

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD MUNDINGER
BY JERRY GROVER JANUARY 23, 2002

MR. GROVER: Dick, where were you born?

MR. MUNDINGER: I was born in Bertha, Minnesota in September of 1927. I grew up in the little town of Nimrod, Minnesota on the Crow Wing River. That was for the first sixteen years of my life. Then, my parents moved to Glenwood, Minnesota where I finished high school in 1945. I went into the Army in January of 1946. I spent almost two years in the military, part of which was in Korea. This was before the conflict in Korea. This was in the occupation Army.

MR. GROVER: What did you do in the Army?

MR. MUNDINGER: I was a High Speed Radio Operator. I was part of the G2. We copied the whole entire west coast of Russia's net, all of their radio communications in their military. We sat on the top of a mountain in Korea for, well, I was there for over a year. It was a real experience. There were thirteen of us who sat up on top of this mountain. We'd occupied a Japanese radio facility on this mountain. And we lived in Japanese quarters, which were these typical Japanese buildings with paper walls, and paper windows. And it was cold that winter I was there. But I never had better hunting in my life. I went hunting three or four times a week! It was quite an experience. We worked around the clock, so we had eight hour shifts, then we were off for twenty-four. And we just kept rotating. About every two or three days you could go hunting. That was the only recreation we really had. I hunted Pheasants and Deer...

MR. GROVER: With an M-1?

MR. MUNDINGER: With an M-1 carbine. We hunted Deer, Pheasants, and ducks and fox, and everything. See, the Koreans had no weapons. The Japanese didn't allow them to have any. And when we occupied Korea, the Japs left, so there were no weapons for the Koreans. If I had had a shotgun, we'd have gotten a lot more. We were fortunate. We had one cook in our group. He happened to be from South Dakota. And he knew how to fix Pheasants. We lived high on the hog as a military group. We were attached to a signal group. The Army in its wisdom, you know, has compliments of supplies built for certain sized units. And the minimum was for fifty people. Well, the thirteen of us drew rations for fifty. We had more food and things that we didn't need. We would give them to the Koreans. We couldn't use them. We just had too much. We ran an outfit that had top security clearance so we had no military, I shouldn't say 'discipline', but nobody bothered us. We had no inspections. Nobody came to see us. We just kind of sat out there by ourselves. It was quite an experience for a person who was nineteen years old at the time, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. Then I came back. And went to school at the University of Minnesota. I had started at the University of Minnesota in 1945, in the fall. I wasn't eight until the last part of September in 1945. So I wasn't drafted until after that. I was in the last draft order out of Minnesota at the end of World War II. I came back to the University of Minnesota, and enrolled in the School of Forestry. I

graduated from the University in the spring of 1952. I played football with the University of Minnesota football team. I was drafted by the Chicago Bears so I went to Chicago in the summer of 1952. I was with them until mid November when I got my leg all bummed up, so I was released. That was probably the best thing that ever happened to me, because I would have kept playing football otherwise. And I started with the Fish and Wildlife Service on December 7, 1954. I, and Ben Shaffer who was in Washington when he retired, started the same day. We had gone to school together at the University of Minnesota. So that's when I first started in the Division of Realty, in Minneapolis.

MR. GROVER: Let's step back just a bit, Dick. So you graduated from school, and started with the Fish and Wildlife Service. What lead you into this? What did your folks do? How did you get interested in [the field]?

MR. MUNDINGER: I'll tell you how I got interested in the Forestry part of it. I grew up in Nimrod, Minnesota. And during this time was the CCC days. Right outside of Nimrod was a CCC Camp. This was during really hard times. The leaders of camp were Foresters. And they were making big salaries at eighteen hundred dollars a year. At that time in the late 1930's and early 1940's that was a lot of money. I figured that if those guys who were basically Foresters...I said, that if I go to school, that's what I wanted to get involved with. I had always been involved with the outdoor type things. I grew up on this really wonderful river in Minnesota. I practically lived on it, summer and winter. I was hunting and fishing and trapping and everything else, every waking moment that I had, I think. It was kind of a natural flow. How I came with the Fish and Wildlife Service was kind of unique. I had accepted a job with the Forest Service at Crockett, Texas on the Davy Crockett National Forest. I made arrangements to move down there. About a week and a half before we were to leave, I had an offer with the Fish and Wildlife Service, right in Minneapolis. So I called up the Forest Service and said that I wasn't coming. Otherwise, I would have been down there in the swamps of east Texas with all of the snakes, and everything else.

MR. GROVER: What grade were you hired at? And what was your position when you started with the Fish and Wildlife Service?

MR. MUNDINGER: I started as a GS-5. At that time in 1954, the starting salary was \$3410.00 per year. I was hired as an Appraiser, and I didn't know beans about appraisals. We had a good training program and a good staff to work with, so it was a real challenging job.

MR. GROVER: How many of you were there in the Division of Realty at that time in Minneapolis? As I remember, that was a pretty big program up there.

MR. MUNDINGER: Let's see, at that time, it was very small. At that time there was about six of us, at that point, plus two secretaries. Yeah, about eight. I started in December of 1954, and in August of 1956, I was chosen to go to the Departmental Training Program in Washington. Which I did.

MR. GROVER: What was your grade then, Dick?

