.
MR. KAYE: What kind of public uses did you think that this area would best serve? Did you personally believe that quality or regulated sport hunting were appropriate or not and if so, in what form?
MR. THAYER: If it had been left up to me there would have been no hunting at all, but I knew that wasn't going to work at all. And if you go back to the old refuge manual, it lays it out in there what a hunt on a refuge should be. And a hunt on a refuge is different from a hunt on just any public land. It's a quality hunt; the spirit of the chase, the ambiance of the campfire, the whole works. Those are the guidelines. The manual is about that thick and I don't know, but I think it was printed in about 1940 or something like that. It was all in there.
MR. KAYE: So given that hunting was allowed: what type of hunting then do you think the Refuge should provide? Tell me what you mean by 'quality'.
MR. THAYER: It should be the very highest quality in which a party goes to a place in the Refuge; they set up camp or they shoulder their backpacks and head up into the mountains and camp in there. They find the sheep and look them over for a couple days

and pick out some nice specimens. Get them and backpack them back down to their landing source, or to whatever means they used to get it there. They don't fly up and down the valleys spotting sheep. They don't have elaborate camps with stoves and generators and lights or whatever. It should be sport hunting in the older, traditional sense.

MR. KAYE: When you were the Manager, were some of the hunt guiding operations being established?

MR. THAYER: Well, there were guided hunts up there. I don't remember just who was there early on. But there were several guides working up in there.

MR. KAYE: Did you have any problems with their approach towards hunting, either legally or philosophically?

MR. THAYER: Philosophically, I am sure I did, but we didn't have any court cases. At that time the guides and the other hunters too, would wait until late in the sheep season when the sheep were driven down by the snow. You've probably noticed that if you go there in September you'll find all of the sheep down there on the valley bottom. They are feeding on the vegetated islands in the glacial streams that are right on the bottom of Canning River and in Sheenjek and others. It was about that time of year when the most pressure occurred. Sometimes they messed up and it turned too cold and they got snow all over. Then they were just done for the year. Generally, they waited for that. Again, you can refer back to the old refuge manual. It's all laid out in black and white, well black and yellow; the pages were old!

MR. KAYE: What about recreationists? Did you have much contact with people who wanted to do trans-Brooks Range trips, ski trips and that type of thing?

MR. THAYER: Yeah, we did. We corresponded with people, or responded to their mailed requests for information. We gave it a lot of attention. When I first came to Fairbanks in 1968, the Refuge wasn't yet a refuge. There was correspondence in the office there. I was in the Law Enforcement Division then. A fellow from Johns Hopkins University, who was a staff member there, had written about taking a hike through the Refuge from Sheenjek to Barter Island. There were all sorts of memos from the Regional Office telling him not to do it, and that he would disappear; that he would die and that sort of thing. The guy was adamant. He wanted to go. I don't think legally you could tell him that he couldn't. I wasn't about to tell him that he couldn't. So he showed up and went up to the Sheenjek. I didn't see him for a long time. I took off from Barter Island one day and I was just flying over that channel between the island and the mainland. He was standing on the bank there waving his sleeping bag. I had the floatplane so I landed and gave him a ride across the channel. He was as hale and as hearty as could be. He didn't have a gas stove or anything. He had special rice and raisins for some sort of rations that he carried. He had an excellent trip with no problems whatsoever. He then went back to Johns Hopkins and published a big write-up there. He sent us copies of all of the publicity. He also sent it to the regional office with a little bit of rubbing their noses in it.

MR. KAYE: I know in John Melton's book, *Nameless Valley, Shining Mountains* it talks about you meeting them and giving them a little ride with the plane.

MR. THAYER: Well, they were camped at Last Lake. I didn't know they were there. But they showed me where they wanted to go and the route they were going to take. It was just way too rough. I took one of them up in the plane and flew over that route. I pointed out some precipices that they would have had a terrible time with. He picked out a different route. I took him back to the lake.

