Interview with Robert Domrose
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Interviewer:
Art Whitney
2010 Jerome Place
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 443-2739

Robert Domrose is a Fisheries Biologist retired from the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in 1991. This interview was taken at his home in Kalispell, Montana.

AW: Like all the others, Bob, they'd like us to start with your earlier history, a little bit where you were born, where you grew up, and how you got into the fish business.

RD: Well, I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, back in 1929, during the depression days. My Dad and I and, in fact, my whole family, except for the girls, enjoyed fishing and my Dad used to get off whenever he could to go fishing. He worked as a cook in a major hotel in Milwaukee. He loved the outdoors and whenever he could get away from the kitchen, he would love to get out and do some fishing. I think this is probably where I developed an interest in fisheries. We used to get the old '37 Chevy and old bamboo poles, about half a dozen of them, roll them up and put them on top of the care and take off every weekend to a nearby lake. We'd fish the hell out of the lake. We came home at night. These were mostly day trips, but every year during the last part of August, used to be the worst part of the hay fever season. So, to get out of Milwaukee area we'd travel north to northern Wisconsin and spend two weeks up there. We'd rent a cabin for two weeks and do nothing but fish. My brother and I and my folks were the only ones who went up there. My sisters hated fishing. It was great. I'd come back late every year for school so I'd have to catch up on everything because school had already started – that was a little drawback.

AW: Did you make a decision then to learn about the fisheries field?

RD: I always had an interest in the west. I always tried to find out anything I could about the west. In fact, in my annual, my picture said, "Bob Domrose wants to go to Idaho, but not pick potatoes." I was talking about going out and working for the Forest Service in the summers and find out what the west was like. Anyway, I spent a few years in Wisconsin and went to school for three years.

Excuse me, I'll back up a minute. About a year out of high school, there were three of us who had been working. We decided we were going to take a canoe trip down the ol' Mississippi. Buy an old canoe and go down the Fox River, down the Illinois River, all the way down to new Orleans. But, fortunately, we couldn't find an old canoe. So, we bought an old '29 Chevy for $89 and made a trip around the country. We were gone for 4 months and of all the places I visited, Montana impressed me the most. We came through there at Yellowstone Park and had quite a few good experiences on that trip. We got to see all the bears; at that time all the bears were coming out of the woods and we had a pile of donuts that we'd got from a baker in Ennis, Montana, where we stayed a week because of car problems. We got to know the guy and his wife. One of my buddies that was with us played the violin and gave us four bags of donuts. Here we were, dumb city kids with all these donuts, and we started feeding the bears. They were climbing all over the care and we were taking pictures of them. They were crawling on the hood and some on the windows. We were face-to-face with the bears just through the glass windows. That was kinda fun.

Anyway, this whole experience of going through Montana and being impressed with the mountains, kinda lured me back. After going to school in Wisconsin, I went to junior college for a year and two years to Wisconsin's state teachers college, which is now the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. I decided that while I was going there I wrote to Montana State to find out about their programs. The first and second year at Wisconsin I started taking some of the same courses offered over there in fish and wildlife management. So, after the third year, I transferred out to Montana State and did pretty well with my transfer credits. I just lost one quarter in three years of school. So, I was able to finish and get my B.S. degree.

After that, I went back to Wisconsin, figuring I had a degree in fish and wildlife, no problem getting a job. After writing many letters to the Fish and Wildlife Service and all sorts of agencies, I found out there weren't many jobs available in fisheries management. Let's see, I graduated in the winter, I can't remember the year anymore, but by making applications all over without any success, I applied for graduate school in the fall of the following year. I think it was probably late '50s. I went out there without actually being accepted or anything. Fortunately, Doc Brown who was a good friend of mine and all the people in fisheries managed to find a project for me to work on and that actually was my start. It was on the age and growth of book trout in Montana. Probably not a real significant work, but I did manage to get a lot of information about brook trout both in western and eastern Montana.