MR. MUNDINGER: Seven.

MR. GROVER: Ok, so you were in that 'junior' program that they had?

MR. MUNDINGER: Yes, I think I was in the eighth one that they had. I came back from that program to Minneapolis. At that time, the program allowed you to come back. I don't think they did later on. So in 1959, or late 1958, they had started the Wetlands Acquisition Program in the Dakotas and Minnesota and Iowa and Wisconsin. I was given the job of starting the Realty side of that, with very little experience, and no staff. One of my first jobs was hiring people. We started out hiring graduating students from Forestry schools around the Midwest basically. Part of my job was to interview these folks, right at school, before they ever graduated so we could see what we could find in the way of employees.

MR. GROVER: So you are out in the Wetlands Acquisition Program. Set the stage, where you a Supervisor at that time? What was your grade and title?

MR. MUNDINGER: Well, I was a GS-9, yet. And I was just an Assistant to the Regional Supervisor for Realty. We ended up hiring about sixty-four people during that time. We established field offices throughout the area. The first field office we started was at Jamestown, North Dakota.

MR. GROVER: That was the first field office that reported back to the Regional Supervisor?

MR. MUNDINGER: Yes.

MR. GROVER: Were you the head of that office?

MR. MUNDINGER: No. I just headed up the Wetlands section only. I was responsible for these folks in the field, yes. Recroft was the Regional Supervisor of Realty at that time. The first two people that we sent to the field were Tom Smith and Harold Benson. Tom went on to become the Regional Supervisor of Realty in Albuquerque. And Harold was the Assistant Regional Director for Wildlife in Atlanta.

MR. GROVER: Was the name of that Supervisor that you said?

MR. MUNDINGER: In Minneapolis?

MR. GROVER: Yes.

MR. MUNDINGER: Ray Recroft. At that point, the Supervisors of Realty around the country were all ex-cadastral surveyors, in fact, every one of them. That was Recroft's background. He was an excellent guy to work for. He'd give you the authority to do

something and let you do it. That program I worked on until I transferred to Portland. We established Wetlands offices in Jamestown, Minot, and Devil's Lake, North Dakota. Huron and Aberdeen, South Dakota, Fergus Falls, and Benson, Minnesota.

MR. GROVER: And these offices were all engaged in Wetlands acquisitions in an accelerated program?

MR. MUNDINGER: That's right. Exactly. The only problem was that in those early days we didn't have much funding. The first year, in Jamestown with Tom and Harold, I think we had about \$150,000.00. And I think we could have spent five million. At that time, farmers were begging them to buy their land. The first year, I can't remember how many acres of land they bought in central North Dakota, but the average price was \$11.00 an acre. We could have bought *thousands* of acres at that point, if we had had the money. When we first started, there weren't many restrictions on the purchases. Sooner or later it came along that we had to get County Commissioner approval before we could buy land. This was a process that anybody who has dealt with County Commissioners in rural counties understands what frustrations we went through. It was a selling job. You had go to the County Commissioners and sell your program. You really had to convince those people that you were doing some good. That was difficult to do with a bunch of former farmers; that you were taking their land out of production and using it strictly for waterfowl and wildlife.

MR. GROVER: What were the big issues of the day when you went to meet with those people? Was it taking property off of the tax rolls?

MR. MUNDINER: Yes, and stopping them from draining wetlands. We had an easement program along with the acquisition where we'd take an easement on their property where they could no longer drain any of the marshes. It was really tough because the Agriculture Department was subsidizing them to drain them. So we were two government organizations in direct conflict with each other for what they were trying to do. And the irony of the thing today, is that the Agriculture Department is today trying to pay those people to plug those drains up now, after thirty years.

MR. GROVER: So you were out there until when?

MR. MUNDINER: I left Minneapolis in the fall of 1963.

MR. GROVER: And that is when you came to Portland?

MR. MUNDINGER: I came to Portland, yep. Evelyn didn't come with me right away. We were in the process of adopting a child and we didn't get our baby until November. So I went back and picked her up in November, and we moved out here. I retired from the area around Portland. When I first got here, I went to work for Howard Sergeant in Realty. The Realty office here had four people in it, plus a Secretary when I arrived here in 1963.

MR. GROVER: So you were still an Appraiser in Realty?

MR. MUNDINGER: Yes.

MR. GROVER: And at what grade?

MR. MUNDINGER: By that time, I transferred out here as a GS-12. I was trying to think back. That was a level transfer. The moving process then, was not like it is today in the government. You were kind of on your own. I look back at it though as a great move. Because I have thoroughly enjoyed living in Oregon, and working on the west coast. It's just been a wonderful experience.

MR. GROVER: Dick, let's step back a moment. You mentioned Evelyn a moment ago. Can you tell us how that came about?

MR. MUNDINGER: [Chuckling] Well, Evelyn was a classmate of my older sister. When I came back from the military, my parents had moved up to northern Minnesota, St. Hilaire. And Evelyn and my sister were seniors in High School. That's when I met her. And we got married in 1950. We've been married now for over fifty-two years!

MR. GROVER: You mentioned that you are adopting.

MR. MUNDINGER: Yeah, we adopted a son in Minnesota. When we picked him up, he was nine weeks old. We left Minnesota in a snowstorm, and drove to Oregon. We stopped along the way in Billings and visited my good friend Bill Sweeney who is a Fish and Wildlife Service [person]. It was quite an eventful trip coming across the country in the winter.

