HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #397 - Sides A/B

Subject: Ellis Mason - With Video

Date: January 18, 1994

Place: Marshall Home - Drewsey, Oregon

Interviewer: Conly Marshall

CONLY MARSHALL: ... Ellis Mason, he has been with the ODFW so long I think he owns it. I'm not too sure whether he owns it or ... He retired a short time ago. Ellis, where was you born and raised? Where did you come from, back East, down South, or in the middle?

ELLIS MASON: Well I was born and raised in the hills between Turner and Jefferson in the Willamette Valley. And my great-granddad came over there in 1855, and homesteaded in there. And that's actually, now Turner is south of Salem a ways, and Jefferson, it is in the hills there. And that's where my mother was born and raised in that same ---

CONLY: Around Turner, right around there.

ELLIS: Yeah. But when we went to town we always came into Turner, there was no roads off on the other side going west and towards Jefferson. So the road we came, went to town on, would come into Turner.

CONLY: Did you go to school in Turner, or did you go to Salem, or where?

ELLIS: I went to school up in, in a little; Summit Hill was the name of it, Summit Hill School, a little one-room school. There was 5 or 6 of us in the school. I had two sisters in it, and I had two cousins, and there was a neighbor that went to school part-time there. And we went there, I went to school for seven years and never had a classmate, I was the

only one in my class.

CONLY: Well, I don't doubt that.

ELLIS: So that's where I was born and raised there. The same place my mother was born and raised.

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: And then when we got ready to go to high school, I have a sister a couple years older, and another one a couple years younger, and then my folks bought a farm down south of Salem, near Chemawa Indian School. So we moved down there then on a farm so that we could go to school there.

CONLY: I got a cousin that lives right there by the Chemawa Indian Reservation, or the Chemawa School.

ELLIS: Oh yeah.

CONLY: And he was an instructor there for a while. But that's where you ---

ELLIS: That's where I lived when I went to school, high school.

CONLY: High school.

ELLIS: Went to high school in Salem.

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: Then after I got out of high school, of course I was born and raised on a farm. And when we went to town, like on the hills above Turner, why we always went in in a horse and buggy. And ---

CONLY: Now Ellis, what years was these? How long ago has this been?

ELLIS: Well I was born there in 1915.

CONLY: Was you?

ELLIS: Yeah. See that makes me pretty near 79 years old now. But like I say, when we went to town, we'd get in the horse and buggy, and we traveled with the horses in those

days. They just didn't walk along, we'd trot them all day to go into Turner. And occasionally we'd go into Salem. And my folks never had a vehicle, a motorized vehicle, until 1926. They bought an old Model-T Ford; it was two years old, a 1924 model. And that was our first ---

CONLY: Vehicle.

ELLIS: --- first vehicle we had. So we, horses, as far as going to town, it's pretty much retired in those days. And then after I got out of high school, why being farmers in the depression years, you know, you didn't have money to do the things you wanted to do.

CONLY: That's right.

ELLIS: And the folks would like to have you do. So I worked on the folk's farm, and I had neighbors that had fields that they let me, I'd farm on them on a share basis. I could raise potatoes, or put strawberries in, and they'd get a percentage of the profits from it. Now I ended up, I was the night dryer man in a prune dryer. And back in those days prune dryers; drying prunes was a big thing.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: And I was just a kid, and that's a pretty responsible job, you know, a lot of work went into getting those prunes on the trays and things like that. And they'd give the responsibility to a kid 18 years old, or 17 or 18 years old was quite a responsibility.

So I was working there one night in the prune dryer, and my neighbor down the road a ways came over, and he had just, he was a couple years younger than I was, and said that --- this was in 1935, that Oregon State was starting this course in Wildlife Game Management. And that he wanted to go, and he said, "I'm going." But he says, "I'm just like you are, my folks don't have any money either, and so we're going to have to batch." So he said, "Why don't you quit this job and we'll go over and batch there and go to school, take this course in Fish and Game Management."

Well my mother was working in town at that time, going in so many days a week, and doing some work. And one of them was a, kind of a, way up in the army deal in the National Guard, and she was working there. And I used to go in town at times and work for her too; I'd do some of her garden work, do things like that to make a few extra dollars. And so my mother told this Mrs. White about that, and so when George, her husband, come home for dinner that day why she told him about it. Well he just went to the telephone and called Dean Showenfield, who was the Dean of Agriculture at Oregon State College, he knew him. And he says well he has a boy there that would like to come over and go to college, but he doesn't have any money, and he is going to have to have a job in order to go to school. So Dean Showenfield told him to send him over and I'll see that he gets a job.

Well my day off, which I didn't have a day off, but I was working nights, because they was still putting the prunes on the trays and stuff during the day. I went over there and talked to him, and he sent me over to this Roland Dimmick, who they had appointed to be the, head up the Fish and Game Department. And the Dean told him to give me a part-time job there, so he did. So I had me a job.

And so I worked all four years through college for this department there, Fish and Game, in the school. I had various jobs, they --- oh for a while they, a couple years there we had some beaver we kept on a place there, in more or less captivity, and I would check them every day, is one of my jobs. And I worked at the Vet Building some, and things like that. So anyway, I worked all through college.

And when I got out why I guess the Game Department, they called it the Game Commission in those days. At the time I worked for them, I worked for them for 41 years; they had about four different names. Now it is the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. So I applied for a job, and they had this job over in the Burns country. Well I had

never seen it, except in 1937 I came over on a field trip from Oregon State ---

CONLY: That's the first time you had ever been here?

ELLIS: That's the first time I'd ever been over here.

CONLY: Oh my god.

ELLIS: And we went down on the Steens Mountains, and on this field trip, and I remember we came up through John Day. I can still remember down toward Mount Vernon, we spent one night there at an old grange hall. And they had a big program there and give all of these students an insight on the wildlife and things like that. Anyway I went on down on the Steens with them then, and John Scharff was down there then. He came here in 1935, like I think that makes him before --- that he was born and raised up in Monument, out of John Day about 60 miles. So we were down on the Steens, and he asked me how I liked this country. And I said, "Well I sure, it is sure interesting to see this country, but I sure wouldn't want to live here."

CONLY: (Laughter)

ELLIS: I was just a kid, you know.

CONLY: God forsaken sagebrush country, huh?

ELLIS: John still likes to tell people about this, what I said. Right now I figure since 19--- I graduated in '39, the first graduating class. I think there was seven colleges in the United States started this course in 1935.

CONLY: Is that right?

ELLIS: And Oregon State was the only one on the west coast.

CONLY: This was the first one?

ELLIS: That was the first class in Fish and Game Management in the United States.

CONLY: I'll be damned.

ELLIS: And there was seven colleges started it that year. And like I mentioned, Oregon

State was the only one on the west coast. Anyway I got out of school, and by gosh they had a job in Burns. So they --- here I come, you know. I've been here so long now they can't get rid of me.

CONLY: They can't even run you out.

ELLIS: But it is interesting how things, you just have to --- things just fall in place, things just worked out good for me. I was able to get a job with them. And I came over here and I didn't know what I was going to be doing.

CONLY: Now what year did you come here?

ELLIS: I came here to stay in 1939.

CONLY: 1939.

ELLIS: And they had, had the, the government had put up some money, they called it Pitman Robinson money, and they set up a sage grouse project, to work on the sage grouse, so that's what I did. I came here, and I went around the country, and I talked to ranchers. And in order to build up the habitat for the sage grouse, we liked to, would go to a rancher, and if he had a spring that needed developing, which most of the ranchers had, was in that category, they let us, if they'd let us fence, oh say a couple acres, or maybe a little more, or a little less below the spring, fixed in to keep the cattle and things off of it. And we would develop their spring, we built the trough, dug out the spring, it was all hand done, handwork. Why then for us developing and building, we built the trough for them and everything.

CONLY: How many of you was there, Ellis?

ELLIS: There was, I was the only one on the project, but I had somebody working with me. One or two people, usually just one other individual.

CONLY: Was there anybody else here at Burns? Was you ---

ELLIS: Well yeah, one of them was old Pat O'Toole's dad, Mike O'Toole.

CONLY: Is that right?

ELLIS: And remember those, the twins went with me one time to look at a place up, over, out of Buchanan. Those twin boys went along, Dan and ---

CONLY: Yeah, Tom.

ELLIS: Tom, yeah. I remember them because they was 7, 8 years old, something like that. And they could open the gates, but they couldn't close them. And boy the road we went was a lot of gates, I remember that. They'd open the gates for me, but I'd have to go through and then ---

CONLY: Want to back up your ... lamb ranch, back off up in there someplace.

ELLIS: But it was interesting. And I spent all that summer of '39, and the fall of that, in developing springs. And over around Westfall, I developed some over in that country. And various places around the country like that.

CONLY: Ellis, before we go any farther, we'll go right back into it. What was your area? Where was you, all of Harney County, and Malheur, Grant, or what?

ELLIS: At that time I covered all of Southeastern Oregon. If something came up in Ontario for example, over in Malheur County

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CONLY: Oh you was?

ELLIS: --- if something came up over in ---

CONLY: Lake County.

ELLIS: --- Lake County, well I'd go over there. Now we had a few uprisings, you know, and something like ---

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: --- oh various things. Like one of them was up at Ukiah, went up there for a month or two one time because the elk was a moving into the hay stacks so bad up there,

and they wondered just what are we going to do about it. So they sent me up there to talk to the ranchers.

CONLY: So you was all over Eastern Oregon?

ELLIS: So what we decided to do then, what I came up with in visiting with these ranchers, that we'd have to reduce some of the elk herds. And we would also have a special season and reduce some of the animals, because we had too many for the habitat. And so that's what I did. And we also had a special season. I was only up there for a month, maybe two months for a while on this, deciding what to do.

And then soon thereafter I got an old Army truck, belonged to the Game Commission, and it was the only four-wheel drive they owned. And so they sent me up there when we had the special season, and I stayed with some of the ranchers up there. And that's the kind of projects.

But the first year I did quite a lot of springs, like 8 or 10 springs on different rancher's property, and they let us fence it in. Well the end result is I kind of questioned, not knowing at that time, actually what would be the best type of a project to increase the habitat for sage grouse. Because we soon found out that sage grouse, 98% of their year round diet is sagebrush, for the adults. When they're young, the young ones when they're first born, for three months, well they eat lots of little grass and various things like that. And they gradually get to eating more and more sagebrush. So really food wasn't a problem for the sage grouse.

And then the next winter they sent me over on the Tillamook burn area for a couple, I was over there a couple months, you know. Tillamook County had a terrific big fire.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: Just deluded that whole country over there. And they thought well maybe it would

be a good idea if we could go in there and re-seed some projects, re-seed some land for a project to increase the habitat of the wildlife of all species in there. So I went over, and I was alone, I picked out areas that should be seeded, and we used different mixtures. And when I got them located, well then I had two or three people went with me then. And we went around and planted those areas that I had picked out. And then I come back over here.