MR. KAYE: Was there very much recreation in those early years?
MR. THAYER: No there wasn't. The first year, as far as I know, there were thirty-five backpackers and hikers and so on. That was in 1969. Then I wrote an article for Alaska Magazine about canoeing on the Sheenjek. That prompted, I think, considerable interest in doing that specific thing and some interest in some other activities too, I suppose. That was the purpose of the article, of course, because use of that nature was going to support the Refuge.
MR. KAYE: Explain what you mean by that.
MR. THAYER: People go there and see what it is and help defend it. But there were conservationists who were annoyed because I wrote that article. They said that I was just inviting people up here. It was going to get too crowded. I knew it would add to the crowding but I think the tradeoff of getting support for the Refuge was worth it. The use was going to come anyway; it was just a matter of when.
MR. KAYE: Tell me about your interactions with the native people in the early days in Arctic Village and on Barter Island. When you became Manager, did you make an effort to interact with them, to hire, or to work with them?
MR. THAYER: Very initially we did not hire them. I always talked to them, but I don't think they were really sure just what I was about. We had good relationships. I never heard a harsh word. Of course, frequently you don't in that situation. They are fairly quiet people. After a few years we did hire some guys to camp on a bluff on the North Slope and watch for the caribou and make notes of any other wildlife right down to the last raven. I had a guy over on the Sheenjek helping the Sheep Crew. I can't think of any others off hand.
MR. KAYE: Did the villagers have any idea what a refuge was? Was that one of the things you had to do; explain what a wildlife refuge is?
MR. THAYER: They claimed not to be really aware of what was going on when it was being established. They said that nobody asked them if they wanted a refuge there.
MR. KAYE: In looking through the record, I have never found any record of any of the earlier proponents meeting with either village to get their input on it.
MR. THAYER: I think that's probably correct from the way it sounded at Barter Island.
MR. KAYE: I wonder why that was.
MR. THAYER: That's pretty much the way it was done then. It wasn't until about 1970 or 1971 that the matter of public involvement took on a lot of importance. There were public meetings for the Refuge; but public involvement as an activity was fairly minor.
MR. KAYE: Did you have any conflicts with the villagers in terms of their hunting and trapping and things like that?
MR. THAYER: No, I just didn't get involved in their hunting and trapping at all.
MR. KAYE: Did you just overlook, or ignore it?
MR. THAYER: Entirely. They had been doing that for thousands of years. The amounts of animals they were taking was not all that great. If we were going to permit hunters from Fairbanks, or Chicago to come there and hunt, it seemed reasonable that they could hunt up there unmolested. There might have been a better way of handling that, but that's the way I did it. I did nothing on it.
MR. KAYE: How about the Muries? When did you first meet the Muries?
MR. THAYER: Well, I never did meet Olaus Murie. In about 1965 we were banding ducks at Fort Yukon and the Muries and Sigurd Olsen and somebody came in there. That may be the year they went up to the Sheenjek. It probably is.

MR. KAYE: They went to the Sheenjek in 1956.
[Editor's comment: The Muries also went to the Sheenjek in 1961. Thayer also worked in Fort Yukon that year.]
MR. THAYER: Well, it wasn't that then. But they were in and out of there. And people talked about them. I didn't meet them. We were busy with the ducks. Later when I was at Kenai in about 1965 or so, Mardy Murie came through there. I think Olaus had died by then. She stayed with the Spencers since they were old friends. The family of Dave Spencer. I met her then. Later in about 1968 or 1969 she and Brina Kessel and Celia were going up to the Refuge. Spencer came up in a Beaver, and we had a Beaver here. I flew Mardy and Celia, no I think it was Brina; we went up to Last Lake and looked around. I landed at Lobo Lake so Mardy could hike around and visit the place where they camped and that sort of thing. Then, we went over to Walker Lake and I think we stayed overnight. Then, about two days after that when we left; we stayed over at Peters Lake. When we left, Celia was riding with Mardy in the Beaver with me. That's when the engine gave out, so I really met her then. Before, it was all very formal. As Celia put it, when you are survivors it ties you together. But my thought is that if we had only had Jane Goodall on the plane, too, then I could have threatened the lives of all three of those famous people!
MR. KAYE: So what was wrong to cause the engine failure?
MR. THAYER: The engine just went all to pieces and quit.
MR. KAYE: You were able to put it down without breaking anything?
MR. THAYER: Well, without breaking anything important. I had to land on the tundra with the floats. I couldn't put the wheels down of course. I landed going uphill a little bit, which helps keep a floatplane from tipping over. One of the rear float struts did puncture the fuselage. So that float was sort of deformed up towards the fuselage. Other than that there was no damage to it.
MR. KAYE: I was going to ask you too, about Ed Owen. He was quite a legendary guy who lived out on the refuge for a long time. I know you met him. When we floated the Sheenjek years ago, you told me a few stories. How did you happen to meet Ed Owen and what was your interaction with him?
MR. THAYER: I think it was in 1963. Dave Klein , me and Neil Argy and someone else went up to the Refuge. Neil took the Beaver and I took the Cub. We made a thing we called a surveillance. We wrote up a report and sent it off to George Collins and to other places. I am pretty sure that was in 1963. While we were in Fort Yukon Cliff Fairchild was concerned about Owens. He wanted me to check on him. So I went up that way. He had a little strip crosswise on a point of land by the cabin, which was at a bend in the Colleen River. The wind was such that as the strip was under a stand of spruce that I just couldn't land there. I landed upstream on the bar and then I walked over to Ed Owens' cabin and he wasn't there. Then I went back through the woods to the plane and there was a piece of wood about a foot long. It was a piece of aspen that a beaver had chewed off and in the bark were carved the words, "Wait for Mail". So I waited, and pretty soon he came out of the woods. He came over there and we talked a long time, it was about two hours I think. He was very broken down by hard labor, I think, or else he had arthritis. He was very stooped. He lay down on the gravel bar because it was the only comfortable position for him. I lay down there, too, and he told me a lot of things.

