Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Ave Thayer
Date of Interview: March 30, 2010
Location of Interview: Washington D.C.
Interviewer: Mark Madison

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 30 +

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: With Alaska Game Commission in Anchorage, Alaska in 1952; in McGrath on the Kuskokwim dealing with trapping, hunting, and fisheries (1954,'55); at Amchitka in 1956; 1958 at Kenai Moose doing law enforcement and then became Assistant Refuge Manager; 1968 to Fairbanks; from 1969 to 1982 was 1st Refuge Manager at Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Most Important Projects: Helped search for Clarence Rhode

Colleagues: Roger Kaye

Mentors: Dave Spencer

Most Important Issues: People not understanding what wilderness was and wanting to build cabins, bring vehicles, and build airstrips on Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; poaching; number of people interfering, going into habitats because they want to see the wildlife.

Brief Summary of Interview: Mr. Thayer talks about how he came to Alaska and started working for the Fish and Wildlife Service, which was then the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. He talks about jobs he performed in various locations, including doing aerial wildlife surveys, law enforcement, hunting and trapping, and eventually becoming the first Refuge Manager at Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. He helped in the search for Clarence Rhode when his plane went down, and also shares a few stories of meeting Mardy Murie and having some correspondence with her when he became manager of Arctic. He shares some information of where he grew up and what first got him interested in the environment and wildlife, and his concerns with impact on the habitats of wildlife.

MM: And we're talking to Ave Thayer, who among other things was the first refuge manager at Arctic Refuge. And Ave, the first obvious question is how did you end up working for Fish and Wildlife Service, or our predecessor agencies actually when you came in?

AT: Well, I was working summers in Glacier Park, Montana. And in the fall of 1950, one of the other fellows was going to drive to Alaska, wanted me to go along mainly to help him buy gasoline. I did that with the intention of getting a construction job during winter and then working for the Fish and Wildlife Service in the summer. The job at Glacier National Park was an excellent job, great place; some of the best summers of my life were spent there. But for reasons I can't explain, I decided we could move to something a little more wildlife-related. So we came on up at the end of October and went to Anchorage, and got a construction job out in the bush. And in May went to work for the Fisheries Branch of the Fish and Wildlife Service. But at that time it was all one unit, so at the end of the fishing season, I worked with hunting and then trapping following that and so on, through the winter. And worked Fisheries again the next summer, and that fall then I moved inland to McGrath on the Kuskokwim, so I've been away from Fisheries since that time.

MM: What exactly did you do for the agency back then, what did your job entail? Because it's quite different than what we do today, some of the stuff. If you can remember back, I mean we're talking 50 years, I know.

AT: Very basic, I was on Kalgin Island in Cook Inlet, and my job was to keep the salmon fishermen from setting nets across the spawning streams and catching the spawners. And so I had an outdoor boat, traveled around the island doing that. There were about a dozen of us throughout Cook Inlet trying to protect the spawning stream.

MM: And then what did you do when you moved inland?

AT: Well, when I was at McGrath we traveled up and down the Kuskokwim River and the lower Yukon, from Anvik downstream and the Innoko River. And did pretty much everything, dealt with the trapping, hunting, and fisheries again, primarily fish wheel fisheries. As I mentioned, Fisheries were not a separate branch at that time. It was Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife; in fact it was referred to (unintelligible) as the Alaska Game Commission (unintelligible). So we had a little airplane, it was a four- seater, we took all of our stuff (unintelligible); for all practical purposes a two-seater, but it served us well. Trapping was a big event in the interior, beaver trapping. And we would attach metal seals to each beaver skin before it could be exported. So we spent quite a bit of time doing that and measuring skins. We tagged about 10,000 beavers a year.

MM: And just to get some of the dates down, when did you start working for the Bureau of Sport Fisheries?

AT: In the spring of 1951.

MM: 1951, okay. Then you moved inland and you were doing hunting and trapping; were other things going on then?