The work I did was primarily a lot of field work in the Beartooth Mountains, near Silver Butte and Cooke City. I had Vern Waples who was the game warden in that area; he's a fellow that helped me, he had horses and we'd go to several places. He gave me a lot of help. All I had was a one-man raft to do the gill netting with and it was pretty rough. You'd go out to a lake, you know how the winds are in high mountain lakes; they blow in one direction for two minutes and another direction another time and here I am in this one-man raft with a gill net trying to set it to get a sample. Sometimes, it took me over an hour to get the net set because every time I'd let the netting out, the raft would be blown over the top of the net and I'd have to start all over again and come back.

AW: That's a problem that has come up in several interviews. I remember Nels Thoreson in particular talking about trying to set in a farm pond near Miles City out of a rubber raft. Did your rubber raft have an inflatable floor or a floppy floor?

RD: It had a floppy bottom. Yeah.

AW: The only thing it wouldn't do was go in a straight line. Nels said that he has a slide of a rubber raft near the shore and a gill net set in the pond and you can see the net is in a perfect 'S' shape.

RD: Yes, that's how mine were set. Fortunately, I did get samples from those lakes and got some information on brook trout in western Montana. Tried to get a whole synopsis of the sampling that was done and a large array of samples to get information.

AW: So you went back to Bozeman for your master's and got that there?

RD: Right. I'd like to mention a little bit about the time I spent in the summers. One summer I worked prior to that in Bozeman with the fish and game department. That was the time Boyd Opheim and Bob Albrecht were there. We did a lot of things and had great times. But I also remember a little conflict that came about between Bob Albrecht and Boyd Opheim. Many a day we'd be riding down with our shocking equipment, doing some shocking in the streams, and I'd be sitting in the middle. Albrecht would be sitting on the door side and Opheim would be driving and they'd get in some hellacious arguments and I'd be right in the middle of that. They were shouting right across me and I felt real uneasy. There were some problems between those two guys and I guess there were some problems elsewhere in the state, too.

AW: Bob Albrecht was eventually fired because he wasn't doing the job properly. He was assigned to me in Missoula as a fisheries biologist and because of his superior

attitude and his inability to deal with the western ranchers, I said I couldn't use him. They assigned him to Opheim in Bozeman and you must have wound up with him.

RD: He did a stint up in Kalispell, too, with Frank Stefanich.

AW: That winter I was helping Frank net the Thompson Lakes and Bob was assigned to me.

RD: Is that the time we were catching these fish and Bob wasn't too familiar with the species and he was picking up squaw fish and identified them as lake trout?

AW: He was kinda led into it but he didn't know fish, that's true. Walt Allen met him at an AFS meeting back east. He hired him for two reasons – he could sing well when he was drunk and he'd never seen a beaver. In those days, Frank had an assistant by the name of John Echo who had acquired a southern accent and used the word "mackinaw" as an exclamation. Mack-ee-naw meant great or wonderful. And the first squaw fish that came out, Echo hollered, "mack-ee-naw" because it was a real large squaw fish and Albrecht assumed it was a lake trout.

RD: I understand later he wrote a paper on the edibility of squaw fish. I don't know if he ever did.

AW: I'm sure your work wasn't too pleasant then.

RD: No, it wasn't. There was certainly personality conflicts, both of them liked to party and I guess with the wives they went out and partied quite a bit. But maybe it was too much of the same personally, and they had some clashes.

AW: Now, Bob, let's talk about the next step in your education.

RD: Ok, I entered graduate school in 1958 under the direction of Doc Brown and my thesis was on the age and growth of brook trout in Montana. I worked primarily in the Beartooth Mountain range collecting samples of brook trout for my study. Also delved into the huge collection of brook trout scales that were collected statewide and supplemented with information I picked up from the Beartooths. I spent two long years in grad school and graduated the summer of 1960.

I applied for a job with the state but there were no positions open at the time. So I applied other areas and landed a job in Virginia in the fall of 1960 and spent two and a half years working in Virginia. The primary project was a striped bass project in the Kerr Reservoir and the Roanoke and Dan Rivers tributaries to the reservoir, trying to pick up information on the life cycle of the land-locked striped bass

population that had been introduced four years earlier.