He gave me a grocery order. I was to give it to Cliff Fairchild. So when I got back to Fort Yukon I gave it to Fairchild. He said that he didn't want to take it up there. He said that he

couldn't charge Owens anything, and that I could drop it off as handily as he could. I didn't object to that. So I took it over to the trading post to a guy named Peterson. I went back to the roadhouse and in a couple of hours somebody showed up with the grocery order. It was a beer box for a case of beer and it was about half full. There wasn't but about twenty or twenty-five pounds of groceries. There were just a few cans of this and that. I expected three hundred pounds. That time, when I got up there, the wind was okay and I landed on his short strip. I went over to his house and he made coffee and showed me his ore samples and told me about all of the prospecting he had done. He also told me about his hatred of the U. S. Government.
MR. KAYE: Why was that?
MR. THAYER: It was just general principles I think.
MR. KAYE: Owens spent his life up there looking for gold, and prospecting; yet the area was closed to mining. He couldn't have mined anything had he found it.
MR. THAYER: Well, it wasn't closed to mining until the Refuge was established.
MR. KAYE: Yeah, in 1960.
MR. THAYER: That's true, but by 1960, he wasn't doing much digging. He was really in pretty tough shape. I think he was mostly just existing.
MR. KAYE: Did he hold out hopes for finding gold in the Arctic? Did he think there were good prospects there?
MR. THAYER: He seemed to. He had some books on prospecting and minerals. He was interested in other minerals too. He mostly sunk shafts and in the summer they filled with water and he moved on. I think mostly what he got was exercise!
MR. KAYE: You've told me about George Collins. I know you had met him once or twice.
MR. THAYER: I have to admit that I hadn't heard of him until we sent in our report called Surveillance in the Arctic Wildlife Range, in 1963 I think. Someone in government sent a copy on to him. He wrote to me and asked questions about it. He generally praised the report, which was the work of Klein, and me and Mardy and another fellow. So that was my first awareness of his existence. There was a person from the University who was up here with them for a while. I can't think of his name. He was with the Extension Service and is retired now. Following that I occasionally had a letter from him asking about the Arctic Refuge and some specific things about it.
MR. KAYE: Years ago, you told me about a lost gold find in the Arctic. Tell me what that was about.
MR. THAYER: Well, Cliff Fairchild told me this. He was a pilot at Fort Yukon. He said that some fellows went up on a route which must have been up the Sheenjek and down into the Kongakut and built a willow house there. They did have quite a bit of gold so they claimed. The willow house caught fire and they just barely escaped with their hides. In the process of getting back to town…it's been a while since I thought about this. I am probably leaving out critical details. They lost track of the cash or gold and then later two other fellows went up to retrieve the gold. I think it had been left over on the Colleen. You realize that this might not be exactly factual! They had a falling out and one of them was killed and so on. About two years after that I read a story by Jack London that was very similar. That cast considerable doubt on the whole story. So that's really all I really know about it.
MR. KAYE: Well, the last thing I'd like to ask Ave is about the future. We've talked about the past, but looking towards the future; what kind of future do you envision for the Arctic Refuge?