AT: In the fall of 1951, yes. I also conducted wildlife surveys, aerial surveys for moose and caribou, and sheep and goat.

MM: How were those done back in the '50's?

AT: Well, one year I used a two-seater, Super Cub, fly around (unintelligible) river, and the pilot participates to an extent of quoting large numbers, and the observer is looking for specifics, you know, sex and age, whenever that can be done.

MM: What type of wildlife were you surveying back then? Was it waterfowl primarily or mammals or?

AT: No, it was mammals; spent a lot of time on caribou surveys because they were widely scattered. And doing moose surveys as well. The sheep and goat surveys were in fairly restricted areas.

MM: And to back track a little bit, where did you learn how to fly?

AT: I learned in Anchorage. When my construction job ended, well I quit the construction job. And I spent a few weeks in Anchorage and it was spring by then. And got a pilot's license, and went on out with commercial fisheries.

MM: Was it hard to get a pilot's license back then?

AT: No it wasn't. For five hundred dollars they would guarantee you a private license, (unintelligible) getting your money back. Obviously they're concerned with getting you through, it was a quick process.

MM: It was a win-win. And what type of aircraft were you flying in the early '50's up in Alaska? Were they Grumman Gooses or were they…?

AT: Well, the Fisheries were conducted with Grumman Widgeon, the larger Goose almost exclusively. The aerial surveys were Piper Pacer, which is good for caribou because it had a speed of about 115 mph. A Super Cub was better for detail work, goats and sheep, (unintelligible); low speed and high performance.

MM: How did those aircraft handle back then?

AT: Well, they handled well, I guess.

MM: Well enough, you're here to do an oral history in 2010.

AT: If there was any weakness in the system, I think it was probably the pilot making human error. The airplanes pretty well stick with Isaac Newton and his theories.

MM: (Chuckling) Do you remember anything about the observers you worked with in the '50's back then? Were they service people also, primarily?

AT: Yes, they were biologists.

MM: Do you remember any of their names or any of those folks?
AT: There was a Ronald Skoog (unintelligible), and I can't think of the other fellow's, primary fellow's name. They're interested in getting closer, of course, always wanted the airplane closer to the animal.

MM: How close would you get to the animal?

AT: Well, you don't have to be extremely close. Looking at a moose's head, even if the antlers are shed, you could tell if it was a bull or a cow. That's my recollection of it; they always wanted to be closer.

MM: Now, when you do these surveys back then, because we actually haven't talked to anybody that did surveys back in the 1950's. Would you stay out for a couple weeks at a time or would you be able to come back to a town every night, or how did that work?

AT: We were in towns or lodges along the highway almost exclusively. We needed facilities to take care of the airplane.

MM: Right.

AT: Primarily.

MM: Fuel and so on.

AT: We occasionally stayed out when the weather went down and we couldn't fly back. And we had big sleeping bags and we had to camp out overnight. When that happened, as soon as the weather lifted we headed back to the roadhouse and had cooked food.

MM: I bet. Now did you overlap with Clarence Rhode then in the 1950's?

AT: Well he was the Regional Director.

MM: Right.

AT: When I went to work and for some years after that. And then he was killed in 1958.

MM: Right.

AT: And I'm not sure just who the Director was after that.

MM: I don't recall either. Did you meet Mr. Rhode at all when you…?

AT: Oh yes.

MM: Any memories of what he was like as a person?

AT: He was a person of great intellect; really a smart guy. He could do just about anything, and did actually. He worked with government agencies very well. They were impressed because obviously he was a person who knew what he was talking about, and knew what to do. And he pretty much single-handedly got the communication system along with surplus military radio equipment. And so we had a communications chain throughout Alaska that was, I think, better than any other, better than the airlines; sometimes they depended on us (unintelligible). Each field station had a radio, and they were big radios with transmitters.

MM: Like military issue radios?

AT: As a matter of fact, I repaired radios when I was in the Navy during the war; radios, radar, (unintelligible). And some of the units we had were the same ones we had on our ship.

MM: Really?