In 1963 I heard from Laney Hanzel, who was a good friend of mine all the way through school. I had applied to the Department of Fish and Game and he said there was an opening. I applied to George Holton and heard that I'd been accepted and came to Montana in March 1963. That was quite a memorable change. A lot of our friends back in Virginia were telling us we were kinda crazy for going back there. Most of the people who lived in Virginia had lived there their whole life and never got out. They thought it was God's country and they didn't want to leave. I was kinda ironic because the day I left Lynchburg, the front page of the newspaper had a picture of Missoula, Montana, with heaps of snow on Main Street covering the parking meters. People said, "You're going out there? You're crazy. You have paradise here and you're going to that wild country in Montana?" The next day, we got the U-haul to move all our things back and they had three inches of snow in Lynchburg and we couldn't move because Lynchburg has lots of hills like San Francisco and no snow removal. It was kinda ironic.

AW: So your take-off was delayed a little while?

RD: A little while. Then we came back through Wisconsin and visited our folks.

The next experience we had was between Townsend and Helena. When we were traveling along, all of a sudden, a wheel came past us and flew into the ditch. It was a wheel from our trailer. Here we were stuck in no-man's land wondering what to do. In about 5 minutes a guy comes along and happened to have a threading machine and he rethreaded the bolts on the tire and put the tire back on. I gave Art a call from Helena and told him the problems and a few days later we made it to Missoula.

AW: And then you and I worked together till that fall when I transferred to Helena.

RD: Some of the projects I recall... it was in the winter and there was a project with aerators at Georgetown Lake where we tried to improve the oxygen content to prevent fish kill in the winter. There was also one at Brown's Lake. I remember going up to Georgetown several times with Bob Mitchell who clued me in as to what was going on and we spent several days trying to flush out lines and keep the lines open so they wouldn't ice over.

Also had some good times at Browns' Lake with Art Whitney. We'd get our work done early as possible and head on over to Trixie's saloon. That place really impressed me. There were banks of snow about ten feet high outside the saloon and sunshine would be real bright. You'd get into the saloon with only 2 15-watt

bulbs and a thousand antlers hanging all over the place. We'd come in and have a little refreshment before we'd go back home. Trixie always had a bunch of salad and hors d'oeuvres on the bar and we'd make that our lunch with a few beers. You'd come out of that place and it was so blinding it would take about 5 minutes to adjust your eyes because of the bright snow.

AW: Was that when Trixie's was downtown Ovando?

RD: Yeah, I remember Trixie had lived in Alaska as a trick rider.

AW: She was a McCormick from Ovando and went to Alaska and owned a bar there.

RD: I was pretty impressed in that place but it didn't have the same flavor after she moved it to the outskirts of Ovando.

AW: The whole Ovando community was quite a place.

RD: I don't know if it's changed that much, the town, maybe it has. Trixie's has. Anyway, that was some of my experiences with Art in Region 2.

AW: Then you moved up to Kalispell in spring or summer of '64?

RD: It was early summer of '64; I remember that quite well. It was a time when Kalispell was engulfed in the big '64 flood. We came up here and tried to get housing and it was pretty difficult because there were a lot of people evacuated from the floodplain and they were trying to find a place to live. Eventually we did find a place. In fact, we moved into Opheim's old rental and lived there for about a year and a half. Found this place we're living in now and been here ever since.

I'd like to talk a little about some of the big blunders I was involved with in this area. One of them was the mysis shrimp introduction made in 1968 which George Holton said was one of the biggest biological disasters that ever occurred in northwest Montana. He's probably right.