MR. THAYER: Well, if we get a change in the administration in Washington, number one; I can see higher standards for pubic use and habitat preservation. I can see higher standards for hunting too.
MR. KAYE: What do you mean by higher standards?
MR. THAYER: More control, more rules, more regulations, which is inevitable. If you don't have rules….
MR. KAYE: What would they cover? What would they protect?
MR. THAYER: …you end up with nothing if everybody could do what they wanted. The rules would protect the habitat. There wouldn't be airplane landings in sensitive places. There would be smaller hunting camps and maybe less pressure on sheep. Guided parties might do things differently; maybe smaller numbers and no repeated use of a campsite.
[Side B]
….sometimes people would criticize Clarence Rhodes because he didn't know all of the birds, or couldn't identify all of them. He did not really concern himself with the details of wildlife management. He had the big picture. He didn't have to know one duck from another at five hundred yards. He had much bigger things on his mind. He didn't fall into the rut of minor details. The difference between one duck and another is a minor detail. When they are gone, you'd probably wish you had had the big picture.
MR. KAYE: What about flying? Did you say that maybe he spent too much time flying?
MR. THAYER: I said it by saying that nobody is perfect and everyone has a weakness. He certainly retained his interest in flying. Sometimes, I suppose he maybe had a little bit too much interest in personally flying around. But maybe not, I might be blatantly wrong on that. I did want to comment on Dave Spencer and Theron Smith. Those two fellows on a day by day, hour by hour, week by week and month by month and decade by decade basis, were always there, doing their very best and being very straightforward about everything. And they were doing what was best for the FWS getting the work done. There were no games, no tricks, no deceptions, just lots and lots of hard work. Theron Smith and Spencer both put in thousands of unpaid hours, maybe not thousands per year, but over the time there were many thousands of unpaid hours doing what needed to be done. I think they were impressive in that regard.
MR. KAYE: What about Spencer? What was it about him? What was his interest or concern or commitment?
MR. THAYER: Habitat preservation, primarily; which comes back to the old refuge manual. When the Wilderness Act was established, he saw the value in that immediately. He was the FWS expert in Alaska on the Wilderness Act. He researched the legislation and studied the Act. People from the regional office came to him for information and interpretation. This was very fortunate for the FWS. He saw the value immediately. Many others didn't know quite what to make of it.
MR. KAYE: He was a big picture kind of guy?
MR. THAYER: Yes.
MR. KAYE: And Theron Smith; he was a pilot?
MR. THAYER: He was the Aircraft Supervisor. The story goes that when the FWS was getting a little better established that there had to be an Aircraft Supervisor and a Regional Director. They tossed the coin and Theron won; he got to be the Aircraft Supervisor. Clarence had to be the Regional Director!
MR. KAYE: Is that right?!

MR. THAYER: I don't know if that's really true, but that's the story. Smitty is an extremely intelligent guy. I can't think of anyone they could have gotten who would have been better. The practical ability to keep things moving and know what is desired and what is needed. He understood that we had airplanes because we wanted to fly. We had them because we wanted to do the work of the FWS. There's a big difference in that.

MR. KAYE: How many hours did you end up having in your career, flying in Alaska?

MR. THAYER: Not a whole lot. There was a big piece of time when I didn't keep a logbook. When I was asked to keep a logbook again it was probably seven thousand.

MR. KAYE: Tell me about how the FWS, or actually it was the Bureau of Biological Survey then, functioned before Statehood.

MR. THAYER: The situation that I remember best before Statehood is one of a number of stations in Alaska; Kotzebue, Bethel, McGrath, Fairbanks, Kenai, Anchorage, Glenallen, some in the southeast and others. Each station had quite a powerful radio transmitter. Most of it was Navy surplus. Navy transmitters were made to hold together when they fired the cannons. So they were durable. There was a very complete communications net. In fact, during the Rhodes search, that radio net was used by Search and Rescue rather than their own because it was so much better. There are a couple of reasons for that. One reason is that the ionosphere was just about the right height for a lot of skip. If you were in McGrath, you could ring up Juneau on the radio quite reliably. The other thing was that they used the middle frequencies; 5907 and a half of course. But also you could crank up on 5544 and 3611 and a lot of the middle frequencies. If you were wondering about getting into Galena or some place, the store at Galena had their radio on. You could ring them up and get the weather there. Or, if you wanted to send FWS a message and couldn't get the station you wanted, there could be somebody at Fort Yukon with a radio in the store. They could take the message. From that position they might skip it on in to Juneau. So radio communication conditions were very good. Those radios were on in the evening too. People were talking sometimes fairly late at night on them about matters not necessarily specific to FWS. One conversation I heard was on the finer techniques of making home brew. It made it seem like a big family to have that big radio net. You have to have an excuse to call somebody on the phone but you didn't need an excuse with the radio.

MR. KAYE: Before Statehood, when you started with FWS, what was the relationship between the Alaska Game Commission and the Bureau of Biological Survey?

MR. THAYER: When I got hired in 1952, my own records show that I was in the Alaska Game Commission. That was the name of the organization. Then later on it got changed to the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, then later on to the Fish and Wildlife Service. I might have those last two messed up. It was definitely the Alaska Game Commission to start with.

MR. KAYE: Was that a division of FWS?

MR. THAYER: Yeah, we were in the FWS, but we were also in the Alaska Game Commission. I guess there was that difference between us and somebody down in the States.

MR. KAYE: Gee, this has answered all the questions I had. Is there anything you want to add Ave?

MR. THAYER: No, I don't think so.

MR. KAYE: Well, I want to thank you so much for this interview!