AT: So I knew every wire in that transmitter, so I could keep those going sometimes.

MM: You were quite a jack of all trades. They must have loved you in Alaska (laughing).

AT: No, not necessarily.

MM: Did you ever have a chance to fly with Clarence Rhode?

AT: I did.

MM: What was he like as a pilot? Or were you piloting?

AT: He was very calm. On several occasions he had me take the controls on a twin engine airplane, Beech D18. And I was pleased at that; I thought (unintelligible) get to fly this D18. And he made me stay exactly on course; if I was off by one degree he called that to my attention. If the altitude changed just a little bit, he pointed that out, and it ruined the flight basically. By the time we got to where we were going, I was exhausted, but it was interesting. Doing aerial surveys, it was not a matter of position, turning and banking, and diving and climbing. So you got a little bit sloppy at it.

MM: Did you participate in the search when Clarence Rhode's plane went down?

AT: Uh-huh

MM: What was that like? We haven't really been able to talk to many people.

AT: Well, we stayed at Fort Yukon at first, and there a few weeks, I think. And just went out to our assigned areas every day, methodically trying to search through all of that. And as it turned out, persistent bad weather up in the mountains prevented our finding the airplane because it isn't in plain sight if the weather is clear and if you could go up the right canyon. Then we moved out to Galena. And then in October, we were out at Moses Point out on the west coast a week or two. So we had quite a few airplanes and flew a lot.

MM: Now this period in the '50's, was that primarily what you were doing was wildlife surveys and flying and that, or did other stuff come up with your job?

AT: Well, it was a combination of that and law enforcement.

MM: Okay. How was that? How was it doing law enforcement up in Alaska in the '50's?

AT: Law enforcement involved about three quarters of our time, I think, because there were only so many surveys that are needed.

MM: Sure.

AT: Around Anchorage and settled areas, the big problem was poaching of moose and marketing of moose; spent quite a bit of time on the road doing that. Out from town, it was primarily trapping regulations; closed season, open season, setting traps too close to the beaver houses, and dealing with individuals.

MM: It's always dealing with individuals (chuckling).

AT: But if some trapper killed his moose a week, or two, or three after the

season closed, he's out there by himself, nobody around for a hundred square miles, one moose more or less, it's not important. It's not the purpose of those regulations; regulations are really intended for around town, masses of people.

MM: Right.

AT: So we didn't mind overlooking that, and I think that was the right decision. The law people say that our job is to find violations and let the judge determine whether they should be punished or not. (Unintelligible), you didn't do that.

MM: How did Alaskans feel about the law enforcement, the game warden law enforcement?

AT: Well, a lot of people had criticism about it. Generally, when they were involved alongside people who were not in trouble, were more generous about it.

MM: And when you were doing the law enforcement work, did you go off by yourself or did you go out in teams usually?

AT: Both actually. We were alone quite a bit, and we had a radio.

MM: Right.

AT: And sometimes we went together, (unintelligible) that's the way it worked out.

MM: Were you ever concerned about your safety going out alone to…?

AT: No, not seriously. People can get very angry, but at risk of sounding kind of old fashioned, I don't think people were as mean as they are now. It just seemed that they were considerably more reserved.

MM: It's a smaller community up in Alaska.

AT: I suppose that's the reason, yeah. If it'd been here, might be different.

MM: Are there any cases that stick in your mind from this era?

AT: Well, everyone is different in some way. I think probably the cases where we worked the hardest were on guided hunts, or sometimes individual hunts. But the primary objective was to get a big set of antlers, and they did not sell the meat. And we put a lot of efforts onto those, and were gratified to apprehend the people at fault.

MM: Were you guys using undercover agents in that era, or how did you find some of these guided hunts that were just collecting antlers and so on?

AT: Well, a lot of it was done by aerial survey. For example, one person, I don't think he was a guide, killed a very large moose. And it was an area covered in Alders and laid Alders over the body of the moose so we wouldn't see it from the airplane. But in about three days, the leaves on those branches wilted and were sagging. Obviously something was hidden under there. We prosecuted him.