First of all, I should do a little bit of background. British Columbia, on one of the lakes up there, had some real success with growing large kokanee in the west arm of Kootenai lakes. They attributed that to the mysis shrimp that were in the system. I don't recall if it was planted there or if they were natural. I think they were planted, but I'm not sure. At any rate, they were catching kokanee that were 2 and 3 lbs. And everybody took notice of that. Several states and provinces thought this was the real 'cat's meow' as far as raising kokanee were concerned. So, through the press, it known what had happened up there and a lot of other states decided they

were going to start planting kokanee in their lakes. They were planted all the way from Lake Tahoe in California to Pend Oreille and all kinds of lakes throughout the northwest. So, Montana was one of the last ones to get on the bandwagon. We decided maybe we should get on it too and try to get some of these huge fish into Region 1. So, Shumacher and I went to Waterton Lake where most of the mysis shrimp were collected. In 1968 we went up there on two occasions. On the first occasion, we didn't catch very much; we weren't too successful. That was in the spring. In the following fall we went up and towed drift nets in the middle of the night while the shrimp were migrated up towards the surface and picked up a fair amount of shrimp and transported them back to Montana and planted them in the lakes.

It was kind of an enjoyable trip. We spent a few days up there. We drank beer during the competing with some California fish biologists up there at the time and they had bottom trawls with electric winches and everything; they were really into it and did a lot better at collecting than we did. Unfortunately, we were successful in collecting a fair sample of mysis shrimp. We had a hatchery truck where we kept them cold with ice water and brought them back and immediately planted them in about five or six lakes in northwestern Montana. Swan, Whitefish, Bitterroot, Ashley, Crystal, Holland, and Lindberg Lakes. By the time Holland and Lindberg were the last lakes we planted and what happened there I guess they were all dead by the time they got there. So fortunately we didn't get any success in survival in those two lakes. However, we did get very good success in Whitefish Lake, Swan Lake, and Bitterroot. As time went on, we sampled and started picking up more and more and density increased in those lakes. Oh, another lakes was MacGregor Lake.

In about 3 or 4 years all of a sudden we discovered something was going wrong and this was in Whitefish Lake where every year we'd take kokanee for the spawning operations for the hatchery. In the fall of that year we went up to the north end of Whitefish Lake where the spawning area was and set our nets out and, lo and behold, the kokanee were not there. We must have caught maybe 50 or 100 kokanee whereas previously we caught 100s and 100s of kokanee and got a good supply of eggs. The following year the same thing. There was something wrong. Something had happened to the kokanee. That's when we started thinking there was some problem with the mysis shrimp. MacGregor Lake was a lake where we stocked kokanee. We stocked 200,000 a year. So, we had these problems in the lake and we didn't really know what was happening except that the mysis densities were increasing.

We found out later that the success they had in the west arm of Kootenai Lakes was the nature of the mysis – normally they live on the bottom of the lake during the daylight hours and migrate to the surface at night and then return back to the

bottom as light increases in the morning. They call it negatively phototrophic. They have an aversion to light. Anyway, what happened here is that the mysis shrimp were coming up towards the surface at night and feeding on the zooplankton which was the main source of food for kokanee. At that time, because kokanee are strictly sight feeders, they don't come in contact with the mysis shrimp. By the time the mysis shrimp return to the bottom, they aren't available to the kokanee for food. That these shrimp were doing was consuming the food source of the kokanee, the zooplankton, the kokanee were getting nothing in return, since the shrimp weren't there when the kokanee were feeding.

So, we found out later in the west arm of Kootenai Lakes was an upwelling in this part of the lake where the mysis shrimp were forced into the thermocline area where the kokanee were feeding and, of course, this is where they were able to consume great quantities of mysis shrimp and reach their size. This was kind of a freak thing that happened and this upwelling doesn't happen in too many lakes.