MR. GROVER: What that your only child?

MR. MUNDINGER: The only child, yep.

MR. GROVER: Now you're back in Portland, and still an Appraiser. What went on after that?

MR. MUNDINGER: Well, I worked in Portland. I was on the Appraisal side, and Bill Lindsey was on the Land Acquisition side of Realty at that time, under Howard Sergeant. We were starting a program of acquiring more land in the west and we hired some additional people in the west. Some of those that we hired were people I had hired in the Wetlands Program. I scarfed them off of Minneapolis. Tom Smith came out here, and Bob Miller. Bob went on to be Regional Supervisor out in Boston. Dutch Estchimer, also Ed Edelbrock, Bob Billing came out from Minneapolis. Who else? Jim Shaw, Jim went on to become Supervisor of Realty here in Portland also. Those were I think, the four that we hired. We started a Wetlands Program out in Montana after I got out here, in northeastern Montana.

MR. GROVER: That was when Montana was still in Region 1, before it was broke off into Region 6.

MR. MUNDINGER: Yeah, that's where we put Bob Miller. That's right, he was over there. I was trying to think who we had in Montana. Bob went over there, and then he went on to Boston. Over the years I've had in the Realty side of it, from the Wetlands Program people, a number of them went on to pretty good jobs in the Fish and Wildlife Service or other agencies. A lot of them became Supervisors. Rolf Wallenstrom became a Regional Director out here in Portland. I hired Rolf for his first job. I have been closely associated with Rolf ever since that time, and we are still close friends. We built up a staff here in Portland before we could do the job of acquiring a number of new Refuges that were established, plus the wetlands in Montana.

MR. GROVER: What are some of the notable acquisitions that stand out in your mind, something that really added to the National Wildlife Refuge System?

MR. MUNDINGER: Oh yeah, in this Region. There were the three Refuges in the Valley here; Akeney, Baskett Slough and Findley. Findley had been started when I got here. But we finished up the acquisition on that. Akeney and Baskett Slough were two of them here in Oregon. Ridgefield and Toppenash were two that were in Washington.

MR. GROVER: Was Ridgefield acquired as part of an endangered species at that time? I know it wasn't White-tailed Deer. Was Lower Columbia involved?

MR. MUNDINGER: Later on, Lower Columbia was. I didn't do much on Lower Columbia. I think I had left Realty by that time when they really started doing the Lower Columbia. But we worked on Malheur and California. We were busy in California all of the time doing not only land acquisition, but doing the appraisal work for the states under their PRDJ programs.

MR. GROVER: So your relationship with this program wasn't so much the establishment of Refuges, but once they had been approved to go out and acquire the land, get the in-holdings...

MR. MUNDINGER: And doing the initial work on the public relations was a big job. Like all of the public meetings that you had to go to in order to get these areas approved by the local jurisdictions. I was involved for one whole summer with Humbolt Bay with Travis Roberts. That is all we did. All we did was go down there and meet with those folks and get the different factions and agencies to agree to what we wanted to do. As an example, I dealt with many of the Indian tribes getting Hatchery sites. That was a fun job. On the Warm Springs here in Oregon, and Neah Bay up in Washington and the Yakima Indians on the Toppedish Refuge. That was a fun time. People ought to all have the experience of dealing with a Tribal Council.

MR. GROVER: Ok, you've kind of moved out of Realty, or Acquisitions, and in 1971...?

MR. MUNDINGER: I was asked if I would take the Supervisors job in Contracting General Services. I replaced Ike Trackenburg. Ike retired and I was asked if I would take the Supervisors job in CGS.

MR. GROVER: Asked by whom?

MR. MUNDINGER: The Regional Director, John Findley. When John asked me to take the job, I said, "John, I don't know beans about this. That job has got some legal complications that I have no knowledge of whatsoever, especially as a Contracting Officer, and the responsibilities that go with it. Why would you select me?" He told me, "One thing Dick, you'll tell me when it's right, or when it's wrong." I said, "Well, yeah, I'll do that". He told me that he needed somebody in the job to do that. He said that he would let me go to any school I wanted to get caught up on what I needed to do. Which he did, I went to a lot of schools that first year. I made a lot of mistakes too. But it was a satisfying job because here was a Division that provided service to our field people, and that's the only thing that they had responsibility for. It was to provide service in the way of procurement and contracting of all of different kinds of construction jobs that were going on, or other kinds of contracts such as research or whatever. So, here was a job where you were really involved with helping those folks finish the job that they had to do. I got a lot of satisfaction out of it. I had the opportunity to get all over the Region. I met with practically every Project Leader that was out there. I had some knowledge of most of the, and especially the Refuges and some of the Hatcheries of who these people were and what their mission was. Once I got involved with heading up Contracting General Services, I made it my mission to find out exactly what they were doing so that we could be of service to them.

MR. GROVER: Is this when you got your GS-13 then?

MR. MUNDINGER: No. I was already a "13".

MR. GROVER: When you came to CGS?

MR. MUNDINGER: Umhum. It was a good job. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I had some Supervisors that were not the best, but that goes with the territory.