MM: So these weren't mastermind criminals (laughing).

AT: I don't think so. Anytime there was snow, the snow tracks helped That

was good evidence in court, it was generally accepted.

MM: So how did you end up going from law enforcement to wildlife surveys to Arctic Refuge? What was that pathway?

AT: Well, most of us preferred surveys to doing law enforcement; get out of town, work with animals, live animals rather than dead ones. And so whenever surveys came up, I took it. Then I went down to Kenai in 1958, down to the Moose Range. And it was there that I; I was still in law enforcement then, but did write up a survey on the Moose Range. And it was there I just sort of slid over into the Refuge Division.

MM: What were you doing for; you were still doing law enforcement within refuges at Kenai?

AT: Yes.

MM: Okay.

AT: I was, after a while I was assistant refuge manager. And then from that I went to the Arctic Refuge. But I had made two trips, I think, to the refuge…

Break in tape.

MM: We were talking about Arctic.

AT: When the Arctic Refuge was established, Senator Gruening would not permit it to be funded, and put a stop to all the funding bills for it. For some years there was no manager and no staff, and it was during that time that I made several survey trips in the refuge. So with that experience I think we got probably a considerable advantage of getting selecting as manager.

MM: And when were you appointed manager of Arctic?

AT: In 1969, I guess it'd been the summer of '69.

MM: And what was your mandate up there? Because it's a big refuge, it's kind of different than the other ones.

AT: Pretty much everything, but I think the law enforcement experience was part of it as well because trespass, vehicle trespass especially, could become a problem. So I spent at least 50% of the time being at least partly alert to legal problems. And the other time documenting what was there.

MM: What type of staff did you have in the early years?

AT: Well, at first I was the only one, and had half a secretary. And about 6 months later, maybe 4 months later, I got an assistant.

MM: That's still a big refuge for two and half people.

AT: But there's an advantage to air travel, and if we had been traveling by land it'd be very inefficient getting around.

MM: So early on the big issues were trespassing, and…?

AT: Well, a lot of the biologists don't care for my view on how refuges should be managed because I think the greatest need is protection. And there's certainly a place for research, particularly applied research rather than academic research.

And although there's nothing better than being out in the field camp doing bird work, law enforcement is the most important; protection of habitat first, and then protection of the animal second, then apply research, and then maybe academic research. They all have their place, but you have to have priorities, I think.

MM: So you think the biologists had a priority to do the research first and…?

AT: Well some of them did and I don't blame them; that's what they trained to do. And they shouldn't have to do law enforcement work. I was dealing with the oil companies quite a bit because that was my job on the Kenai, to go out to the oil field and deal with them on matters of pollution, soil erosion, construction of building sites and permits. And so I continued that in the refuge, but the only activity then was sufficient geology. And they were keen to bring vehicles into the refuge to do their work and we did not permit that.

MM: Why didn't you permit them to bring vehicles in?

AT: Because of the damage to the ground.

MM: Besides geologists, were there a lot of visitors in 1969 and in the early years? Was anybody visiting?

AT: No. In the summer of 1970, I think there were 35 recreation visitors that we knew about.

MM: How were these people even getting onto the refuge, the recreational; there was no road or anything to lead them out there?

AT: They fly in from Arctic Village and also from Kaktovik; charter a plane.

MM: Did you want to increase the number of recreational visitors that came up there?

AT: Well, I think so because you could see support for the refuge values in recreational visitors. And I think in that case, up to a point, the more the better. I think in some cases, especially in the National Parks, to think more is better is misguided, the Park Service recognized that and tamed it down a bit. But we could see each person as a defender and generally it turned out that way. After a visit to the refuge, I think 99% of the people are strong proponents for protection for it.

MM: I think that's very true.