CONLY: Let me ask you on that burn over there, was there quite a death kill of burned animals and stuff that you ---

ELLIS: You know what, that was a terrifically hot fire, and it burned a big area.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: And there was carcasses found, quite a group of carcasses found in those areas there. But I had good cooperation of all the --- there was some old railroads in those days; spurs went back up into the logging camp. And when I got around --- of course I finally took a couple horses over and used horses to pack the seed in. But a lot of those areas there was, if there wasn't any roads why we'd, where that railroad went, why we got an old cart and put on the railroad and we'd pack it back in like this, so the horses wouldn't have to pack it so far. But that was just ---

CONLY: Now here again, Ellis, how many of you was there? Two or three of you, or one or two of you?

ELLIS: Well when we went to do the seeding, there was always two, and sometimes three, or something like that.

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: It was just a project that, you just in those days you used your own judgment. If you picked out a place to plant it, and were ready to seed it, why we just, the employees there, why we'd figure out how we thought it would be best, and that's what we did.

They'd let us do it; we didn't have to go to any superiors or any-thing to find out from them how to do it. They wanted you to make the decision on how it was going to be done, and things like that.

CONLY: Did you have any cooperation from loggers, ranchers, any-body like that, or did they just as soon you --- the game and stuff was gone and ---

ELLIS: I would say we had excellent cooperation. Like in developing these springs, we couldn't have done it without the cooperation of the ranchers. And I tried to get acquainted with the ranchers and it's --- when they find out that I was a farmer boy, and I knew what their problems had, and things like that, why I was invited to stay. Like when I was making these surveys to pick out these springs I'd go someplace --- I remember over to, up out of Ironside one time I stopped in there and there was an old couple there, and I visited with them. And I thought well maybe I could camp there in their, around their barn or something. They said, well they had been wanting to go on a vacation, but he said, "We got a couple milk cows and we just can't go. We'd sure like to." Well I said, "Well I can --- if you throw in a few, if you are willing to let me camp here, well I'll milk the cow." "Can you milk a cow?" "Well," I said, "I'd milked cows ever since I was a little kid." So boy they took that right up. I stayed there and milked their cows and they were gone for --

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CONLY: They thought an old kid out of college didn't know how to pull a faucet, huh?

ELLIS: Unusual that a kid just out of college would know how to milk a cow. And I told them well we always had three or four cows on the farm. And my dad, we had an old easy milk cow, easy to milk, and my dad would milk the rest of them, and I'd milk her. And did the cleaning of the barns and the feeding. And we used to come out about the same time like that. But that's the kind of projects we were working on during those times.

And then the next year, why in the '40's, we went into trapping and transferring beaver. They had a crew trapping beaver in the Willamette Valley, and we had two or three pickups hauling them over in this country. Well my job was when they come to Southeastern Oregon was to pick out streams that we felt should have some beaver on, there would be an advantage to prevent erosion and ... on the creeks. So I covered most of Southeastern Oregon picking out places to plant these beaver. When the truck comes why I go with them and I knew right where they were going, we'd plant them right there.

CONLY: What was --- then you was saying the beaver wasn't much in these creeks at that time. Had they been trapped out, or they died out?

ELLIS: Well I think they'd been trapped out pretty much years and years ago, you know. When the old trappers first come to this country the beaver was the, one of their number one fur animals. I think, I may be in error, but I think the name Malheur means disaster, like the Malheur River means disaster or something. I don't know whether that is Indian or French, whatever. The trappers had been there, trapped all winter, and they got a big flash flood and it got all of their furs, they'd worked all winter trapping, it just destroyed them all. So they named that Malheur, and I think that means disaster.

CONLY: Could be.

ELLIS: Things like that, you know. But yeah, there was places now, some places I went like the Whitehorse Mountains and the Whitehorse Ranch which, you know was, well John Devine came there in 1886 or '87.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: He was our first permanent settler that lived in Harney County. Well at the time in that, '39 and '40's why they, there was quite a few beaver there, they didn't need any more.

CONLY: Yeah, you see --- now I was on the head of the little Whitehorse in '41. I worked

for my dad out at Disaster Peak.

ELLIS: Oh yeah.

CONLY: And for Arch Meyers.

ELLIS: Oh.

CONLY: And I was up on the head of the Little Whitehorse Creek. I had been in the Trout Creek area for about two or three years prior to that, out of school. So yeah, I kind of understand. But you did quite a bit of transplanting the beaver primarily for your, or did you do the most of that?

ELLIS: Well most all over Harney County.

CONLY: Was it?

ELLIS: Mostly in Malheur County, some in --- did I say Malheur, I meant Harney County.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: And some in Malheur and Lake County too. I covered most of the Fremont Forest there in a matter of a week or so just picking out possible locations. And I could talk to ranchers and natives there and they could tell me places to be, they suggested I look at, that possibly need trapping. But that's the project I worked on there then.

And then in the late '40's I was in the National Guard, and had been for a number of years. And then when the war broke out I was gone in the service then for about four, pretty near five years. And then I came back in 1945. And when I come back why they, a fellow by the name of John McKeene was head of the Game Department in Portland, he asked me what area I'd like to work in. I said, "Oh I want to go back to Harney County."

CONLY: You did come back.

ELLIS: And he said, "I knew you would say that." And so I headed right over here, and I've been here ever since. And like I've said, told a lot of people, they can't get rid of me now, I'm here to stay.

CONLY: You bet. Well you know --- do you remember on the Steens Mountains, up around Sage Creek and back up in Little Fish Creek and all through that country when there was a lot of sheep, quite a lot of sheep through there? That's where we used to, when we lived on the lake, that's where we used to go up there and go deer hunting, you know, on the Fish Creeks. And I remember those sage hens; you was talking about sage hens. They fly up, and if they flew towards the sun they would dang near blacken out that sun. But I remember something else that has always been kind of strange to me. There was, it seemed like an awful lot of yellow flowers, sunflowers or stuff like that at that time. There was a lot of sheep and stuff like that. Did that have anything to do with feed or anything for the birds, or anything like that, Ellis, that you could ever figure out? It has always been a question in my mind, and I always kind of wondered about it.

ELLIS: Well I think, you know, when the old homesteaders first started coming here everybody had horses of course. And then a lot of them started going into the sheep business and the homesteaders coming in they begin to recognize Southeastern Oregon as a cattle country, they ... the cattle country. And there was a bunch of grass here, and so the cowmen started coming in as well as the sheep men. And there was a lot of sheep, for example on the Steens Mountain, you know, they claim that years and years ago why there was probably close to 100,000 sheep trying to summer up on the Steens Mountains.

CONLY: Oh, I think so.

ELLIS: Because it was the highest elevation. It is just a little under 10,000 feet in elevation. And of course they were converging on the Steens in the late summer because the higher elevation and the grass was a little greener up there. And so it's, it just progressed on like that. And the sheep men, lots of places they had too many sheep for their own good, I'm sure.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: And then the cattle competed with them, and of course a lot of the cattlemen and the sheep men weren't getting along too good, all because of the competition for feed. And it's, it just went on like that. And conditions were altogether different then, just like the wildlife in those days. Wildlife has come and gone, historically, all through the years, you know. And it's, there has definitely been competition of wildlife and livestock, whether it is cattle or sheep.

Well you're speaking of the, like on the Steens in the homestead days. When they come in there, you know, why a lot of the old homesteaders they'd bunch their, quite a few would move into one place. Virginia Valley, up out of Princeton, why there was homesteaders come in there. I knew Ernie Quier there real well, and he homesteaded there, came in 1910. Well his, Fred Peters, his wife's sister's husband was over at Adobe Flat from there. And there was quite a lot of people in there. And they'd get a gathering like that, why the first thing you know they had a school a going. And then a lot of those homesteaders would starve out in a matter of 5, or 6, or 8 years, and then they'd move the school someplace, or abandon it, and go on. But it was a real challenge for the homesteaders coming to an area.

Southeastern Oregon was pretty much universal, but the Steens was a classic example of it. And I heard the story that, you know, there was no sagebrush in Harney County back in those times, and everything was just bunchgrass. And it was up stirrup high to your saddle horse. And I asked this old fellow that came there in 1910 and homesteaded, I asked him if there was sagebrush there. Well he said, "Let me tell you my story." He said, "We used to go out, we'd usually take four horses abreast, and we'd drag sagebrush for a week and break it off." Now you don't drag young sagebrush and break it off, most of it will just pop right back up and keep a growing. And he said, "After

we dragged it for a week why we'd come back then with a wagon, we'd pick up that old sagebrush and haul it in and that was our winter's fuel supply." Now when they tell you a story like that, why you know that that's factual, it isn't somebody's memory.

Lots of times you'll talk to somebody and they'll tell you that something happened years ago, and they'll tell you how they remember it, and if they just, if it is just a matter of their memory, some other old timer will tell you an exactly different story, because they remember it.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: But when they have a story like dragging their sagebrush, I mean that was what they used in their cook stoves to get them through the winter, why they --- you know that is factual to me.

CONLY: That's what we had to do around Voltage.

ELLIS: Sure.

CONLY: We done that every fall over there, we'd take two team on each end of a big long chain, just like Cats and ... and drag it, and then we'd throw it on them old hay wagons. Dirty stinking job, but that --- yeah that's ---

Ellis, do you remember at that time as going around to that lower country, what was they, if any game was there down low? Was it still all up in the mountains, or was it still down low, or what was it?

ELLIS: No, I think there was, in the wintertime they all moved to the lower elevations. Like these homesteaders that homesteaded during this Virginia Valley that I was talking about, I asked them about --- and you get acquainted with those old timers like that and they, you soon learn that they are just a telling you a story or whether there is facts about it.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: When they've got a story, and I ask these same old timers about what was the deer population like on the Steens Mountains in those days. Well they said we all tracked coyotes in the wintertime in order to get a little cash, in order to buy our beans and flour to get us through the winter, winter months. And he said if any of us saw a deer track, now he says not the deer, but if we saw a deer track the word got around. So and so saw a deer track in a certain canyon. He says that's what the deer population was like in those days. Now I think that's factual, because several old timers had told me that. And these same fellows told me about they would get together, oh four or five different years, and they'd take the team of horses and wagons and they would go up north of Harney Valley up in that Rattlesnake Creek country, there is an old spring up there. Can't think of the name of it now. And they, he also told me that's the hardest water he had ever, was around, couldn't get a lather out of soap on it. But they were going up there to hunt deer. And if there was any deer on the Steens like he said, real unusual to see a deer track there, well they wouldn't be taking a team of horses and a wagon going 50 miles up there to hunt deer like that. So you know that there was no deer there at that time.

And there is other stories that, well you take old Peter Skene Ogden when he came in here in 1826, or something like that. In their diaries they went without meat for a long period of time.

CONLY: Finally starved ---

ELLIS: In their diaries they found a notation there where they finally found a bunch, or a herd of antelope. And so it is mentioned that they had a supply of meat to last them for a while. So the antelope and deer population was extremely low in those times.