There was another phenomena we found out later that even though we had fairly good Kokanee populations in Swan, Bitterroot, and Ashley Lakes and they did survive and become part of the food source in the lake, they didn't wipe out the food supply. Kokanee populations still thrive in those lakes as they do today. The main problem was the predator that was involved in this system whereas MacGregor Lake and Whitefish Lake have large populations of lake trout. These fish flourished in these situations. They had increased food supply – the mysis shrimp lived in the bottom and the lake trout increased in numbers. The juveniles were able to survive and increase in numbers with the increased food abundance provided by the mysis shrimp. As a result, the lake trout population expanded and the prey relationship in MacGregor Lake and Whitefish Lake changed dramatically. Whereas the prey population had been in great abundance. It switched around so the predator population overcame the prey population and as a result the kokanee were wiped out in MacGregor Lake and Whitefish Lake. Now the same situation in the other lakes which did not have this efficient predator, Swan, Ashley and Bitterroot, the populations remained relatively stable. They still have good populations of salmon in these lakes today. That's the theory behind it and I think it's true.

What happened later in 1981, this happened in 1968; by 1981 the first mysis shrimp was found in Flathead Lake. Steve Leathe was doing some fry sampling there and he picked up some in some of his fine mesh nets and in 1983 we went from the population where it was just barely visible to huge populations of mysis shrimp in Flathead Lake. As a result we had the same occurrence that happened up in Whitefish Lake. We had runs of excess of 50,000 fish coming up into MacDonald Creek and in one year time that dropped down to two to three

hundred. It was just a complete elimination of kokanee in Flathead Lake. It has never really recovered. Now there are some who theorize that part of the problem was because of habitat conditions that changed as far as logging and siltation, overfishing. A few years before that they caught thousands of fish in Skidoo Bay ice fishing; the ice fisherman caught their limits, but that to me is not the significant problem. The whole thing was the environmental ecological change that occurred in Flathead Lake with the advent of the mysis shrimp.

AW: One of the situations where something worked in one place, other people thought it would work other places. Montana wasn't the only state by any means. Other states were doing the same thing without understanding the whole relationship. In some cases, they did well; in some cases, they didn't. They got into Flathead Lake which is one of our major attractions and they mucked that up a bit.

RD: Not all people agree with me. But in my own mind, I think this is exactly what happened. I think we had problems, you know, we did studies trying to improve spawning areas in the Flathead River and we had fluctuations in the Flathead River where spawning was limited to kokanee, but this I think is one that put the "nail in the coffin" as far as kokanee are concerned.

AW: Well, how about some of the things you enjoyed doing up here?

RD: There's a lot of stream habitat work going on, pretty much in eastern Montana a lot and to some extent up here in the northwest. A lot of my work involved lake surveys and working with some of the bigger lakes in Montana outside of Flathead lake. Flathead Lake was Laney Hanzel's project, but I had a special interest in Lake Mary Ronan. We had a fishery there in the early '60s that had decreased in numbers. The fish had somehow disappeared. Kokanee fishing fell flat, there were very few caught but the ones that were caught were large. This indicated that there was poor survival of those fish that were planted. It may, in part, be because the fish were planted too small, maybe planted a little too early and ended up down in the mud. Some may have been too small to survive. Any rate, in the early '60s, the fishing was very poor. The catch rate was one fish in very five hours which is not acceptable to fishermen. Another thing it was only a summer fishery. There was no fishing in the winter because there were two resorts on the lake and people decided that we should save these fish for the summer fishermen. There should be no winter fishing. We decided we were going to try to provide a little more fishing for the lake so gradually we started a winter fishery that was restricted to weekend. Lo and behold, everyone thought winter fishing would be great because no one's hit the lake in the winter time. It was still the same thing – not very much at all. So we got together with the hatchery people and started stocking a little bit larger fish. We were more careful in how these fish were released into the lake and what time they

were released.

By the mid '60s, the fishing started to improve and we had some great fishing there by the '70s and '80s and opened up the fishing to winter fishing all the way to the middle of March. Winter fishing was terrific and about 80 percent of the people caught limits of salmon without affecting the summer fishery. We'd come back to the resort people and ask them how things were going. They were very happy with the fishing and here we had opened up a winter fishery as well.