AT: There were also hunters there, there were hunters there at that time for sheep primarily; it's a long way to haul moose from there. For the most part, hunters had hunting on their mind; they were not concerned with other things. And they wanted to build cabins and airstrips and we did not permit that, so we had some complaints about that. I don't think today anyone has recommended that.

MM: No. Was there a fair amount of subsistence hunting going on too?

AT: Well, from Kaktovik, people grew up in refuge and hunt bears and caribou but generally they waited until the caribou were down very near Kaktovik. And in the spring they would go into the mountains where the rivers are, in winter, discontinuous, and there are big holes where fish congregate. And they would go there and stock up on fish, and

in considerable numbers, but I doubt very much they hurt the population. The people from Arctic Village hunted moose and caribou and sheep; Kaktovik people killed sheep as well.

MM: What was the Wildlife Management Plan for Arctic?

AT: Well, initially there was none, but very basic, tried to perpetrate the populations in a natural form; that doesn't say much, I know.

MM: Well, it's a unique refuge, it's very big.

AT: I don't think that in most cases, possible reasons were to try to improve the population just for the sake of more animals. If there's five thousand sheep on the refuge, who's to say that it's better to have ten thousand.

MM: Right.

AT: And if it's stabilized at five, probably best to leave it that way.

MM: Were you there when muskox were re-introduced?

AT: Yes.

MM: Tell us a little about that project.

AT: Well, I wasn't directly involved in that at all, but I did go up and look at them, made some photos, saw where they were grazing, but otherwise I was just not involved. My understanding is the population is greatly diminished.

MM: Recently yeah. Arctic was pretty famous in the process of becoming a refuge for a lot of environmentalists like the Muries, and so on. Did you have strong feelings that it was a special type of environment, or a special place to be protected? You were at Kenai obviously when the debate was going on and so.

AT: Well, when the initial debate started, I hadn't been to the Arctic; really not involved in the meetings or any of that. After a few trips there I could see that it was a place that certainly needed protection. The Brooks Range Mountains get as close to the ocean as they're going to get in the refuge. So you have a range of habitats from the ocean shoreline to the interior climate in about 2 ½ degrees of latitude. Where the mountains are to the west, it's much more stretched out; Prudhoe Bay, the coastal plain is very wide. And in the Arctic Refuge, in some places, it's only about 4 miles wide. There's no better place for it for the Arctic Refuge than right there.

MM: How many years were you at Arctic Refuge?

(Mary comes in, break in tape).

MM: All right, Ave, we were just a second ago talking about how people think Arctic is very immense; that may be somewhat of a misconception. What were you saying about that?

AT: Well, it is a misconception if it was all one thing; mountains, waterfowl ponds, might be a little marsh. It's a collection of representative habitat. And no one classification is especially large; in fact, I think there's a case for increasing the size. And looking at it on an Alaska map, or on a national map, overall it's about that big (may be gesturing with hand).

MM: Yeah, it's a good point. How long were you refuge manager in Arctic?

AT: Twelve years I think.

MM: So '73…

AT: '69 to '82.

MM: '82, I'm sorry; '82, so that's a long tenure up there.

AT: Well, it was but it was something I wanted to do and I didn't see other things that I wanted to do. And I think everybody becomes what they have to be, no matter how bad they fight it; that's where you end up, that's where I ended up.

MM: Well, because of your long tenure up there, you overlapped with a lot of environmental changes, a lot of different personalities. Olaus Murie had probably passed on by the time you became refuge manager. Did you ever encounter Mardy Murie?

AT: I did. She came to Kenai when I was there to visit Dave Spencer; they've apparently been acquainted for a quite a long time. And she came over to the office and we all met her and talked to her. And then after I became manager, got a letter from her and I saw the address and I thought, "Well, you know, maybe this is going to say you want to do this or that." But it didn't, it was extremely polite and tactful and affective. And she was voicing her concerns about recommendations for a development that she had heard about, an air strip at Sheenjek Lake, hiker's cabins, manufactured trails, and other….

(Break in tape.)

MM: You were talking about this tactful letter from Mardy Murie, which is very; didn't know anything about.