MR. GROVER: Were these Supervisors who were supervising you, or people that you supervised?

MR. MUNDINGER: No, supervising me, or tried to supervise me, I guess. [Laughing]

MR. GROVER: Are there any names that you'd care to divulge?

MR. MUNDINGER: Well, I had... they sent us an Administrative Officer out here, which I was under at that time. His came out of the Washington office. He didn't know how to supervise people. He didn't know the programs. He just was kind of sent out

because they wanted to get him out of Washington. I'll think of his name sooner or later. Then I had a Supervisor during the era when we went through this change in the Fish and Wildlife Service of management by objectives. And I worked for Jerry Van Meter. Jerry was a difficult person to work for.

MR. GROVER: He was hired out of Illinois as I recall.

MR. MUNDINGER: Yeah. He came out from Illinois. He was a very difficult person to work for because he was more concerned about looking good than getting the job done.

MR. GROVER: He was what, the Assistant Regional Director for Administration?

MR. MUNDINGER: Yes.

MR. GROVER: And under that was the Chief of Contracting, and it would have been Engineering and Personnel....

MR. MUNDINGER: And Finance.

MR. GROVER: Yes, Finance. Ok. That was the structure at that time.

MR. MUNDINGER: Yep. It was, and it was a difficult period. Because he'd go out in the field and talk to people in the Field Stations and tell them that they could do things that they couldn't do, by law. And I'd have to come along and clean up all of his mess. Finally, I got the different meetings that I would go to; the Refuge Managers, and the Game Agents and the Hatchery Managers, and finally I'd tell them, "You know, before you do some of those things that Jerry tells you, contact me. Because some of them, you can't do. We'll find you a way to do them, but you can't do them the way he suggested." He was difficult, a very difficult person to work for. That was probably the low part of my career as far as Supervisors [go]. Probably the best Supervisor I had in my life was Ted Perry.

MR. GROVER: You mentioned that your best Supervisor was...?

MR. MUNDINGER: Dr. Ted Perry.

MR. GROVER: And he was the Deputy Regional Director.

MR. MUNDINGER: Right. I worked directly for Ted. And he was one of these Supervisors who let you do your job, and only wanted you to come to him to keep him informed. It was one of the most marvelous working relationships that I ever had because you were free to do what you thought was right, without having to worry about somebody second guessing everything that you did. And Ted supported me in everything that I did. And he was just a wonderful person to work for.

MR. GROVER: But then you went to Jerry Van Meter.

MR. MUNDINGER: [Chuckling] Yeah. First I went to Bob Bosch. He was sent out here from Washington as the first Administrative Officer. After that period we didn't have one. Bob was a likeable guy, but he was way over his head in what he was doing. He didn't understand what the Fish and Wildlife Service was all about even, let alone what his responsibilities were. Consequently, most of us Supervisors under him, we just did our job, and kind of ignored him, really. And he finally retired. Then, Jerry Van Meter came out from Illinois.

MR. GROVER: Do you want to comment on this story? You know relating earlier about how Van Meter would be out in the field folks things, and you were having to come around behind him and say, 'before you do what he said, check with me'. There was a story going around Dick that Jerry was in one of these sessions with administrative folks down in Sacramento, California, the Refuge people, the Hatchery people and the ES folks that were doing personnel contracting and those kinds of things. They were having a little workshop and Van Meter is up telling folks all they can do. And at that time, Area Manager Bill Sweeney is reported to have stood up and interrupted Jerry and asked him, "Do you know how to measure bullshit?" And Jerry swallows the question, hook line and sinker and says, "No", and, "You measure it by the cubic Van Meter!" Is there any truth to that story? Do you believe it?

MR. MUNDINGER: I believe it, but I wasn't there! It sounds like something Bill would do! It was probably a very, very good comment at that particular period because I had never had a Supervisor who was more concerned of his own worth than doing the job. He was difficult to work for. I'll have to say that. But he used to just, at the end of the fiscal year, CGS and the Administrative Divisions never had a real big budget. And if you needed something badly in the way of equipment or something like that, I could go to the other Supervisors of the other Divisions, and I could get some money from them. Or, they would buy me something. And Van Meter would just be livid, because he couldn't get a cent from them! He never could figure out how somebody else could. Well, he never had the rapport to work with them, that's the main thing. He just turned them off, right to begin with. I don't know what his position is today. He is still working, I guess.

MR. GROVER: He still works for the Fish and Wildlife Service. I understand that he's involved with the water rights issue up on the Yakima.

MR. MUNDINGER: Well, he's not in the big pond any more.

MR. GROVER: Was Jerry the same, away from the job?

MR. MUNDINGER: No. He was a completely different person. I took him Elk hunting one season, and he was totally dependent on us. On me! He wanted me to tell him what to do every day. And I said, "God Jerry, we're Elk hunting, you can do what you want!" He was very cooperative; he pulled his weight and did his share of the work and everything. And he was just a completely different individual. It just amazed me. I

think that many people thought that I took him Elk hunting to get rid of him. [Laughing] He was completely different. I haven't seen him since I retired.

MR. GROVER: You retired when Jerry Van Meter was still the ARD for Administration. That was when?