Along with that we were monitoring water quality of the lake and did find out some real problems with the lake as far as oxygen temperatures go in late summer. As summer progressed, we had big oxygen depletions down in the lower part of the lake as far as 12 to 15 feet up from the bottom. When you're getting up that high you're getting closer to the thermacline area and in some years the area that we considered was habitable for kokanee and trout was not. By late summer, either the oxygen was too low down in the bottom (maybe the temperature was cool enough but there was no oxygen down there). The thermacline got smaller in the summer and there may have been only a couple of feet of habitable water where oxygen was high enough and water temperature was cool enough in the thermacline that kokanee could survive well. I don't know what it's like to this day but I'm sure it hasn't gotten any better. Of course, we have other problems now with Lake Mary Ronan with the introduction of exotic fish. Perch were planted in there and now we're getting perch out of there. You should see the nets last fall they were averaging about 35 perch per net and a lot of them were 12 to 14 inches long. There are three resorts on the lake and in a few years you are going to see some real effects of this perch population. It will have a dramatic effect.

AW: Yes, bucket biology is going on all over. Walleyes are being spread around. I just saw in the paper the other day where redside shiners were caught in the Big Hole River east of the divide.

RD: Of course, this latest thing with the whirling disease. All these years we thought that sculpins were great.

AW: They were as long as we didn't have whirling disease. That's one thing you and I can be kinda glad is that we aren't there to fight the whirling disease.

RD: One of the disturbing things I heard was at a meeting I went to a few days ago with Vincent and Peterson. They were at the Trout Unlimited and they were saying that in the Gallatin where they found no evidence of whirling disease, they checked the sculpins and didn't find any spores on those either. But where they did find whirling disease in trout they also found them in sculpins. So this is a little

disturbing that places where... you know we may find them in other waters.

AW: I think that's true, just the fact that we haven't looked a lot of places is the reason we don't know if they are there.

RD: Yeah, maybe in other species of fish we'll find them. Anyway, the other problem I see here in the northwest as a big blunder is the northern pike introduction. When I first came to this region there were two bodies with northern pike in them and one was Echo Lake, a closed basin lake where water can come in but no water can get out of it. And Lone Pine Reservoir, where there were some downstream effects going into the lower Clark Fork. We had some 60 bodies of water in northwestern Montana where northern pike populations were apparently dragged around by people who liked northern pike. I call them Norwegian pike because I think there's a lot of Scandinavians from back where you lived, where both of us lived, in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

AW: The northern got packed around because the northern were easy to pack around in a gunny sack. Now int he central part of the state with the advent of live wells the walleye is moving around the same way. You can move walleye in a live well but not a gunny sack.

RD: I understand now they are in Noxon Reservoir, too. I don't know if I should mention this or not, but you can cut it out if you want. You probably recall this one — the rehab of Horseshoe Lake and Lake Five. You were in Helena at the time. Frank Dunkle was the director. We wanted to get rid of all the fish in these three lakes. I can't remember what the other lake was called. There were three lakes in this chain. There was a commercial hatchery down below. We rehabbed the whole system and I remember Joe Huston and I... there's brook trout in this lower lake and in the stream that connects these two lakes. We were going to get rid of these brook trout so we were going to pour rotenone to them. We just poured concentrated rotenone and apparently there's underground springs that went to this hatchery and a few days later started killing some fish. I think the guy's name was King, and Skenokee Springs was the hatchery. He got wind that we had poisoned out those three lakes and he got to Helena and asked what was going on. At that time the whole thing was kept quiet. There was a payoff to him to pay for his fish.

AW: I think we had made a mistake and reimbursed him for it.

RD: Yes, I guess it was kept out of the press. So, as I mentioned before, the other things that I enjoyed was surveying inventory of lakes. We had about 650 lakes in northwestern Montana a lot of which are high mountain lakes. There's a lot of these lakes that you would expect to be good natural reproduction in good high

mountain lakes and there was about 60 percent that had almost none. To make these manageable and increase the fishing we did get stocking programs for them and got fisheries established in a lot of them. A lot of small pothole lakes were pretty easy to manage. Some of them we had rehab jobs and others had no fish at all.