AT: Her concern, that I was saying, was primarily with development and I certainly agreed with every word she had.

MM: Right.

AT: So I just sent her a personal letter responding to it and shared with her as long as I was manager, not going to happen. I had seen what development can do and in some places it could do a lot. Rock Creek Park, a good example of development, is a good thing but not in the Arctic Refuge.

MM: Did you have any other encounters with Mardy then?

AT: Actually, Mardy and Olaus, and I think, Sigurd Olson, were at Fort Yukon when we were banding waterfowl there one year. I didn't see or talk to them but they were around town and one of the other fellows went over to visit them. Then later on she came to Fairbanks with Dave Spencer and one other person, I can't think of her name right now.

MM: Would that have been Celia Hunter?

AT: Celia and there's another person; the ornithologist from the University.

MM: Brina Kessel?

AT: Pardon.

MM: Brina Kessel

AT: Yes, I haven't.

MM: She was on the original Sheenjek expedition.

AT: And so we went up into the refuge and stopped at several places. It was there that the engine gave out on the Beaver and we had to land up there and wait for somebody to come by in a helicopter and give us a ride.

MM: You could've wiped out a big chunk of the conservation movement if you hadn't made a soft landing there.

AT: Well, you have an airplane company, good designers, they built the mosquito bombers in World War II and to have a Beaver, it's strong, it's slow but ordinarily very reliable. It's built to withstand a landing on the tundra, so there was some damage to it but, to the floats, no damage to the interior of the plane when we landed.

MM: What caused the problem, did you ever find out?

AT: No I didn't but that was the second time I had an engine go out like that. It was an old kind of an engine and you're alerted first by a loud bang inside the engine, and then you lose the power. You might as well land because you can't do anything about it.

MM: Did you have any other planes conk out on you as you were flying them, or were these the only two times with the Beaver?

AT: These were the only two mechanical things that we had some trouble with; we had a gas problem once, but there again with the right plane landed on ponds and cleaned the fuel filter five times. I think it took about five landings to get back to town.

MM: You were hopping. Well, one of the other things, well before we leave Mardy Murie, do you remember anything else about the encounter with her when you flew her out and had to crash land? How did she take the landing?

AT: Oh very calmly. She and Celia set up tent and we put out some Flys for a colored tent signal. And they had some cookies and things, and I stayed in the airplane and tried to reach someone on the radio. So overall, I was in good hands; who better?

MM: Good point, if you're stranded in Alaska. You had very good company with you at the time. You were also manager during the Alaska Lands Act.

AT: Yes.

MM: What do you remember from that period?

AT: Well, I made some trips here, of course, working on that. There was an awful lot going on, I didn't have a good grasp of the whole situation but I knew quite a bit. And the Conservation Movement was very large at that time, and conservation activists played as important a role as anyone.

MM: Did you get a lot of extra visitors in 1979 and early 1980's after the refuge is…?

AT: There was a small increase, I think, I'm not sure about that.

MM: Did they talk to you about where boundaries might be expanded and so on?

AT: Yes, they did. We had a lot of visitors to the office, and they asked for our recommendations and they made recommendations. And unfortunately, there was a fairly large group of people who really didn't understand what wilderness meant. And would make threats such as, "If that's a wilderness area, I'm going to go up there and go camping. I'll show you." And had to explain that's not the way it works. And there were people who visualized great wealth, and visualized setting up lodges and digging mines and doing things that would bring lots of money if it was not a wilderness or other restrictions, with very little basis.

MM: Was that part of your job to try to explain to people what wilderness actually was?

AT: As I rode the bus to and from work, I frequently discussed that with people, individuals on the bus. Some were kind of excited, some were calm; others were bored with the bus ride looking for a diversion.

MM: What other changes did you see; I mean you were there a long time 1969-1982. What were some of the other changes?

AT: Well, the biggest change right now that I know about, is just the increase in public use. I went to Demarcation Bay last summer and flew up from Arctic Village and the bush pilots were telling me about the numbers of people, and Roger Kaye has filled me in too.