And there is other examples, well come right here at home in Drewsey, old Merle McMullen, I got well acquainted with him years ago, right after the war, and he told me about the deer population and things. And he told me that he had some friends over in

Portland that wanted to come over here deer hunting. And he did his best he could to talk them out of it, but they wanted to come. And it took them days and days to get here with the horses. And they went up toward Miller Flat, Dollar Basin country, and they spent a week or two up there, and they hadn't seen a thing. And he said they were hunting deer then just like we hunt elk now. He was telling me this 30, 40 years ago. He said if you got on a bunch of tracks of deer in those days, you stayed with them because you might go for days and not find another track in them.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: But that's how scarce the deer were. "To top that off," he said, "we finally took up a collection and bought a calf from old Mike Acton." Now old Mike was a, you know him --

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CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: --- as well as I did, he was an old, old timer here.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: And in those days they were leaving the cattle out until the snow run them off the hills a lot.

CONLY: Oh yeah.

ELLIS: So by golly they bought a calf from Mike, and so they had the meat to get them by for a period of time like that. When they come out they never did, never killed a deer, never got any. But when they went down though, he, Merle went to Mike Acton and paid him for the calf that they had butchered. And Merle (Mike) said, "Well I'm glad you boys was able to get some meat." He said, "Thanks a lot." Because you know beef ... now days, but that story like that tells you that there wasn't hardly any deer in this Drewsey and Malheur Forest, today's, compared just like on the Steens.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: There wasn't any then. As I view the deer population they just gradually built up from back in those times. They built up to a period of time --- there was an old fellow, Wayne Stewart, he has been dead many years, and he was, had a ranch, the Murderers Creek Ranch, over on the south fork of the John Day River. Now that's where Florence Scharff was raised up there at the Rock Pile Ranch on the south fork. Well a fellow name of Alley Meyers and this Wayne Stewart was up in Murderers Creek in 1937, and that goes back quite a ways. But they estimated 10,000 deer died up in that basin, that winter.

CONLY: In 1937.

ELLIS: '37.

CONLY: I know that's, wasn't that the reason it was named Murderers Creek was --- or am I imagining ---

ELLIS: No, that's the story. I've heard that same thing, yes. But the thing is, the point I'm trying to make, that back, prior to the First World War there was practically no deer. And they just gradually built up until there was too many deer. So they estimated then that 10,000 deer died. Now an estimate means ---

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: That means there was a lot of deer died.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: The numbers are insignificant, I mean, there was a lot of them died. Well in 1939, see I was working for the Game Department then and they had their first antler less season, or either sex season, in order to alleviate the damage. Because you can just imagine the number of deer that was in that Murderers Creek Basin, which is on the south fork of the John Day River. How they, when there are that many starving to death, they just ate themselves out of house and home. They killed much of the browse species in there, and just killed out a lot of it. And so there was way too many.

1939 then, the Game Department had their first season, and I was on a checking station, checking these hunters in, which we had several stations around. And I checked out there at Dayville, another boy was with me, over 800 or 900 deer at that one checking station that they came out through there. Now that is a lot of deer. And that --- the records of the Game Department show that there was a little over 16,000 deer killed by hunters in that period of time.

CONLY: Was they allowed to kill two, one, a dozen?

ELLIS: Yes, they were --- I don't remember now just what it was. I'm not sure just what it was. But you could kill lots of places during the regulation at that time. Well, but normally in Western Oregon you could kill, if you bought a deer tag, you could kill two black tails, or one mule deer, whichever you wanted to do.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: But they had a lot of --- it was an unlimited hunt for deer. So we know that there was that many killed. And then just two years before they estimated 10,000 deer died. So you can imagine what a terrific overpopulation of deer now that we had. Now that population was high pretty much all over the country then. And it just leveled off then, and it stayed high, too high, in many places. We --- one bad thing about that season there was that the general public thought that was just a big slaughter, and thought it was terrible. And you mention in other areas we'd have an over population of deer, we want to have a season to reduce the population. Boy the general public got up in arms and wouldn't let us have a season so to speak, or the condition went back down; allow us to have a season.

Anyway, the population stayed high like that up until, oh about 1960. And then I gathered all these years, I was gathering herd composition in the fall to determine what the increase of the fawn were. For example I averaged 82 fawn per 100 does all through

the years from right after the war, '45 when I came back, until 1960. We averaged a herd of antelope, a 100 antelope does would have 80 fawn, with 82 fawn.

CONLY: Antelope or deer?

ELLIS: I mean deer, I'm talking about deer, I'm sorry.

CONLY: Mule deer, okay ... That's fine.

ELLIS: Yeah, they had an average of 82 fawn per 100 does. Well the next year there was only 41 or 42 fawn per 100 does. Now that's, this is going into the winter, you see.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: And as it so happens the population has stayed down like that, and it is still going down. It is just amazing to see. Back when the homesteaders come there was no deer, and they gradually built up until say the mid '30's to the '40's, in that period of time, we had too many deer. It leveled off with an abundance of deer, then it started down in 1960. And the reason for that was the fawns just weren't surviving. You see the old does weren't giving birth to them or something like that, and the population ... In short the life of the deer in the country when the homesteaders came here, there was very few, and then built up. In the late '30's we had too many, and it stayed high like that until 1960, then just started --- It isn't an up and down situation. This year you would have a lot, the next year you wouldn't have many, and so on. It was just a long trend like that. So our deer population now, everybody knows it is way down.

CONLY: How do you remember when you first come into this country, being from someplace else, how do you remember the grass and the feed, and the brush? Did this look like a terrible desolate country? Well how did you see it as, what was there? How has it changed, or has it changed? Or is it --- I guess, I don't know what I'm trying to ask other than how you seen it in your eyes as to feed and stuff.

ELLIS: Well I would say in the late '30's when I came here, there was a lot of places that

obviously, where you had a concentration of livestock whether it is deer, or cows, or sheep, that there was places that was real obviously over-grazed. I don't think there was any question about that. But you know the livestock people, both sheep and cattlemen, they were knowledgeable and could see what was taking place. And most of them started managing their livestock and animals so that they was alleviating and doing destruction to the land like that. And it's just over true, right up until this very day. Most of your livestock people, they are a, primarily all cattle now, rather than sheep.

CONLY: Yeah, I think there is one or two bunches of sheep.

ELLIS: Yeah, there is only, Harney County, a couple people that have sheep. And I hate to say they are in the sheep business, because they are multi-millionaires from California or something like that. And what they are doing, it is just kind of a hobby with them to play with their sheep or something. And they are not really trying to make a living in the sheep business.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: But most of your livestock people years ago, and I say most of us, there is always a few no matter what you get into ---

CONLY: Every business there is.

ELLIS: --- they are going to eat every blade of grass they can get. And they don't worry about whether there will be anything next year. But there is very few of them. And that still holds true today, most of the people are more knowledgeable and they're range management conscious. They want their range to increase.

CONLY: I want to ask you something that Tom Howard, when I talked to him, and that's on the juniper trees. How do you remember the juniper trees? Well let's say on Steens Mountain, or on this mountain. Was there, did there seem to be as many junipers back then as there is now? Are they bigger, littler, how do you remember the juniper trees, or

did you even pay any attention?

ELLIS: No, I have some places, a few pictures taken in certain areas, and I can go out and look at them now, and there wasn't near the junipers in those days that there is now. And we all know, I think, that a juniper takes a lot of moisture out of the soil. And as they, they're growing and taking over lots and lots of hillsides, are just solid juniper now.

CONLY: Okay.

ELLIS: It used to be they were just scattering junipers.

CONLY: So on the same thoughts, I used to, you know when I was back, little, we hunted deer on the Steens Mountains, you know, back, that's where I started in my hunting. And the sagebrush being as thick as it is, up high on these mountains, like on Otis Mountain or, you know, or up on the Steens, you know, it gets real thick. Did you remember it as being thick back then, or was it not?

ELLIS: In my time here since the '30's, there has always been a lot of sagebrush.

CONLY: Yes.

ELLIS: Been a lot of sagebrush.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: And I think its, the sagebrush has had its good times and, you know, like the deer they normally don't eat sagebrush until they have to. But in the wintertime there is nothing else for them, they'll eat a lot of sagebrush, it keeps them alive. Just like a lot of other things here, your cattle may prefer alfalfa hay, the thing is more nutritious and things. But they'll eat anything to keep alive through the winter sometimes. And that's what most of our wildlife is doing, and a lot of the cattle. They wintered them out so late in the fall then, until they had to come out, the snow drove them out, and they couldn't get anything else. Why there was lots of sagebrush in those days.

CONLY: What about quaken asp and stuff like that. You know Steens Mountains is one

of the beautiful places in the world in the fall, you know, when the --- Has the quaken ask expanded and deteriorated and stuff like that?

ELLIS: Oh yes. I think the quaken asp thickets along by the streams in the early years, they're mostly in the draws and along the creek beds and things like that, and it has definitely increased from what there used to be 50, 60 years ago. There's just, quaken asp have done real good. I think some of the sheep, when they had lots of sheep in that country, they think the little young aspen and seedlings a coming, they cut them off and ---

CONLY: I think they did too.

ELLIS: Cut back on the survival of the, increase in them. Yeah, but when the sheep went out of the business, the country, I think the aspen have taken over pretty much.

CONLY: Uh huh, uh huh. I don't know, you know, of course I thought, well ---

... (Phone rings)

CONLY: Like down on Steens Mountain, and down on Cow Creek and down through there, you know, that I remember you talking about the beaver and stuff on Trout Creek, you know, and back up there. And then on Little Fish Creek, or on Whitehorse Creek and stuff like that, and then that one down towards McDermitt there was quite a lot of beaver. Some beautiful ponds for fish ... And a lot of little meadow-like type of thing. Do you think that the beaver being trapped out and taken out of them creeks created a problem for them fish? That there wasn't the little ponds and stuff like that, that there was maybe years and years ago? Do you think that that made any difference?

ELLIS: Well it, yes, I think it made a difference. But our beaver population has built up in some places, and we just have too many beaver for ---

CONLY: You're right.

ELLIS: They just go down a creek and raid it. To keep their teeth sharp, they fall trees and that, and not even eat them. They eat the cambium layer off, they want to spark

them, you know. And gosh they fell lots of trees, just looked like they was just a playing, and fall a lot of trees. And they kept a lot of the population down. And it was a valuable asset to the fish in the creek too. But there is a limit to that, because the beaver will just build up in an area, and the first thing you know they'll fall every tree up and down the creek bed, and that's not good for shade or, for shade for the water for fish and the ... or the livestock or anything else.

CONLY: Well it's the same, you know, expansion of population of anything, it gets away from you, you know. And it needs to be caught. Now I'm going to jump around some. You was, tell me about planting of the sheep on Steens Mountain. I know you was in on that hard and heavy. When did that start, and how did you go about doing that, when you put them back on Steens Mountain? What kind of trouble did you run into on that, Ellis?

ELLIS: Well years ago, we've had quite a few different species of animals that was here years ago, and they disappeared pretty much. And the Department decided they'd like to re-introduce some of these native species, and the mountain sheep there is no exception. Well in 1915, and up until that time the last known sheep was killed on the Steens Mountains. And so we didn't have any sheep there, and hadn't had for a long time. And in 1954 they decided well we'd like to re-introduce some sheep.

CONLY: Now Ellis, who did you say killed the last sheep on Steens Mountains?

ELLIS: Well the story goes that it was a Dr. Hibbard. We have three generations of Dr. Hubbard's.