AW: Region 1 has been blessed with a lot of small bodies of water that are pretty easy to manage. You can get them all together and it's pretty good.

RD: That's right. I did focus a lot on that type of management. Most of the small lakes outside of wilderness areas we covered; high mountain lakes with helicopters with Don Brown, Doug Get, and Cliff Higgins. The ones that had established a good fish population we left alone. Those that didn't, we tried to get a stocking program and manage them with stocking every 3 or 4 years with fry. I think it's worked pretty well in a lot of these lakes. So, that and trying to keep the westslope cutthroat as a viable entity. Now we're coming into the bull trout problem which I think in the Flathead River drainage, high country lakes, back to the change in ecology of the lake because of the mysis shrimp. Dolly Vardin have limited spawning areas; they have to go upstream to spawn. I think there's predation because of some of the smaller fish coming down and creating problems. You also have the lake whitefish on the increase too, that prey on small fish. I think those problems are related to mysis shrimp and the whole ecology change of the lake in the species composition. Also lately we're seeing a decline in the perch population in east bay. Those fish aren't there like they used to be. Lake trout are roaming around looking for more forage and are foraging on perch, too. The Swan River, for example, as an example of another drainage, the bull trout are actually increasing and we're having very good success with bull trout. I'm sure there's problems with degradation of the habitat through logging and things like that. The main impact in the Flathead Drainage is the change that has occurred.

AW: Probably should think about getting close to retirement and would you do it all over again?

RD: Yes, I would. I enjoyed it tremendously. I can't think of a better profession to be in. I enjoyed all the years I worked for the state of Virginia and the state of Montana. I appreciated the opportunity to work for this department. When I retire from the job the main things I miss are the people I worked with. I had a great relationship will all the people I worked for. I enjoyed being in the field, too. I wanted to remain a hip-boot biologist because you can work out in the field. I tried to stay out of the office as much as I could. The problems I see right now, the things I don't miss, is the increase activity with the public and all the problems arising. People wanting different demands from the department. This the part I

don't enjoy.

AW: One of the younger people told me that when we worked the job was fun. I agreed with him. I feel like you do, it was a good life.

RD: Getting into it now, things would be different. For that time period, it was good. Going back to the years I worked, divide the time span into three different times – the mid '60s, mid '70s. Just starting out we worked real long hours. There was no overtime. We worked 60 to 70 hours a week to get the job done. There was no such thing as overtime and getting paid for come time. We spent a lot more time in the field than biologists are doing now. The computers turned me off and I felt I was too old to change. To be a biologist these days you have to be pretty sharp working with computers. We fished, shock fished, gill netted, lots of field work. We worked mostly with the public through sportsmen's clubs. We didn't have too many special interest groups that we had to contend with. Fishing was excellent; we had liberal fish limits. Just about this time, some time in the mid '60s, we started to get a little concerned with habitat degradation. This was about the time we had the first stream bill enacted back in '63. This involved road construction, mainly bridge. Anytime there was any contact with the stream, from federal, state, and county highway departments, it excluded the forest service at that time.

AW: It didn't affect any federal agencies, but most federal agencies signed an agreement with us to act as if it did.

RD: Yes, we were starting to get concerned about logging impacts and problems with heavy silt coming from logging projects. From the mid '70s to the mid '80s, well this is a period where I got into Lake Mary Ronan and water quality stuff and started getting a stream and lake inventory. Then the mid '70s to the mid '80s, the stream projection law, I guess it was the 310 bill, started to include private landowners where they were encroaching the streams. There was a period where they established minimum streamflows and particularly in eastern Montana. We had a lot of proposed micro hydro projects in this area and spent a few years in the field trying to pick up information on water flows, minimum flows. Tried to establish minimum flows on several creeks in north and western Montana, so we could keep these streams in the event the micro hydro projects were to prove that we could limit them to the amount of water they took off. We continued the lake and streams surveys and started to work more with other agencies. Worked with Plum Creek on their logging sales. During this period we increased our staff in this region with BPA studies, studies impacting reservoir construction, past reservoir construction, Flathead Lake, Kookanusa Lake, and Hungry Horse Reservoir.