MM: Right.

AT: Number of people who are traveling down Kongakut River by raft and camping at the low end, intercept the caribou migration and it's a very large number. I think, as I told Roger, I think in the very near future there's going to have to be some sort of control over the numbers, some sort of scheduling. And maybe convince some of the people who are keen to see a thousand caribou that maybe seeing five or six caribou is just as good. And 'cause a little bit more use other places, there are large canyons there full of wildlife and interesting things that aren't nearly as much as the Kongakut.

MM: That kind of goes back to your earlier point; the refuge has a lot of different landscapes within it. It isn't one of these 20 million-acre monoliths that's all the same.

AT: Yes, you could spend 15, 20 summers concentrating on specific types of habitat and have an interesting time. In fact, I'll do that, maybe.

MM: What was your favorite part of the refuge? Was there a place you liked to go to?

AT: No, I don't think so.

MM: You liked the whole refuge.

AT: Yes, because of the variety.

MM: Right.

AT: It's just about as much variety as you're capable of seeing.

MM: You mentioned wilderness, were there other things you tried to educate people about Arctic? Since most people can't go to Arctic, obviously its part of your job as a refuge manager, were there other misperceptions or things you tried to get across about the refuge?

AT: Well, one I think that's important to me, is for people who probably will not go there, can't afford or not inclined to, but knowing it's there and functioning should be a source of considerate satisfaction. I would probably never go to the Everglades, but I take a great interest in seeing a movie, reading about, hearing what's going on; I'd be plenty annoyed if anything happened to it.

MM: That's a good point. Did you retire then in '82 or did you go to another position after Arctic?

AT: Well, I sort of retired. I took a job with the state office, it was called the Advisory Commission on Federal Areas. And primarily it was not designed to help federal areas; I think it was designed to help the state. I took a different view; I defended the federal areas and explained why they're there. Really wasn't all that comfortable a situation, I was kind of a traitor. I only worked there about 8 months, and I could see it was probably better that I left. The other things that I've done have been voluntary things.

MM: Let's circle back just a little, 'cause I didn't ask you anything about your early background; usually for an oral history that's interesting. Where and when were you born?

AT: I was born in Oregon in 1925. And then in 1935, we moved to Hailey, Idaho. I am fortunate enough to grow up there in the mountains.

MM: And what piqued your interests in the environment and wildlife? Obviously you had one if you, was it books you had or teachers that inspired you or something else?

AT: Well, I think it's a beautiful, natural reaction to exposure of wildlife. And Roger Kaye suggested that since quite a few people that he's talked to have read wildlife related books; there's an author whose name I can't think of, of course, who has written a series of books, popular primarily males of about 12 years of age having to do with.

MM: Ernest Thompson Seton.

AT: Ernest Thompson Seton.

MM: Sure, sure, he's a very famous author.

AT: Well, I read those, so did a lot of other people; I just suggested there was a connection with that. Well, I think reading Seton and being out and enjoying animals is two phases of the single interest. And it only makes sense they were reading Seton, but probably were favorably impressed by him.

MM: And what did you think of Alaska as a young man before you went up there, did you have a vision of what it was going to be like?

AT: No probably had the romantic vision; prospectors and hunters.

MM: And then after high school, did you go into the military or did you go to college, what did you do?

AT: Well, I was in high school when I went in the military, then I went to college on the GI Bill. And because I had been through the electronics school in the Navy, I went into electronics in college; electronical engineering. So I was in that for two years and then I discovered there was such a thing as wildlife management and I didn't know that. So I took that for a year, but the stress was so heavily on taking an agricultural view, farming view to raise animals to be shot, how to shoot more animals; just didn't care for that stress and found out that there was forestry so I switched over to forestry and was in that a year as well. At that time, after the war, there was a very big national demand for lumber because there was no domestic construction basically during the war. And the Forest Service was emphasizing very heavily on timber cutting, and that didn't sit well. I was using very poor judgment at the time, you understand. So the last year, the fifth year, I took courses towards a degree in biology. And so when I made the trip to Alaska that fall, the plan was to come back and in another semester could have had the degree in biology but after the salmon season, stayed for the hunting season, then the trapping season. And then it rolled around to a spring bird migration, and waterfowl surveys and one thing and another and I kept putting it off. At this point I think, I think I'll probably just forget it.