CONLY: Over here in ---

ELLIS: They were dentists.

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: And it was the old gentleman, and in fact he was a member of our, prior to my time, he was a member of the Oregon Game Commission. Now the Oregon Game

Commission, as they called it in those days, was, the Commission was appointed by the Governor, that was kind of a political appointment.

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: And they had, I think, five members, or three or five members, and the Governor appointed them. And they made the decision of what you were going to do with the wildlife. And along in that time why the --- let's see, I was going to make a point there. What was I ---

CONLY: On Hibbard killing the sheep.

ELLIS: Oh yeah, he was on the, the theory went that he killed the last known sheep. And anyway we decided in 1954 we would like to re-introduce this mountain sheep in Southeastern Oregon. Well the original species that was in here was not the common and most widely spread Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep, like we introduced in Northeastern Oregon, and Idaho, and many places. The species that we had here was the California sub-species of the Desert Bighorn Sheep. So we had a connection up in Kamloops, near Kamloops in British Columbia, they had this same species, the California sub-species of the Desert Bighorn. And they was, cooperated with them up there, they actually did the trapping for us up there. And they gave us, I think, about 26 head of sheep. And we went up and brought them down. And we built a fence, a sheep proof fence on Hart Mountain, on the west base of it there near where the old 3-C Camp was there in later years.

And we built that long fence there. We hired a fellow, a contractor, well he was an employee of the Game Commission, built with a lot of help. Most of that ---

We brought those sheep there in '54 and put them inside of this fence. We had quite a lot of trouble keeping the fence up because, you know, in the wintertime a big rock would break loose up on the rim someplace and come down and go right through the

fence. And the sheep started getting out that way. So finally by 1960, six years later, we thought they'd built up to the point where we could trap some of those sheep and --- because we could see the fence was going to be down before too long. So we run down there, and we'd trap them, and we'd take 8 or 10 of us to go on top of the mountain, we'd drive them down off of there and get them in the lower end of this big pasture. And we had a small, an acre, two acre plot down there, we run them in there. The first thing, you know, we had them in a trap.

So we got our first transplant out of Hart Mountain, was on the Steens Mountains above the Alvord Ranch. We brought over, well it was the winter of '60, '61, and in November we only made our first trap, run down, we only caught four, which wasn't enough really. So right after the first of the year why we made another run down there and we got, ended up with eleven sheep, turned them out on the Alvord Creek, above the Alvord Ranch. And five of those were rams, and six were ewes. And it went along like that, and they just did real good, and they built up a little then.

And finally why we decided we could have a season there. And in about '68, I believe, we started having, just buy two tags or something like that, you know. And then just gradually built it up, and that's a remarkable example of what an animal can do, and how it can increase, just starting out with that small number of animals.

And up until this day we have harvested over a 150 rams through the hunting seasons. And in the last three, four years we have probably hauled out, oh maybe 75; I don't know the exact number. But we've been ---

CONLY: You've live-trapped and taken out.

ELLIS: Yes, we have live-trapped them on the Steens and hauled them out. And just here last week we took 20 head off, and took 20, 30 off last spring. So we've been trapping them out of there. When you start back in 1960 with just six rams, six ewes and

five rams, and to think you have that --- and they still have around 150, 200 --- 100, 200 ---

CONLY: They're maintaining about that many of Steens Mountain.

ELLIS: Yeah, there is that many on the Steens today. So that's remarkable.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: At least that tells you one thing, there certainly hasn't been many natural enemies of the sheep on the mountain. And I might mention too that this sub-species will not historically, have never scattered. Most wild animals are human populations.

CONLY: Yes.

ELLIS: You know children grow up. Now where are children, they're not here at home where they were born and raised.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: And the same way with your animals. But this species of sheep, they just stay right there and they --- what they do, they historically have developed the lung worm and that's the one that goes through the life cycle, and goes into the --- A snail, which we have the snail on the Steens Mountains, after they reach this point why the ewes, if they have these lambs, they pass this lung worm onto the lambs before they're born, and they can't live with it. They'll give birth to them, by the time they're a month old why 90% or better will be dead, they'll die by the time they're a month old.

CONLY: Well now, Ellis, does this got anything to do with the fact that these sheep would not expand, or move out, that they stay so tight together, and they deplete themselves in a way? Or is ---

ELLIS: Well I think the theory is that when they get to a certain concentration point, whatever that might be, then that lungworm takes over. And that's one reason we've been harvesting animals there, the large numbers that we have, for a small ... sheep, try to keep them from getting to this point, where the lung worms will take over.

Now a classic example there is at Pike's Peak. I went to Colorado to a meeting and they had biologists there from all the western states, Canada and Alaska. And the history of this species of sheep is that they will build up in one place and they won't spread out, and they can get this lungworm. Now Pike's Peak, I don't remember the number, but they had a good many hundreds of sheep on Pike's Peak. And that lung worm hit them and they never raised over, I don't know, they had 400, 500 sheep on the mountain and they never raised over a dozen lambs one year after this lung worm hit them.

Now the vet department at Colorado took an interest in it, and they went in there and they trapped a lot of them and treated them for the lungworm, and it finally brought the herd back up. And that was in an area where they could trap them. They, what they did they used an apple pulp to bait them into the trip nets. And they'd catch them, and the veterinarians, like I say, took a real interest in it, and they corrected that situation.

CONLY: What, these sheep didn't, well let's say you had a 100 head of sheep, and they built up to 200 head of sheep, and they stayed in this little area. Did they eat themselves down to where they were picking up these snails or something due to the feed shortage or anything? What do you think there, Ellis?

ELLIS: Well just how they were actually getting it, but I would assume that the snails, you know they like to, on the little green grass, you know, they'll cling to that, and things like that. And just actually how that really took place I don't know.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: That's the history of it though. They'll get his lungworm, and then the old ewes can't, the lambs can't live with it.

CONLY: Do they, say these ewes were having twins or something, maybe they don't, I don't know. But would they, and then they'd go down to one, and then they'd go down to

nothing? Or did they, or did this just happen boom, like that?

ELLIS: No, the ewes, they were having the lambs after they got the lungworm, but they were passing this lungworm in the pre-natal stage. And when they're born then is when they died. They were having the lambs all right, but they just weren't surviving. Now they were 90% or better dead by the time they were a month old, they just couldn't live with it.

CONLY: Oh.

ELLIS: And what they actually died of now is pneumonia. The lungworm in their lungs created this situation, ideal for pneumonia to take over. And actually pneumonia is what was killing them.

CONLY: Oh.

ELLIS: But it was the result of the lungworm in their lungs.

CONLY: So it wasn't a starvation or anything like that?

ELLIS: No, no.

CONLY: It was a true pneumonia type of deal, or something like that.

ELLIS: Right, yeah.

CONLY: So what then, what it kind of indicates then is to keep the population spread out, or get them spread out or something then, huh?

ELLIS: Yeah, that's right. It's just amazing that the life cycle that the sheep have gone through, and oh, they're a marvelous animal that many, many people enjoy seeing them on the mountain. And there is lots of people go on the mountains today just to observe the sheep. It's really interesting for them. But that's

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CONLY: How much more of this State can absorb more sheep of that type? Is there quite a bit more of Harney County that can take on more of them? Or is there not?

ELLIS: Well in the last 10 or 15 years we have trapped, like at Hart Mountain, we

continue, still trapping there. And there are some other places on the Owyhee, they're trapping and starting new locations. I think right now that probably, oh I think probably all of Southeastern Oregon; the natural habitat of the Desert Bighorn sub-species of the sheep has been re-stocked. And I doubt if they will ever, well they don't have an interest, they don't want to start them in new places where they never existed before. I think practically all of the country that originally had the mountain sheep have it. I mentioned, I think before, that Northeastern Oregon has the Rocky Mountains.

CONLY: Yeah, that's right.

ELLIS: But I think everything has been stocked in this country where they would survive and not interfere or mix up with other animals. Now there is a real concern that, well years ago when, it is all hearsay that we used to have a lot of mountain sheep so they say, and that's when the sheep people come, domestic sheep people come in here. Well the story here is that they, the Bighorn sheep got the diseases from the domestic sheep. And I think ... that our domestic sheep years ago had far more diseases than they have nowadays, because they can treat them nowadays. But I think that that's questionable in my mind whether that's it. But now today they don't want the domestic sheep and our Bighorn sheep on the same range if they can help it, for fear that they will ---

CONLY: Develop something.

ELLIS: Just how much --- they have done quite a lot of research on that. Some places they have taken some domestic, or Bighorn sheep and put them in where there was definitely a range of Bighorn sheep, mixed them with domestic sheep. And the Bighorns, first thing you know they came up with an ailment and died. Now other places it hasn't worked out that good, so that was just a happen so or not.

So there is a real good possibility that we would prefer not to have our mountain sheep in a range where there is domestic sheep a running.

CONLY: Yeah, yeah, well you can understand that. Of course I don't think within Eastern Oregon and this part, that the domestic sheep should be that much of a problem with the Bighorn now.

ELLIS: Well its kind of a long story, you know, like with our domestic sheep and our mountain sheep. I think our mountain sheep have definitely made a good comeback.

CONLY: Yes.

ELLIS: And we've got them pretty much re-established, I'd say, in all of ideal habitat form, and that's just about the life history of our mountain sheep.

CONLY: Have you got any, have you got any of these sheep down in Trout Creek, up on Trout Creek Mountain, over in there towards Disaster Peak, or any place ...

ELLIS: Yes, there is some over in that country there, in the mountains, southern mountains.

CONLY: Is there?

ELLIS: ...

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: Yeah, there is, there is limited numbers in various places that have been planted in there.

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: Now I mentioned that these don't migrate. Now there has been, on several occasions for example, where maybe two or three rams will take off, young rams will take off and they'll just kind of go across country, first thing you know they'll end up back with their herd. I think it is just like some of our children, they'll take off, and the first thing you know they'll come back home with their young, you know. And that's been proven in the case of deer. Some deer with our, they had a lot of studies on the deer, you know, they'll raise their fawn here, and by gosh the fawn females will go back to their summer range

with their mothers. But the young buck deer they go all directions. We have done lots of trapping and transplanting and marking with radio telemetry and collars and things on them. The young rams go pretty much all directions. Now this is here I'm talking about. But the young female lambs, they go back to the home range, summer range, with their mother. And like the deer, they will summer, live in a certain area, and they'll go to the winter range. They go back and forth from the same place year after year. And the bucks will scatter more than the young female here. Antelope is another ...

CONLY: They sure are, aren't they.

ELLIS: We used to have them here, you know, and Peter Skene Ogden come through the country, and antelope --- I think, well I'm changing the subject a little, but the antelope population has come and gone a lot. But I think we are short something in our habitat, because we don't have antelope near like Colorado does, for example, or Wyoming, say Wyoming for example.

CONLY: Well do you think the coyotes are knocking --- I've noticed them up here on Drewsey Peak, you know, I notice them. Them old does, or whatever you want to call them, I see them chasing coyotes and stuff at different times.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: And them old coyotes are pretty smart, you know. Do you think they are any problem, really though, when it comes down to it?

ELLIS: Well our coyote population has come and gone all through the years.