In the mid '80s to the present, we have our new headquarters. The fisheries part

right now is the size of the old building. The old quonset hut. Now, we got a period of extended growth and the impacts on the watershed were considerable. This period of illegal fish introductions, the mysis shrimp impacts, the population of bull trout, and the westslope cutthroat in the drainage and Kootenai Reservoir, trying to establish westslope cutthroat populations. As the reservoir was built and competition increased the westslope cutthroat dwindled to the point where it is probably getting pretty rare up in that Kootenai Reservoir right now. That was a time too we got into some changes in Region 1 with going to certain waters where we started planting fish in some small lakes for catch and release and trophy trout fishing. We must have about 7 or 8 lakes where we have this type of management. We also had an attempt to use this on our wild trout fishery on the Thompson River. We did a study on that for 2 or 3 years and found out there was really no change in the structure of the fish population during that period. So that one was dropped but we do have some small lakes that were stocked for trophy fishing. In my opinion, we might be going overboard with the trophy lake fishing because I think in a few lakes, about 4 or 5 lakes might be enough, but these are stocked fish and the trophy lake limit is 1 fish over 22 inches, which I don't think most of these lakes produce a fish that big. My idea would be to bring that fish limit down to 15 or 16 inches so a person had a chance.

AW: The limit at 22 inches is essentially zero.

RD: That's right. The other point I can see where there'd be a certain amount of lakes spaced out around the region where people could have the opportunity to catch a large fish but some people can start rebelling because they've taken some good lakes where people were catching fish very fast and they got a lot of 12 inch fish. They've taken these lakes and turned them into trophy fish lakes and they don't get the use they used to. Bob Shumacher would probably agree with me on that.

AW: It's a smaller group of people you are satisfying with this.

RD: Yes, that's right. They talk about catch and release fishing and trophy fishing. I see this more as an area where you have wild trout waters. I think that's fine. You can reduce populations in a hurry by taking all the large fish out of a system. In stocked lakes it's put-and-take and it really doesn't matter if you catch a fish or not. There's always more fish to put back into the system.

To my recollection, we only had 2 or 3 streams where we had catchable plants, 7 to 9 inch fish. We pretty much kept them out of the system. There was one on the Swan River we tried in the late '60s and early '70s on catchables we kept a creel census to find out how many fish were returned to the system. We considered about a 40 percent return as being acceptable from hatchery plants. We tried this

for one summer and we found out we got a return of about 7 to 8 percent and we eliminated the hatchery plants in the Swan River. We had one in the Thompson River for a while and we had one in the Pleasant Valley Fishery River. Most of our hatchery plants were three to four inch fish we used for lake management. It was very important for management of lakes where you are totally dependent on hatchery fish.

AW: Lakes were a larger part of the management program here than in any other region.

RD: Yes, that's right. He had lots of lakes. Stream fishing was primarily small fish with the exception of the bull trout population in the Flathead River. Stream fishing was pretty limited to 10 to 12 inches. We sure don't have the growth rates here like they have east of the divide where you can catch fish about 12 to 17 inches which are probably the average sizes.

AW: Well, anything else you'd like to say?

RD: No, but thanks. It was about 25 years, 1963 to 1991, and I enjoyed every minute of it. I sure enjoyed working with you, Art.

AW: I feel the same way, Bob.

RD: Oh, the other thing I was going to say. Things have changed in Helena, too. We worked pretty much directly with the Helena staff on things that we needed and what we did. There was a lot less red tape to go through to get anything done. When we did a rehab job a couple sheets of paper and we'd get the job done. Now, you have to jump a whole pile of hoops to get anything done, go through other branches of the department as well as outside the department.

AW: Yes, the department is getting bigger and other agencies have more things to do with what we do and it takes a lot longer to get anything done.

RD: You get pretty discouraged after a while. That's the time you retire and you and I have already done that!

End of Interview.

Transcribed by Margie Peterson.
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