MR. MUNDINGER: 1984. I had a good career. I left the Fish and Wildlife Service as a happy individual. My whole career I had done things, and had opportunities to do things that most people did not. I worked in every state in the union while I worked here for the Fish and Wildlife Service. I've traveled all over. I've seen stations and facilities everywhere that the Fish and Wildlife Service stands for and works with. I just had a lot of opportunities. And I've been very thankful for that. I always had a good staff. I had a wonderful staff at CGS. When I first started there was four people working there. The Regional Director let me hire staff. I think that when I left I had twenty-two. I had a staff that understood what their mission was. When I started, they did not. I had people who thought they existed because they were there. They had no feel for the 'field people' they had never been out of the Regional office! I started out and made them go to the field. I made them go out and see what these people did in the field. Some of them were mad at me for this because I made them go places that they didn't want to go. But the field people are so congenial, and so accepting of somebody from the Regional office coming out to understand what they are doing, that it was a pleasure. It was an absolute pleasure working for the Fish and Wildlife Service. I had a great career.

MR. GROVER: Well, I think Dick when you left, and you know I had been in and out of the Region at that time, but Region 1 had a reputation as having very good support services there. Whether it as Personnel, or Contracting or whether it was in Safety or Engineering; all of those features I think, kind of reflected that environment.

MR. MUNDINGER: Well, it was partly due to the fact that during some of that period we had Supervisors that allowed us to do that too, like Ted Perry. He encouraged us to do what were doing. That makes your job so much easier, rather than fighting what you have to do. And that's what I had to with Bob Busch. I had to fight him to do the things that we were supposed to do, because he didn't know. He didn't understand. It's difficult, working under those situations. And when you are the combatant, so to speak, in order to get your job done, so your people can get their job, you have to fight the front office. And it was difficult a couple of times, but ...

MR. GROVER: Do you look back on this being probably one of the 'feel good' or memorable times of your career? When you feel that you had input? What would be some of the best?

MR. MUNDINGER: I think, when I look back at it, I had input and something to contribute, like the establishment of the Warm Springs Hatchery. I did the original Realty work end of it in site selection. I hiked down in the Valley. I was one of the first people in there with the Biologists. Then I went on with the CGS, and was responsible for all of the contracting to build it. So here you can start with a bare piece of land, know

what the mission is going to be, and dealing with the Indians to get access or control of that piece of land, and then going on, later on in your career, and seeing it built and producing. You know, there's not many people who have involvement that far into a project, not many. That's just one of the examples. The Hatchery up at Maka was another one. I got involved with the early work on the Quinalt Hatchery. And many of the Refuges, like the one at Humbolt, down at Eureka. Right from the beginning, you get involved with the ascertainment work and that end of it. It was kind of rewarding to know that you had a finger in, or that you had some input, you had some help in establishing these Refuges and Hatcheries over the period of your involvement. One of the highlights of my career was the establishment of that Wetlands Program. Because it went on to acquire many, many areas in the Midwest which today are, if you see them, are very, very productive. And they are wonderful things to see.

MR. GROVER: That's kind of the 'feel good' highlights. Are there things that really disturbed you about your career with Fish and Wildlife? Are there things that you wish you had done, or should have done?

MR. MUNDINGER: Oh, I think the only thing that really disturbed me was the fact that funding never kept up with what you wanted to get done. You could never get enough funding to really do the job proper. Especially in the Land Acquisition end of it, you could not get enough funding to do something in a real timely manner. It was always kind of piecemeal. Things happened, I mean, things got done over the years, but it took longer than it probably should have.

MR. GROVER: Did the Land and Water Conservation fund help at all?

MR. MUNDINGER: Oh definitely, definitely. It wasn't used as much as it should have been, even today. There is so much money available there. They just don't get it all appropriated where it needs to be. The economy increase[s] so lands become more valuable. I don't think that the Fish and Wildlife Service bought a piece of land that hasn't been a good investment; I don't care where it is, over the years.

MR. GROVER: You said that the Service never did get quite enough money to the purchase that they had identified in a timely manner. Do you have a way of pinpointing what the cause might have been? Was it not being able to 'sell' our program, or a reluctant Congress, or not enough money in the government or...

MR. MUNDINGER: Well, as you understand, the early acquisition of refuges was all done with Duck Stamp funding. There was just so much money available every year. So that was a fixed amount. You had to compete with other Regions for it. I remember one year, it was the year that we really started the Baskett Slough, and the Ankeny and Ridgefield and those Refuges; we were on the fiscal year basis. It ended in July. About in February, the central office in Realty called us up and wanted to know if we could use four million dollars out of the Duck Stamp Fund. Well, Howard Sergeant, Bill Lindsey and I sat down together and those two gentlemen said, "Oh, we can't use that". And I said, "Tell them we'll take it all!" They about flipped. I told them, "You've never had

that kind of funding in your whole life. Tell them we'll take it all. You've got all of these Refuges that they want to establish. We'll have to make the effort. We'll have to get them appraised. We'll have to get them approved by the Migratory Bird Commission. And we'll have to acquire them before July. But tell them we'll take it all!" I finally convinced them of that. And I think the only reason that I convinced them was because they thought that I would fail. But Don Kistner, who was our Appraiser at that time, Merv Cross, and Don Doughton, myself; Cross and Doughton were negotiators. Don got the work all done on the appraisals. I hand carried the approvals to the Migratory Bird Commission myself, and presented them. We spent that four million dollars before July. It was on Ankeny, Baskett Slough, Ridgefield, Toppenish, that was initial acquisitions out in those areas. They wouldn't have if the funding hadn't been available by a fluke. The rest of the Regions hadn't spent it. They couldn't spend it that year for some reason. But I really had to combat my own Supervisor to get him to accept it. It took a lot of effort. And you never get a lot of money like that, in one big block usually. Never. That was a good accomplishment, but it took some effort. The only reason I know that Howard Sergeant went along with me, [was because] he thought I'd fail. At that, he hoped we would, I think. He just didn't want to push for anything. There was a lot of risk involved, a lot of risk.