CONLY: Yes.

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ELLIS: ... on the food supply of them. And I remember I went to a meeting one time where there was a fellow that had been studying the, up in Mount McKinley in Alaska,

studying the trends up there of caribou with relation to the wolves. Well he found that when the food supply of those wolves was way down, the caribou population was way down, where they had had only maybe, wouldn't breed at all some years. And they just --
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CONLY: Well then, backing up, of course I, you know, I hunted jackrabbits from the time I was knee high to a grasshopper when we lived down on the lake. In fact I put myself through school for a while at a nickel a pair of ears. And the jackrabbit population was tremendous, you know. My god we even run them out there on Pelican Island, back out in there. We put up nets and run them in those traps, and stuff, when I was a kid. There was a lot of coyotes. And along that same line, could the coyote, jackrabbit, deer population have anything to do with each other?

ELLIS: Well I'm sure that there is a definite trend in the relationship there. Now I made a --- if you want to change the subject a little on these, like the jackrabbits for example. You know how thick they used to be.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: I might just mention that I made a graph one time that showed the cycles of jackrabbits, were cyclic, you know.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: And then they would drop right down. And then they would build back up. Well the graph I made, I showed that they peaked, averaged about every five years. Now where I got my information to make this graph, Harney County paid a five-cent bounty on jackrabbits for years.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: Now this goes back to 1926, I'll just mention what they did, conditions were there. In 1926 Harney County paid five cents, which was quite a lot of money in those days, on

jackrabbits. And they paid a bounty on 200, a bounty on 345,000 jackrabbits. That's in 1926. Now in those days the homesteaders was putting up wings, and they'd go out and make drives, and they would go in there and just beat them to death. And a nickel was worth quite a lot of money to those homesteaders. Anyway, and then just five years later, they only bountied 10,000. Now think of the drop. 1936 they bountied 244,000 or 245,000 jackrabbits. Just think of that many rabbits, paying a five-cent bounty on them. And it went on like that for quite a few years. And then, oh let's see, it was in the late '50's, I think, the county took the bounty off. Because all this information I'm giving here about the cycles of the rabbits came from the county records.

CONLY: Out here where they bountied them.

ELLIS: Just black and white records over here in the county clerk's office.

CONLY: Oh yeah, you bet.

ELLIS: So we have people now, they'll go someplace and they'll see four or five jackrabbits between here and Fields and they'll say boy the rabbits are coming back. I like to tell them my jackrabbit story. I came in after dark the other night, we never saw a jackrabbit. We left down there after dark, 6 o'clock; we never saw a single jackrabbit on the way home.

CONLY: Well it's just like right out this window, Ellis, when my kids was going to school, there was one hunting season, I had some hunters here from Grants Pass, and some kids and stuff, and two, or two or three of my kids come from Drewsey a horseback. And there was just a sea of rabbits come right straight towards this house. Now I don't remember what year it was, but about a year later, I think Ray Novotney was still here, we poisoned those rabbits. We poisoned them with, oh it seemed like to me cabbage, or lettuce, or something, with poison. It stunk to high heavens around here. And then they kind of --- but I hunted them for years, and snared them. And for years I run a snare line, and

hunted, and that's where we made our money at.

ELLIS: Yeah, that's right.

CONLY: Big money.

ELLIS: Oh, a lot of kids did. You know the year before this, a year just before they took the bounty off, they only bountied, either 800 or 900 jackrabbits. And I think my boys, I had two boys, and I think they bountied better than of half them.

CONLY: Did they? I don't doubt it, you know. Because ---

ELLIS: But you know, there is the thing you can talk to no end about these population trends and things. Why couldn't your deer population --- And antelope is another classic example of things that --- it's real interesting. And in the old days I came here, I soon established for the deer, for example, I established population trend routes. I rode about six weeks every spring, tried to do it about the same weather conditions. For example on the east side of the Steens I spent four days a riding a horseback along there, and I compared the numbers I seen from year to year, and I was classifying them too. And then so this year I saw 20 deer per mile, next year maybe 30 deer per mile, and so I've got black and white records of the trend. And I'd move over, that's usually where spring and Harney County both first, in the south end like that, and then I moved over to the Frenchglen area, which is the next. Then I moved to the Drewsey area here, it was next to the, a little milder temperatures we had west of Burns and Dry Mountain, and in that country. And so every year, for all those years that I worked, I had those trend figures like that.

And the herd composition, I was mentioning where I was getting, I gathered them usually in November and December. Did most of that with a vehicle, because a horseback I'd be off of the horse looking at the deer most of the time classifying when they're bunched up. You have to watch them if they are bunched quite awhile. And then

in the spring I, population trends, that's where I gathered in the spring when they're bunched up, just before they left the winter range.

Antelope is a different story. They, like I say, I think we are short something in our habitat, I don't know that, but I remember I made a eriogonum habitat study one time with the antelope. We were having such a poor survival of the antelope; they just weren't increasing, so I contacted Wyoming. And I found, they didn't know, couldn't answer my question. Said we don't have any trouble with antelope here, our population is growing wild. And they were just a killing them all the time. And at that time they were killing four times as many antelope in their hunting season as Oregon had for a total population. Now we had what we estimated, 10,000 antelope here in Southeastern Oregon.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: And Wyoming at that time was killing 40,000 every year during their hunting seasons. So you know that there is something short here, because we just weren't raising antelope like that. And I collected, I think I mentioned, I collected a couple antelope every three, every month out of the year. We were out on a food habit study. And the University of California at Davis had a couple of students working on their master's degree, and I sent the stomach contents to those, to the college there, and they did the analytical work on the stomachs. And it was just interesting what they come of. I sent them a list of all the species of shrubs and grasses and stuff that we had here to help them in their surveys of the stomach. And it was just remarkable what they come up with.

And actually the antelope, their year round diet --- a lot of people see them going out there in the spring and they think they are eating grass. Well actually the year round diet of an antelope is only 2% sagebrush, that's a ... Now sagebrush is 61% of their year round diet, is sagebrush. That's by far the bulk of it. Now in the wintertime, when the antelope migrate into a lower elevation, sometimes they're in the snow and there is not

much of anything else for them. But an antelope, 61% of their year round diet, and these were collected, two or three, every month out of the year. Now the ... people always asked, well what did you do with the meat? Well I shipped it to the ... Truck Company donated the transportation, and I shipped it all to the Crippled Children's Hospital in Portland, gave it to them down there.

And the next most abundant species was phlox, P H L O X, that we have on the desert. And 14% of their year round diet was phlox. And I just, got a whole list unlike that. The next was Forbes, various species of Forbes, it was 6%. And then bitterbrush was 40%. I killed, collected several on Hart Mountain, up on the mountain a ways, in the bitterbrush country. I usually killed the bucks, except during deer season, antelope season, and I didn't have to shoot them I got them from hunters that was killing them. And poverty weed was 3%, and English plantain and eriogonum and rabbitbrush, and some clovers, and like I say grass was only 1.4% of their year round diet was grass. And the remarkable thing about them is that I ... think that Wyoming was killing 40,000 a year, and we only had 10,000 for a total population. And for me to travel through Wyoming, I've only been through there, not very many times, but their country looks pretty much like Southeastern Oregon.

CONLY: Well that's what --- I had some friends, I've never been back there, but I've had some friends, you know, that ... pretty much the same. Did you ever notice that the antelope in the wintertime, or anything, always seemed to be kind of following along behind them wild horses and stuff, where they had pawed and be eating, maybe it was horse manure, I don't know. (Laughter)

ELLIS: Well I, one reason for it, I think there is, you know, at one time we had a lot of horses here. In fact Marvin Meyers, you probably knew him, he was a Drewsey boy.

CONLY: Oh yes, you bet. You see I worked for Arch.

ELLIS: He run in over 3,000 wild horses down along that Oregon Nevada line. I think that was the winter of '48. And where those horses were so thick, all over those south slopes up there, the antelope concentrated on it. I think that they, the horses were breaking up the snow and things and the antelope could get around better.

CONLY: Well I think so too. Because it always seemed, and I've noticed out here where I've got a few head of horses, it seems like them antelope kind of wander along behind them, you know. But you don't see them all the time, but it's just something like that. And I was wondering if they was pawing, and they was going down and getting some sort of a shrub, or something, that maybe them horses wasn't getting or something.

ELLIS: Well this whole thing with their, antelope, deer, elk, which is just moving in in later years here in big numbers. There is a correlation in there, like just imagine, like --- now Marvin Meyers at that South Crow Spring, I just happened to stop by there, Fourth of July one time. I was going up Buckaroo Pass; I heard this low flying airplane. I finally spotted it up there, and it had this thing hanging out the back of the airplane, I knew what it was, there was Marvin Meyers. Of course Marvin didn't fly the airplane, but he had a fellow by the name of Ted Barber did pretty near all his flying. And he drug this rope, he had a five gallon ... can under that, and he'd, that's what he was doing was harassing these horses around in a trap.

CONLY: Yeah, uh huh.

ELLIS: Well that one trap he got over 800 horses in that one trap there. He had, this was the Fourth of July, and he let his help, ground help go to Plush to a rodeo. And so I, they needed, oh I know, 20, 30 more horses or so to finish, to load the trucks that were on their way in there to haul them out. So I stayed there and helped him on the ground.

And by gosh it was just amazing, you know, they were bringing horses. Can you imagine taking --- well what I did, now Ted Barber's pilot was sick, oh he had the flu bad,

but he wanted me to fly us up, and I told him well I don't think I have any business, or experience. Of course I learned to fly in 1939, but I didn't think I'd ought to be a running horses. So he said, "Well I'll give her a try." So he got them, he got the horses in. But after he got the horses in for Marvin, why I took Marvin, I flew his airplane, and we flew that whole country along the Nevada line there. What we were looking for was places to sit up a trap, you know. You know it takes a nice little place where you just bring them over a hill, and he'd have two or three ... horses there, and this airplane would bring those wild horses in. Those horses would take and run them. Gentle horses run right down into the trap. Those wild horses took right, followed them right into the trap, you know.

CONLY: Did they?

ELLIS: And so that's --- like I say in that area there he caught over 3,000 horses that --- and just look what would 3,000 horses do on the desert water holes. And in those days we didn't have near the water holes we have nowadays.

CONLY: That's right.

ELLIS: So they were a detriment to the range, there is no question to it.

CONLY: I can remember them a coming across the, the fellow from out of ... Duck Valley, Idaho, and ... and I come across in 1946. We trailed some horses across from the Owyhee's, come across the north fork, or the ... by the 45, and we come out at Crooked Creek and back up and down through there. And the wild horses across there at that time, those Owyhee Desert, you could just see plumes of dirt for miles, you know. There was little fogs of dust a coming, and you could see them at all times. Well Marvin's brother, Arch Meyers, and then a fellow Seals from down at --- they run them horses and they took them in Jordan Valley along about that time. And they got a heck of a bunch of them. They had a bunch of horses broke the corrals down and went back out. But they were --- that's neither here nor there, you know.

But there was quite a few antelope out through that country too, even at that time. So I wondered if they kind of went together in the winter, primarily in the winter. I never seen them much together in the summer, but primarily in the winter down through that country there.