MM: Where were you studying these courses?

AT: At Moscow, Idaho.

MM: At Moscow, Idaho. Well, you had a pretty good classroom up in Alaska to study. You had a fairly unique perspective, the agency in wildlife management was production based often times, and of course the Forest Service was in the USDA at that time. Did that put you at odds at times with others in the agency, 'cause that really wasn't the background of the agency in the '50's to not be production orientated; we really were counting waterfowl and trying to produce as many as possible.

AT: No, I don't think so. My recollection is that there really wasn't that much emphasis in Alaska on production primarily, just an evaluation.

MM: Probably because you had so much in Alaska.

AT: Well, I think so. Now the State Game Department is very strongly ordinated to increasing populations, increasing the kill.

MM: The other debate, or the other wildlife issue in the lower 48 still in the '50's and so on, was for predator and rodent control. Was that an issue in Alaska at all with wolves and so?

AT: Well, I don't think it was much of an issue but there was a Predator Control Division. And they had a couple of airplanes and I think there were three people, and they did allow shooting wolves. The second year I was at McGrath, they asked us to shoot some of the wolves in that area, which we did, we shot about 25. And we thought at that time that we didn't think this through very much because we thought we were doing the right thing.

MM: Sure.

AT: But it was a big area, not very many people, really was not a good case to shoot those wolves. But it ended.

MM: Was there wolf hunting regularly at Arctic Refuge in the early days?

AT: Occasionally pilots would go up there, guides, but there was not much.

MM: Just too remote.

AT: Well, I suppose it'd take a lot of flying to find it.

MM: Yeah. I just had one other question for you, Ave, or maybe two. One is: what did you like to do for fun outdoors? Did you hunt, fish, bird, hike?

AT: Well, primarily my favorite activity was skiing, cross country skiing. I liked backpacking a lot, and did a lot of that early on especially, and tried to specialize in traveling light. I had a very thin sleeping bag. In fact on a bright day I could see the sun through this sleeping bag if I held it up.

MM: That's pretty thin.

AT: And I'd just take a piece of plastic to lay under for a tent, and take salmon strips and cornmeal, that's very basic, and live a fairly deprived life out hiking, but the load was very light. And I enjoyed that a very great deal, hiking as far as I could, and I don't do that anymore. The sleeping bag I have now is about that thick, trying to stay warm. I still like skiing a lot, and I like ice skating a lot; Fairbanks has a lot of rinks.

MM: What are you proudest of in your career? You've had a lot of things you've talked about and you've worked for a lot of different divisions and so on, is there something that, a couple of things you're particularly proud of.

AT: Well, the thing that pleases me most, I guess, is that I influenced people to be in favor of a natural system, wilderness, leaving things alone, that was a worthwhile cause. And sometimes we see things as we are rather than the way it is. And tacitly as possible, I lead people into thinking that themselves so I like to think that I influenced quite a few people on a one-to-one basis. As far as giving a talk before a crowd, I don't, I don't think they were very affective with that.

MM: You have people look at it in a different way. Is there anything left undone that you'd like to see done, say up in Arctic?

AT: Well, I do think there has to be controlled use in some areas, the numbers of use. And not to criticize the staff in the least, but I think stricter standards of camping to minimize and reduce the wear on ground, interfering with animals. I think there's always improvement, room for improvement on that to have just a little less impact even though it'd probably cost the person more, and inconvenience them, but I think it's the thing to do.

MM: Thank you so much, Ave. This was wonderful. Sounds like Arctic really lucked out with their first refuge…

End of tape.