MR. GROVER: What would have been the down side had you failed?

MR. MUNDINGER: The money would not have been lost, but we'd have just looked bad. The money would not have been lost because they would carry it over. After we accepted that, and the other Regions got to see what we were doing, they got kind of mad at us because we had taken all of the funds. But they had had an opportunity for it and didn't take it.

When I was on the Training Program, it was during the reorganization of the Fish and Wildlife Service when the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries broke out.

MR. GROVER: That was in October of 1971, I think.

MR. MUNDINGER: No that was in 1956 and 1957, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries became established. It was part of the Fish and Wildlife Service at that time. They broke out under the Fish and Wildlife Reorganization Act. I sat in with the task force that made a lot of those decisions. And on that task force was Harry Goodwin who was in Billings, Montana at that time. When I came to Portland, he was one of the Assistant Regional Directors. I was acting for my Supervisor in Minneapolis when a notice came out that a job was open in Portland in Realty. That was before the 'green sheets' or anything else. So I called up Harry and said, "Harry, I want that job in Portland". I got a call on the next day from Howard Sergeant he wanted to know when I could be there. When I arrived out here in person, I had met Howard one time before that. I walked into his office the first morning, and he says, "I don't suppose you'll be here very long." That was his first comments to me! I said, "Well, that depends on you"! He was a fair enough Supervisor. But you couldn't go and sit down with him and say, 'this is something we should do', and have him make a decision. It would take him two or three days. You'd

have to make the decision for him, give it to him and let him sit on it for a few days, then he would cogitate and then he would finally go on with you. But he was difficult to get anything instantly from.

MR. GROVER: This is the time when you were waiting for Evelyn's arrival that you stayed out in the field and brought him back the six options?

MR. MUNDINGER: Yeah!

MR. GROVER: Was he the one that had to deal with them?

MR. MUNDINGER: No, Bill Lindsey had to handle them from then on. But it worked. I went into the field basically because I wanted to know what was going on. I hadn't been in this Region. I didn't know any of these people out there. I made trip down through California and into Nevada and back up through Idaho and back to Oregon in about three weeks. I stopped at stations. And I stopped at Hatcheries, Refuges and Research Stations. I stopped to talk to folks in Animal Damage Control. You have to know what's going on.

MR. GROVER: And that's where you picked up the options, or refuge acquisitions?

MR. GROVER: Refuge acquisition, all of them, yep. It was fun. Kind of being footloose, it was kind of a fun time! As I say, I've had a good career. I've had no animosity anywhere for the Fish and Wildlife Service. I know a lot of people who retired because they were mad and disappointed and all of this stuff. But I'm not. I had a lot of opportunities to go a lot further if I had wanted to. But when I got to Portland, they weren't going to move me. There was no way I was going to go back to Washington. And that's where all of the jobs were. My good friend Ben Shaffer, who I started with and went to school with actually, at college; Ben went to Washington at about the time I came here, or just a few months after I came here. I used to tell Ben, "Ben you are second in charge in Realty. I make more decisions every day than you do in a year, that affect somebody, that really have some input". They never offered me a job in Washington that had that kind of background. So, why go somewhere where you can't be involved?

MR. GROVER: Dick, in your own mind, what are some of the biggest changes that you have seen in the Fish and Wildlife Service, things for the good, or things maybe that weren't quite so good, but big changes none the less during your career?

MR. MUNDINGER: I think one of the biggest changes that came along that really didn't add to a lot of the Fish and Wildlife Service operation was the Area Offices when they were established. It really took away from the supervision and involvement of the regional people at the local level. Yet, those people in the Area Offices didn't have the authority to do all of things they should have been able to do if they were going to have that total involvement. It was difficult to work with the Field Station when you had to go through the Area Office to get to them. Because a lot of the things we dealt with, with

the Field were mundane as far as the Area Office was concerned, but yet you had to go through that layer to accomplish the Field people's objectives. That was one thing. I knew all of the Area Office Supervisors. That wasn't the problem. It was the fact that you had to...and then when you went to the Area Office, you might have to go through two layers; the Area Office Supervisor plus whoever was responsible for that area of responsibility, such as the Refuge side or the Hatchery side, or whatever. It was a difficult period. I think that the Fish and Wildlife Service finally realized that when they got rid of them. I really don't remember how they came about being established, or what was the impetus to create them other than... I don't know, it just added a layer as far as I was concerned.

MR. GROVER: Well, they lasted five years, so somebody agreed with you.