What about the elk? I hunted elk, I think, possibly the year they opened it up, 1942, up on Pine Creek. Had they brought those elk in prior to, from up where they planted them up in the Wallowas? Had they trapped and brought some elk down in this country, or did they drift down in this country?

ELLIS: Now before I start, let me make one more comment on the antelope.

CONLY: Okay.

ELLIS: Now all the Hart Mountain antelope in that country, most all of them went over on Big Spring Table, which was right on the Oregon-Nevada line. Now like I mentioned, these antelope haven't done good here. But there were years they was plentiful. Now in Big Spring Table, which is right on the Oregon line, I've counted

--- now I did most of the antelope winter range counts with an airplane. I feel that if you're working with an animal on the ground you should be on the ground with them a horseback most of the time. But the antelope is an exception. But I've got records, and I've kept a diary ever since I was in high school. I've counted 4,000 antelope in a matter of a couple of hours right there on Big Spring Table. I used to spend a lot of time in the wintertime down there. And I'd borrow a horse from old Will Jacobs who was an old government trapper, came here years and years ago there. He lived on the Dufurrena place on the Sheldon there. And I just thought I'd throw that in. But the antelope population would be high, and then it would just gradually go clear down. And most of the time I ... antelope was going down.

CONLY: Were those antelope, do you think, going on into Nevada and on down in that,

working that area more so than towards Catlow Valley, and come back up in there?

ELLIS: Well the antelope in Big Spring Table, I've got the patterns of them all plotted out. Now those that is coming in there, now they would cross from Goose Table, which is actually in Nevada, across from the Dufurrena place, a big table in there. If the winter got bad there they'd move over on this Big Spring Table. And those up towards the old headquarters, they'd move down and join the Oregon antelope. Oregon's antelope were coming from Hart Mountain, across Warner Valley, and going. So actually the antelope on Big Spring Table were both Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon antelope.

CONLY: In Oregon, huh?

ELLIS: But the numbers weren't always near that high. ... so much for the antelope, but that's the way it goes. Now as far as the elk is concerned, yeah they brought a few elk in from Yellowstone and put them up in Northeastern Oregon. I think that was in the late '20's, that was before my time with the Department, consider-able. But they planted them up there. And then in 1933 they had built up so they started hunting elk in Northeastern Oregon. Then they just done well there, they built up and built up. And they started spreading, they were never moved down into this country.

CONLY: Oh they weren't?

ELLIS: No, they ---

CONLY: That's what I was curious about.

ELLIS: But they were just gradually moving this way. So then, now this is soon after the war, they decided what are we going to do with these elk? They were moving into this country quite a bit. So they decided well Northeastern Oregon, they've got a lot of those canyons, wooded canyons, they've got those big open hill-sides, excellent antelope --- an elk is a grazing animal just like a cow.

CONLY: Cow.

ELLIS: Deer are a browsing animal.

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: So they decided they must manage Northeastern Oregon for elk, and we'll manage Southeastern Oregon for deer, because this is a good browsing country down here. And it is better browsing country than Northeastern Oregon, so we'll manage it. So what they did then, they started having their seasons up there. And down here we had, for years, an either sex season, anybody could come.

CONLY: Yeah, well I know, we used to do, tried to kill them off. We did our damndest to kill them off, you know.

ELLIS: We weren't trying to eliminate them here; we are trying to keep the numbers from ---

CONLY: Yeah, but I mean a young buck like myself at that time, I was fairly young, and we went out, and we went out in earnest. I mean we tried to walk them down, is what we ---

ELLIS: Well my feeling was that elk were in direct competition with the livestock. And they would stay out later in the fall, and they were also eating some browse that maybe, that our deer would prefer to have been able to eat, rather than just like a white face cow you leave him out there all winter they're going to eat browse too, bitterbrush and stuff.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: But it just worked out that way that it's ---

CONLY: Well the elk are a desert type animal, aren't they, Ellis?

ELLIS: Yeah, they originally were.

CONLY: From back east, or back there they, really their only competition would be a wild horse wouldn't it?

ELLIS: Yeah, that's just about right.

CONLY: And when it comes down to scratch when the winter, when the snow gets belly deep to a tall something or other, I think a horse, and I'm not sure they couldn't even reach higher in a tree than a horse could. I don't know for sure.

ELLIS: Well like a horse when they get in the snow in the wintertime they are equipped, they can paw down. And you fly around, over an area in the wintertime, and you see where, look over there and see after a fresh snow there has been a lot of pawing, there is either a few horses there or some elk. Elk can paw down fairly good and get into the grass too.

CONLY: Oh can they?

ELLIS: Not near as much as a horse, but that's the reason like some of your animals, I think, like the elk you'd find them around some of these wild horses because the horses are pawing down and they break the snow a little, and then the elk could get in there and get down to the grass a little better. But yeah, I noticed that so much in flying, that you see where the hillside where they have been a pawing down, you can figure there is probably some horses there too.

CONLY: Well these elk have done tremendous in this country.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: It looks like to me that they are trying to tell us some-thing, or something, I'm not too sure. But they're doing pretty

--- well for me, they're doing good, they're doing tremendously good.

ELLIS: Elk are a great animal to travel, and like I say they started moving south right after the war, and they're getting more and more down this way. So we were controlling the hunting up there, mostly hunting bulls up there.

CONLY: Right.

ELLIS: To allow the herds to increase. And down here we were shooting either sex. Not

to try to eliminate them, but to keep the numbers down.

CONLY: Well do you remember, Ellis, I was up in LaGrande, we had a meat locker and stuff up there in LaGrande. I was up there in '48, '47, '48, and '49; I was a butcher up there. And in '49 they opened that area up for a short period of time, or something, all sex. Do you remember that? Could that have been part of the pressure that they move more elk on down into this country?

ELLIS: Well I think that's right. When they started hunting in Northeastern Oregon for bulls only, boy those elk started moving, just gradually working south. I think that had a bearing on their movement. An elk is a great animal to travel, as we see right now. We've got elk all over the desert country. Not big numbers, but along the Nevada line, you know, and ---

CONLY: Well I know, Ellis, we went up here, back, you know, at that time there was a number of us, oh around 35, 40 years old, and we took a bull elk from up here, back up here by Blue Bucket. A guy crippled him, and we took him clear to Summit, almost 25 miles in one day.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: He was going on road, to road, to road, to road, around and picking him up and going, and wondering what the --- And finally killed him just about dark right on the railroad track, clear up there. And I was, we figured 25 miles straight away, and god almighty he went up and down them canyons and stuff, so they can go a long ways, and this old boy was crippled, I mean he was crippled.

ELLIS: Well I think hunting of elk has had another bearing on the animals; the hunting has had a bearing on the elk. I think it has delayed their breeding season. Now like I say now they began to move south from the harassment from hunting up there, and we went to hunting either sex here, and bulls up there. Then finally the population was building up

there, the hunter population was building up, so they were killing too many bulls. And they were killing off all the older bulls, and there was nothing left but yearling bulls. Now the elks used to normally breed in, the last of August, and early September, the elk were breeding. Well it got to the point they were harvesting the mature elks so much that by the time they, the cows were coming in heat, say in later part of August, why there was nothing to breed them, but in some areas but the yearlings, and they weren't mature enough to breed the cow then. So it actually delayed their breeding season from August up until now maybe November before they breed sometimes. But that was a bearing of over population of hunters killing too many mature bulls. It actually delayed it up there.

But these animals have been coming here ever since. By the time they started restricting the number of hunters up there, killing these bulls, well a lot of those hunters then that couldn't get a bull tag they'd come down here and hunt in this either sex season we had. Well that put so many hunters down here; we were having too many hunters. We didn't want to eliminate the elk herd; we wanted to keep their numbers down so that there wouldn't be this direct competition with the livestock and things like that. Because this wasn't the ideal elk range.

CONLY: Okay, well along that line, and I don't know whether you

--- but here south of this Highway 20, you know, I'm with the BLM and stuff like that, and the BLM told us that they did not have any food, any grass for elk or sheep.

ELLIS: Uh huh.

CONLY: Now I don't know whether they have changed that or not. But the elk and the sheep, the elk are sure as hell there, and if some sheep are there, why in the hell --- they got grass for them for Christ's sakes, Ellis. Excuse me. There is feed for them. For these elk, out in this country it's a great; some place is a great winter. God we can have elk and --- of course I love to see them, and I like the elk, you know.

ELLIS: Now, well like I say they moved in the desert country. The first ones I saw was on the Steens Mountains for example. Well there was a cow and a calf ended up down here in Diamond Valley, right after the, not too long after the war. She stayed down there; she would be over where they would be feeding cows. Maybe on McCoy Creek, and then she may be down Kiger Creek; she was just wandering around down where the cattlemen were feeding their cows. Well it came up missing finally. And then in 1956 or '57, about 1960 along in there, I saw, I was stuck in a snowdrift up above Fish Lake on May the 23rd. I remember the dates like that.

CONLY: I guess so.

ELLIS: That was my birthday. Old Pat Yarborough run up, and the Game Commission had bought Fish Lake. And a fellow, Dorothy Womack from town, well you know the Womack boys.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: They, their granddad run Fish Lake for the Game Commission for about 5 or 6 years after they bought it. Well a fellow that was going up there with them, they were moving in, and we was up there and I got stuck in this snowdrift. And I looked across the draw and there was two cow elk over there, across that little draw on the very head of Fish Creek. Of course that is awful early for a rig to get up that high on the mountain on May the 23rd.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: Anyway, well a year later there was some more showed up around, and they just started filling up in there. Now there is several hundred head of elk.

CONLY: Is there?

ELLIS: Two or three ---

CONLY: I didn't know. The last time we was in the four point area up on Riddle

Mountain, back up in Buck Pasture and back up in there, and that area there was quite a bit of sign of elk in some of them junipers and stuff, back where there was some big, you know, bucks and stuff.

ELLIS: Yeah. Well they moved into the country all right. Like I say they are seeing them here and there. Now here about three years ago I came up from Nevada, I was down around Denio, and I come up through the Oregon End Ranch, and Ronald McLean was there at the ranch then and Tikey. And by golly I just got inside the Oregon line there, and there was nice bull elk across the road right in front of me. Well I went on up to the ranch, I watched him a little while, and went in there. They were working some cattle there in the corral, and Ronald rode over, and I told him by golly I said, "I just had a bull elk cross the road down here in front of me." And he said, "You know," he says, "I've known you all my life, and I've never known you to drink." He said, "You've been drinking now, ain't you?" (Laughter) I says, "You get in and I'll, I think I've got a 50-50 chance that I can show you that bull down there, because he just run across the road right in front of me up on that big open hillside." "Yeah," he said, "I'll take your word for it."

So anyway, it was kind of interesting, I went on, I went over and up through Domingo Pass and down to the Fields Store. I went in there and Dolly Holloway was working in there and I was telling her about this. Pretty soon here come this Julie Thompson, they owned the store there for several years, Julie and her husband. And Julie come in, she said, "Ellis Mason, did I hear you say you saw some elk up on the mountain there?" And I said, "I sure did, I saw a bull elk cross the road right ---" "Oh my gosh," she says, "I'll apologize." Margie Miler, you know ---

CONLY: Yeah, Defenbaugh.

ELLIS: --- Defenbaugh girl.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: She had gone someplace, took some children someplace and she was coming aback about dark one night up Long Hollow, above Fields, and she told them there that she almost hit some elk up there. She says, "I gave her a pretty bad time." She says, "Here you born and raised on a cow ranch, and you don't even know a white face cow from an elk. But if you saw an elk there I'll apologize, because I think you know what an elk is."

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: That was kind of interesting. But here, oh the last six or eight years why there has been elk moving all --- not big numbers, just see a few head here, and a few there all over the desert.

CONLY: There is still getting down. Is there any in the Trout Creek Mountains?

ELLIS: Yeah, there has been a number of head seen in them. Not big numbers, just a few. I think what those are doing, like, kind of like that, is just like that bull down, he was just a moving through the country down there. And I've seen them in a number of places, and I've never seen them there again. So I think they're just a working through, a traveling around. And the first thing you know they're establishing a little home here and there. And it built up there.

CONLY: Now there is quite a few elk, I think quite a few, on the river down here now. I think the ... locked into that.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: I think they're kind of liking that down in there, and doing pretty good. And I imagine the water is staying open, and they're doing that, you know, pretty good. But I'm going to jump back to the sheep ---

ELLIS: Okay.

CONLY: --- beings as I'm down here on the --- Now did you, you planted some sheep.

Didn't you plant some sheep down at Riverside, down at Blaylocks, turn them out there? And then didn't they come from there back up over Upton Mountain, and then get right out here to this little peak out here on top, right out here across the road for a short period of time? In fact we seen them, I seen them, and then Jim Gardner seen them out here.

ELLIS: Uh huh.

CONLY: And then they left, they pulled out of there in the summer. They stayed there for almost a year. And I understood they went down here, to Upton Mountain, and stayed on the river and then back up there, and down in there. Is this, well possible?

ELLIS: I think where they planted them, they planted some down there on the Blaylock place, the place that Cliff had down --- well the Game Commission owns that now.

CONLY: Oh, do they?

ELLIS: Oh yeah, they've had that ---

CONLY: Oh where Cliff was at, not where --- okay, go ahead, yeah Cliff.

ELLIS: You're thinking of Wayne.

CONLY: Yeah, Wayne.

ELLIS: But anyway here about --- they put them down there four or five years ago.

CONLY: Oh yeah, its been that long.

ELLIS: At least that long. And one of the ... was with me one day here about three, or four years ago, we went over the top of ... we drove out to the dam, just to show them the dam. Got to looking around and we saw five or six sheep right up above the dam, right on those rocks up there.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: And we had a good look at them. And then I was down there again this year, somebody was with me. Might have been John Scharff or somebody, anyway I saw some more ---

CONLY: Is that right?

ELLIS: --- saw two or three head up there again.

CONLY: Staying right there.

ELLIS: I think when they planted them there, I think they kind of moved around just a little bit, and then they'll establish a home, and then that's their home then. Oh, they'll work out a little ways from it, but I think --- Seemed like when we planted them places the first time, sometimes you'll see --- Now like we put them on the Steens they were seen up as far as Folly Farm. But they finally just turned, never been seen up there since.

CONLY: Well you know I heard one time that there was some, a bunch of them sheep come down off of Riddle Mountain, oh down, oh past where the schoolhouse ---

ELLIS: Virginia Valley?

CONLY: They come down and then circled, went right past the school, and then back out, headed back north.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: And apparently kept on a going. I don't know, it was kind of a break-up deal or something.

ELLIS: Well they make some tours around. I know Wilfred ... did you ever know him?

CONLY: Yes, you bet.

ELLIS: He and I were in high school together.

CONLY: Oh, was you?

ELLIS: Yeah. And when he was up there at the Summit Spring ---

CONLY: Yeah, he stayed up there and went to work for Dick Jenkins.

ELLIS: He was working for Dick Jenkins.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: But he saw them there, oh he saw them there for maybe ten days or so. Oh he

looked for them every morning after he saw them. And then Jack Daily saw some where you take off to Virginia Valley Schoolhouse and go back up the, towards ---

CONLY: Yeah, that was who saw them.

ELLIS: Yeah. So when I heard about that, when I saw Jack, I said, "Jack, they tell me you saw some sheep up there, out from the Virginia Valley Schoolhouse." And I said, "What, have you been drinking Jack?" He says, "I knew you would say that." (Laughter) But anyway he saw them there, there is no question.

CONLY: Yeah, that's who. He was the one, I think, that was telling me that.

ELLIS: And then Wilfred verified it, because they hung around, maybe around a week up there, and Wilfred looked for them every morning when he'd get up around there.

CONLY: Staying right there by the cabins and stuff.

ELLIS: Yeah, yeah. Just in the hills right around --- he could see them from the cabin there.

CONLY: Well what did they then pull back in towards Stone House and go on back up on the ridge?

ELLIS: When they left there, they have never been seen since, that I know of. Whether they went back to their old home place, or whether they was just out on a tour or what, you know.

CONLY: Is there any ending up down toward Stone House, and down in toward Burnt Flat, and down in that low? Are they coming off of the Steens that low?

ELLIS: I don't think there is any that far up. I might --- Now I've seen them up as far as the Mann Lake Ranch, they have been up that far.

CONLY: Yes.

ELLIS: And maybe a little farther north, just as very, many in one canyon or two, but that's as far north as you regularly see them. And the hunters really work that country

over looking for them.

CONLY: Oh do they?

ELLIS: Oh yeah.

CONLY: From this ---

ELLIS: But the Mann Lake Ranch, above there, there is always some at Castle Rock Creek there. But those that are in there were the, I saw for years when they first moved up there, well they breed in there around the Alvord Ranch. And then after the breeding season then the rams separate pretty much, a lot of them, and they were going on up toward the Mann Lake Ranch, and they was wintering there. Then the next spring, you see, they moved back down around the Alvord. Pretty near everything I saw north of Mosquito Creek was rams. But there are a few ewes and lambs up in there now, not very many. But like I say, the rams leave the ewes, most of them, not all of them. You see a band of ewes, why there is usually one or two bucks around. But in general the ewes --- the rams go out by themselves and they'll move back with them in the breeding season.

CONLY: Well talking about the breeding, and you said, mentioned it awhile ago on the young bulls breeding the elk, do you feel like that the same thing does happen on these deer that the, these fawns or yearlings are breeding the does quite a bit?

ELLIS: Well I think the deer don't normally breed so early in the year. So you see the deer are born usually, you know, in the spring there, like in May, along in there, and so they're more mature by the time that --- because the deer don't breed normally until November, along in there.

CONLY: Yes, almost end of the season.

ELLIS: And so the yearling bucks are mature enough, I think then, to service a doe.

CONLY: Uh huh, uh huh. Because, you know, we used to have some big old bucks. Now god back up here in Rocky Basin, you know, we used to, I suppose '60's, '70's when

I was at Beulah and back over here, we'd go up in there after they had put them old bucks out of the forest.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: We knew they come out of the forest because they would have pitch and stuff on them. They come in to Rocky Basin and back, and god there was some big old boys up there. Some big old dandy bucks come down off of there.

ELLIS: Well you know there is just, pertaining to wildlife, it's all through the years there has been changes along, and I think that the habits, maybe something to do if the range conditions change a little, might move them a little, but I don't think very much.

CONLY: Oh you don't, huh?

ELLIS: I --- most of your animals, well particular areas, you take a bunch of deer if something is, they find a lush place to eat they're going to stick around there and live there for as long as the food supply is good there. But I think that it; food supply dictates the movement of a lot of our animals. Like the predators, if there is no rodents in this area here they go hunting around and they find some rodents they're going to live there.

CONLY: Well I'm going to ask you something, Ellis, and you don't have to answer it or not. But do you feel like all of this fencing and stuff where we can't move these cattle and horses and stuff can have any effect on the game?

ELLIS: Well ---

CONLY: You know from the standpoint of summer, winter, and fall?

ELLIS: No, I don't think so. You know your deer, the fence don't bother them too much, they jump it.

CONLY: Except they hang up in it.

ELLIS: Antelope is a little different story.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: Because antelope normally, don't normally jump fences much.

CONLY: No, they go under them.

ELLIS: Yeah, they go under it if they can.

CONLY: Yeah, at about 50 miles an hour.

ELLIS: But it has been real noticeable that ---

CONLY: Well I just wondered, you know, where this talking --- well this is purely talk, you know.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: Where they have held these horses in ---

ELLIS: Uh huh.

CONLY: --- put them all on one, in one ---

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: --- where normally them horses would move ---

ELLIS: Sure.

CONLY: --- 10, 15, 5, 6 miles on account of grass, winter, summer ---

ELLIS: Or water, or something.

CONLY: Now they can't move, and I'm a wondering if they --- their pawing and stuff.

ELLIS: Well they're forced to eat something that isn't their ideal ---

CONLY: Yeah, it is not ideal to them.

ELLIS: That's right. And nutritious-wise it is not the best for them probably. But they live on it anyway.

CONLY: And, you know, there again I talk, you know, about on the sagehens and stuff, when I was over in Duck Valley, Idaho or Owyhee, and over in there, you know, there was a lot of sheep out on this bombing range and stuff between Bruneau and there. And those sheep herders had ... and you know, being a cowboy you better not ride by their

tents or their camp, you better come and get something to eat or they'll go get their gun out there and shoot you until you could talk to them.

ELLIS: Yeah, sure, you bet.

CONLY: I remember out there riding down out through that country, them sagehens out there on top of the snow and stuff, eating on these sunflowers. And I was wondering if it is like these kids now eating sunflower seeds. I was wondering if there was maybe something that helped them sagehens, you know, through the winter or something by eating them. And right in there they had a season, and those sagehens would come off into that ... range, god they just fly off of there. The only place I ever seen pass shooting on sagehens. (Laughter) There was a lot of them, and I wondered if, you know, if that had anything to do with helping the sagehens.

ELLIS: Well it certainly could have a bearing there. There is a link between all of these activities of our wild animals, you know, if they get in a place and there is a good food supply they are going to make theirselves at home. If it isn't, they're going to look for something. And your predators, like the coyotes, they do the same thing, you know. If there is no rodents around for them to feed on, which is primary, their food supply, why they're going to move on until they find something.

CONLY: Do you remember when you come over here and trapped quail to trade to Colorado or someplace for some ... turkeys or some-thing?

ELLIS: ...

CONLY: How did the turkey situation turn out?

ELLIS: Well we transplanted, we traded, I think ... and I think I trapped 20, 30, 20, 25 antelope up here in the Harney Valley and gave them to Washington for some, traded for some animal. Might have been some turkeys or something, I forget now what it was. But yeah, we have traded back and forth like that to get a start of something. But our turkeys

just haven't worked out too good. There is a few around up --- you take up on the Columbia River, and up in that general area in the Columbia Basin, I think they have quite a few turkeys. They have had seasons on them up there for quite awhile. But we put some up out of Seneca, and there was some showed up over around Snow Mountain in that country, but I don't, I haven't seen or heard of any up there for years now, a long time.