MR. MUNDINGER: During my career, at one time, there was a big push to centralize the divisions that provided service to the field; like Realty and CGS and Personnel and Budget and all of these. At one time they were going to put all of that in Denver. I don't know, but it never went. It was studied. In fact, I was on the group who was doing the study. I spent a lot of time in Denver working on that. And some of it probably could have worked. When I first came to Portland, all of those services were, not all of them, Realty wasn't, but Finance, and Personnel were provided by Bonneville. Fish and Wildlife Service didn't have an office of Personnel or Budget.

MR. GROVER: That included Payroll.

MR. MUNDINGER: Yeah, Payrolls. It was all handled by Bonneville for all of the departmental agencies, and it worked. It was a pretty efficient operation. I mean, especially on the Finance end of it. You could get a travel voucher back in one day! You'd send it in and get it back the next day! They did have people in Bonneville that specialized in work for a particular Agency, like Gib Bassett and Russ Miller who worked basically for Fish and Wildlife at that time.

MR. GROVER: And they were Personnel?

MR. MUNDINGER: Yeah, they were Personnel. I remember when they came to Fish and Wildlife. As far as the other changes; I don't know if making more Regions increased the efficiency of the Fish and Wildlife Service or not. They seemed to be working with the five that they had originally.

MR. GROVER: But when you were here though, Alaska was still part of Region 1, or had they broke out yet?

MR. MUNDINGER: Yeah, they had moved. When I first came here, we had Alaska and Montana. The Region was a lot bigger, yet it wasn't so big that...Alaska was a problem in itself, I don't care what it was! [Laughing] That was a whole different mindset of people. Even today, I don't know if they can justify being a Region by themselves.

MR. GROVER: Just by size or square miles.

MR. MUNDINGER: By size maybe. But not by activity, as far as the overall operation of the Fish and Wildlife Service. But that was done, and it's working, I'm sure.

The other area that was really a difficulty to deal with; not for myself so much but for the Realty end of it was Hawaii, when they had Administrators in Hawaii.

MR. GROVER: Was that the PIA, the Pacific Island Administrator?

MR. MUNDINGER: It was a layer out there that was difficult because first off, you wondered why it was there. And then when had some Administrators who were really a problem to work with.

MR. GROVER: Well what other changes struck you during your career, when you'd see a shift in the way that they had done business?

MR. MUNDINGER: Well, at present I think that we are practically driven by the Endangered Species Act. That is my estimation. That's what I see. In fact, the office in Sacramento, how many people do they have down there? Somebody told me they had sixty or seventy!

MR. GROVER: I used to supervise that office, and when I left they had a staffing pattern for one hundred and forty-two. It was mostly filled.

MR. MUNDINGER: Is that right! What can they do?! I mean, what can you really accomplish in the Endangered Species Act other than finding the critters and setting up habitat requirements and monitoring, that's about it. Is there that many endangered species in California?

MR. GROVER: And Florida and Hawaii.

MR. MUNDINGER: Well, to me it looks like the Fish and Wildlife Service is spending an awful lot of effort in that area. Maybe they have to by law, I don't know. I am sure they wouldn't be doing it otherwise.

Another thing I recall is the quality and integrity of the people that I worked with in the Fish and Wildlife Service. I think that as a group, and it was a fairly small group really, were some of the most wonderful people that I have ever worked with. They all had a mission. They all had responsibilities. And the Fish and Wildlife Service has responsibility in so many activities of our daily life, even today. It was a pleasure just working with folks that were so dedicated, from the Mechanic of the Refuge, all the way up to the Regional Supervisors, and the Regional Directors and everywhere in between. They all had their missions, and they all seemed to know what it was. And they fulfilled it. Every once in a while you'd run into a bad apple, you do that in any organization. But

by and large, I'd say that ninety-nine percent were just wonderful people to work with. That made my career so much easier, and so much more enjoyable.

MR. GROVER: Dick, there's got to be some stories that I've heard to tell before. Would you like to relate some of those for posterity?

MR. MUNDINGER: Well, some of the unique, or maybe different things that we had to get involved with in CGS were: We had a Game Agent in California who called me up one day and wanted to get nine gallons of Federal [sic?] alcohol which is a very controlled substance in the government. First off, I asked him what they were going to do. You know, the Game Agents every once in while had pretty good-sized parties. "Is this what you are using this for?" He said, "Oh no, we've got a problem down here. We had a Condominium complex that has a lake involved with it, and the Coots are congregating there. They come up and eat all of the vegetation off of there. It's really a mess, and we've been requested to do something about it. We want to move those Coots out of there." And asked him how he planned to use the alcohol to do that. He said, "Well, we're going to take grain, and soak it in alcohol and then feed it to the Coots. And when they get inebriated, we'll pick them up and move them somewhere else!" I said, "OK". We got the alcohol for them and the project was successful. They moved them out. I don't know how long they stayed. But that's just an example of some of the weird things that you have to deal with.

MR. GROVER: That's the day that the Coots got drunk!

MR. MUNDINGER: Yep! The day the Coots got drunk. We were involved in acquiring surplus property from a number places for the Field Stations. One of them was Port Wyanimi [sic], which was a CB readiness station down in California. They have at the ready, big heavy equipment so they can go anywhere in the world and build facilities that are needed for emergency type military things. They kept this equipment on line, ready to go, all of the time. Every year, they had to replace a certain amount of it, to keep it current. We had access to buying the stuff that they were replacing, which was probably brand new, only it was started up two or three times a year to keep it functioning. We could acquire this from them for about ten cents on the dollar. This made it a very favorable acquisition at the end of the year when people needed certain pieces of equipment and didn't have funds enough to buy them in the ready market. That was a very helpful thing for our people in the field. Along that line, we picked up military equipment that was surplus, all over the world if we could. As an example, we came close to getting an entire shipload of heavy equipment from the Viet Nam era. It was during the Viet Nam War, towards the end of it, and they had all kind of heavy equipment that was surplus to their needs in Viet Nam. I was arranging to have it shipped to San Francisco, an entire shipload of it, when the war ended very dramatically and everybody was getting out of there, and the equipment was left [behind]. So I came close to acquiring a whole shipload for the Fish and Wildlife Service. It didn't happen, but it could have. There were a number of other crazy things you had to buy. One time we had a Game Agent in Reno who had wrecked his pickup. And we had to buy a pickup real fast for him. GSA except acquires all vehicles in the government in an emergency.

Because GSA couldn't get us one in ten days, I put out a bid locally here in Portland and in Reno, Sacramento, and the local Chevrolet dealer named Taggart was a low bidder. He had to deliver that pickup to Reno, wheels up. He couldn't drive it. He had to haul it down there. He was the lowest bidder on this. And through their Fleet Manager on this bid, Kanouse Chevrolet for a few years, bid on every vehicle sold, west of the Mississippi River! They won many of them. They had become one of the biggest providers of vehicles to the government west of the Mississippi River. It all stemmed from us having to buy a vehicle under an emergency situation. I got to know the Fleet Manager, and he said that it was such a good deal. He thought that if they could make ten bucks a car, they could make money, because they made money on the volume distributors. When a dealer gets to a certain plateau, they get so much refund from the factory. If they get to a higher plateau of vehicles they get more money. So he said, "We make money on that". And they never saw the vehicles. They just did all of the paperwork. You get involved with crazy things like that. I was involved with the John Deere people out of Moline, Illinois. We bought a lot of big articulating tractors. I wouldn't say 'a lot', but we bought a number of them. It got so that every year the Manager out of Moline would come out and see me and see how we were doing. So you got to meet a lot of folks in many, many different facets of life in the whole U. S. CGS was a fantastic job for me because I just met people everywhere.

MR. GROVER: Dog food?

MR. MUNDINGER: Dog food, yeah. Talking about dog food; When the Viet Nam War was ended the Canine Corps had a warehouse full of dog food at Tacoma. I had a couple of real close contacts up at GSA in Auburn. They called me and said, "You got any use for dog food?" I said, "Well, I don't know. What are you talking about?" He said, "I don't know how many tons we're talking about but we've got a warehouse full. It was going to be shipped out, but it's no longer needed. You can have it. You're going to have to pay for the warehousing of it for a while." I said, "O.K. Let me get back to you." I went to the hatchery people and asked them if they could use it by formulating into the fish food. They said they didn't know. At the same time, we were having a problem getting Peruvian Herring, which was one of the basic ingredients in fish food. I called up our folks in Spearfish at the lab there. They did all of the testing on fish food. I said, "Can you use dog food?" I gave them the formula that the GSA people had given me on the make up of the dog food, which was high protein dog food. And I asked if they could use that in their fish food manufacturing. The crux of the thing is that they finally used it because Herring was almost impossible to get.

MR. GROVER: The herring meal.

MR. MUNDINGER: Yeah, the herring meal. And it was the main ingredient in fish food. They used the entire, I can't remember how many tons were involved, but it was a bunch. It kind of helped us along in getting over that period when Herring meal was in short supply. So these are just few things. I had another one. I don't know if you remember the SST Program that was when they were going to build this big, 'super' jet? GSA called us up and asked if we had any use for the mockup of the plane. I said, "What

is it?" They said, "It's plywood". And it was a monstrous thing. I said, "No, I can't use that. What else have you got?" They told me that they had all of the titanium stock that they had acquired. I told them that that might be useful. I went to Hatcheries again. Because titanium has the property that it doesn't corrode. We had a number of hatcheries where corrosion was a problem. I went to the Hatchery people and asked them if they could use any titanium. And you know, ingeniously, they can all use something. I think we took the entire stockpile that they had.

MR. GROVER: And you put up at Little White Salmon?

MR. MUNDINGER: Some of it. But I think one of the things we did was up on Hood Canal at that Hatchery we built on the Receiving Station out of titanium. It used to rust out all of the time. It was right there at Quinault?

MR. GROVER: It was Quinault or Quilesine. [Sic]

MR. MUNDINGER: Quinault, yeah.

MR. GROVER: Yeah, that's right on Hood Canal, all salt water.

MR. MUNDINGER: So we used the titanium in a number of places that came to us free! We put it to uses that you would never think of before. But those were the type of things you got involved with. Every day you had something strange come up. That's what made the job interesting, very interesting.

MR. GROVER: Well, we've been listening to some reminiscing by Dick Mundinger on his career with the Fish and Wildlife Service in Contracting. And he's got barking fish and drunk Coots, and he's got titanium all over the place! [Makes Mr. Mundinger laugh, tape ends]