CONLY: Somebody told me down around Roseburg that the turkey situation was pretty, you know, fairly good.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: ... acorns and stuff.

ELLIS: I think our country here is pretty hard on turkeys in the wintertime. We have pretty severe winters.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: You know in Burns we average, long term average there at the weather station is 47 inches of snow a year. And that's --- and then if we have a cold winter that goes with it, that snow lays on deep and cold, and frozen, it is pretty hard on a turkey to get a good meal there, I would think.

CONLY: Well what about the fishing in this country? And I go back to here, what, about 5, 10 years ago when the water come down past the round barn and filled the Dry Lake there, and the fish that --- them guys catching now. Hell my boy caught 16", 18", they come out of ---

ELLIS: Riddle Creek.

CONLY: --- Riddle Creek, and what's the other little creek up there? Williams used to ...

ELLIS: Well I go back, way back in history, now Ernie Quier, you know, homesteaded there in Virginia Valley.

CONLY: Well I've got, see I've got Ernie's plates.

ELLIS: Yeah, yeah I know you do. Well he told me that Riddle Creek used to be good fishing up on Riddle Mountain, off of Riddle --- He said years ago, he said that was good fishing. He said you'd could catch some in there a foot, 14 inches long once in awhile. And this is, he is talking back in the homestead days, or maybe right after the First World War, something like that. Yeah, the fish population has come and gone in various places like that. Whitehorse is a good example, you know.

CONLY: Yeah, I know.

ELLIS: They have had those red band, the cutthroat trout down there.

CONLY: Ellis, I don't --- I don't believe in the red band.

ELLIS: I don't think there is such a thing as the red band, personally.

CONLY: I, that's --- okay, I think that's strictly rainbow trout, but go ahead.

ELLIS: Well like I say, there has been so much, they're trying to re-introduce and preserve the native species. Well I'll just tell you a little story at Frenchglen here three or four years ago. Went in there with John --- when we go south in the winter --- south end, why he likes to leave early in the morning and have breakfast at the hotel there at Frenchglen. He likes to visit with people. I went in there and I sat down by a young girl, and the first thing I know she had a Game Commission, pardon that Game Commission, it's the Department of Fish and Wildlife now, insignia on. So I introduced myself, and asked her what it was she was working on. "Oh," she says, "I'm ---" she was just as nice as she could be. She was working on the rare and endangered red band trout. "Oh," I said, "that's interesting. What area are you working?" "Oh, right over here at the mouth of the Blitzen Canyon." So I thought to myself, goodness I said, --- well I introduced myself. I told her, "Well I've been here for 50 years, and originally I took care of the fish, as well as the big game and stuff, I worked both, I was the only one here." And I said, "That mouth of that Blitzen River there has been planted with rainbow trout out of the

hatchery for 50 years that I know of." And I says, "Do you mean to tell me that there is some native red band trouts in there?" "No." She said, "Well Mr. Hosford says ---" he was the fisheries biologist, you know. And I said, "Well now," I said, "you're telling me then that if I had a field out here and they had a bunch of thoroughbred quarter horses in it, and somebody come along and put a bunch of thoroughbreds in there that I would have any registered quarter horses." "Oh," she says, "no, I don't know anything about horses." But, you know, I can understand it. Anyway there she --- and by gosh the next time --- I kind of backed out, apologized. She was nice about it, you know.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: And then three weeks later or so we stopped in there again, and she was in there again, and she had a boy with here. And he was a helping her on this project. He was working primarily in Klamath Falls on something like that. And there they had two people working on the rare and endangered red band trout in a place that had been planted with rainbow for 50 years that I know of. Now isn't that a waste of money?

CONLY: Absolutely.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: It is.

ELLIS: I shouldn't be critical, but then I --- they're overdoing this thing like that.

CONLY: Yeah, yeah they are. Because, you know, back in 1922 when my folks was at Voltage, my aunt --- and my mom and my dad got married and lived at Voltage. I've got a picture of them and the schoolteacher and stuff, and they had caught trout from Rocky Ford Lane down to the Sod House, down where they took the water out to the Sod House. And they got trout in there 23" and 24" long. They looked like steelhead. They got a whole string of them, like that. And they caught most of them right down where the water turned out and headed for the Sod House buildings, if you know where that turn is

at, right in there. And they caught them back then, you know. So there was some tremendous trout back there, and this country raises trout.

But they, this --- why isn't this planting good? I mean here I'll go to the pheasant population; we used to have a lot of pheasants here. When they had that pheasant farm down here at Ontario.

ELLIS: Sure.

CONLY: Shouldn't they plant them some, help them out? What's the difference between a pheasant and a pheasant, I guess, is what I'm saying?

ELLIS: Yeah. Well there is, like there is the Mongolian pheasant, and the old Chinese pheasants.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: And there is the rainbow and the cutthroat. Now just to mention that cutthroat trout again. When I was talking to this girl the first time I asked her if she had counted the vertebrae in those fish to see how many vertebrae they had. "Oh," she said, "I couldn't do that without killing could I?" And I said, "No, you'd have to kill them."

Well I, when I was in school at Oregon State, I played ball there, and during the ball season I was cutting down on my academic work a little, and in order to graduate in four years I had to pick up some extra hours so I got a job working for the Game, in the summer. And they was interested, one of the fishery's professors there, was to find out if there was any characteristic differences between a cutthroat and a rainbow trout in different watersheds. So I spent some of that summer, most of it, going around on the coast, as well as over in this country, and the only thing I learned that the rainbow trout, typically a rainbow trout had 64 vertebrae and the cutthroat had 61 vertebrae. And as far as I'm concerned that's the only way that I could --- now you might get a fish that looks like a rainbow, and it might be, got some cutthroat in him too. It is just like an appaloosa

horse out here.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: And you can have an appaloosa horse that is ---

CONLY: A ... cross.

ELLIS: Might be a thoroughbred, but he doesn't have any colors on him, and he is still an appaloosa.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: I know the *American Horse Magazine* they run over that a lot of times, a lot of false ... you know, nowadays. They might be a registered, they say they could register them; they still didn't have any markings, if it was an appaloosa now. But that's the thing I come up with on those is the vertebra. It's the only difference that I could find. I couldn't find any difference in a different watershed, but if a rainbow in the coast range is the same as a rainbow over here.

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: But I, and the same way with the cutthroat. And I did count a lot of vertebras, and obviously the rainbow had 64 vertebrae, and the cutthroat 61. But, so there is so many little things like that. And I know right after the war I could go down Trout Creek and I could catch a limit of fish there, and half of them would be cutthroats, and maybe half of them rainbow.

CONLY: You bet.

ELLIS: And get over on Willow Creek and the Whitehorse, particularly Willow Creek they, 99% of them were cutthroat over there.

CONLY: Well, you know, I, up there on the head of that creek, you know, I stayed up there and I caught some, you know. But I love to watch them, you know, we love to watch them.

ELLIS: Sure.

CONLY: Same way the Little Fish Creek and stuff like that. Caught one when you was hungry and ate some. But what was --- what is wrong with them planting these fish and helping the population out? Is that wrong?

ELLIS: Some places the trout build up and probably had too many. Now like, take that Willow Creek there. Now this is the Willow Creek just before you get to the Whitehorse Ranch.

CONLY: Yeah.

ELLIS: My boys used to like to go up there; an old road dead-ended right down in there. They liked to ---

CONLY: ...

ELLIS: Just catch fish --- they were throwing them back. They would just have a ball. They'd throw a lot, just little kids in there for a while.

CONLY: They go into that little gap there?

ELLIS: Then they'd pick up their fishing pole and go to fishing, they'd still go to catching them, you know. Well that was in, let's see now, '40---, '56, '55. The Game Commission bought their first four-wheel drive Chevrolet --- now I had an army truck that belonged to the Game Commission prior to that. But we went down in there and we picked --- we hauled out 640 fish out of that dead end road right on the creek there. But we shocked a lot of them, and we put nets in. And we preferred little ones, three or four inches was better, and we hauled them up to a hatchery in LaGrande, Enterprise. And they were going to use them for breeding stock up there.

CONLY: Uh huh.

ELLIS: But we, there was about four of us in on that. And we caught them close enough to our pickup that we could carry them back and put them in a pickup with a ... tank on the

back of it. So that is a lot of fish, you know, that close to the ... We weren't packing them a mile down the creek to get them there either, you know. Just amazing, that creek was saturated with those.

CONLY: There was a lot of fish way on up, back towards Disaster Peak, up that, up that creek up there where I was camped. There was a lot of fish, lots of nice fish, a lot of them, you know.

ELLIS: But fish have come and gone just like our other animals, you know.

CONLY: Well Mother Nature has an awful lot to do with an awful lot of things that's like that. What about the chucker?

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: You know I was over at Beulah when they planted the first bunch of chuckers right over there just up from Johnny Albertson's, up from there ... The guys stopped and told me, you know, they were planting some chuckers. And I thought they were a little off their rockers, what the hell was a chucker to begin with.

ELLIS: Yeah.

CONLY: I didn't know what a chucker was. But a wonderful bird, a tremendous bird.

ELLIS: Yeah, they provided a lot of recreation for these sports-men.

CONLY: But they disappeared, they faded out. Is that on account of the cheat grass, and the lack of cheat grass, that food? Or---

ELLIS: I don't really know. They have a large brood, if you have a good season, what are you going to call a good season. That's when they raise big broods. And what the conditions are, I don't know. But I remember one year I, when I was writing my deer census, I wrote down everything I saw. Now like from Alvord Ranch to the Mann Lake Ranch one time I wrote down 600, over 600 chuckers. And I threw out a few, because there was a chance that I might have been, a bunch get up and fly here, I may be

counting the same ones again. And I figured then, well boy if we don't raise any chuckers at all next spring we're going to have a big supply. Well the next year the population was a way down. And it is just some certain conditions.

CONLY: Something strange happened here last year, Ellis, back up here past my corrals. You know the snow was just about two and a half, almost three feet on the level. And there was 8 chuckers come in off the mountain up here, they come in. And it just went, they just disappeared, just kind of one or two at a time until we was down to one, and then they disappeared. And to my knowledge I don't think there is any more chuckers. Do them chuckers have to be able to get to gravel so that they can digest?

ELLIS: I don't ---

CONLY: Now they were eating alfalfa hay and stuff there. They were, went right along, hell they were right in with the cattle and stuff. And my wife and I, you know, we was enjoying it and stuff. But they disappeared. Or, was it coyotes, or was it house cats. Now I believe an awful lot of our lack of birds on house cats.

ELLIS: House cats are real bad, real bad.

CONLY: My wife has got a whole slew of them out here. But --- and I do, I blame the lack of pheasants, the lack of quail, and I don't know about the chuckers, I don't know for sure, on the house cats, more so than I think I would on the coyotes and stuff.

ELLIS: Yeah, yeah. Now the chuckers like to get into the rocks and the hillsides. Like on the east side of the Steens, ideal along there. They like those hills in there. In the spring with

--- or when it comes hunting season, if you want to hunt chuckers if you can find a hillside that has got some green grass a coming in the fall, you're going to get into the chuckers there. Because they like that green grass a coming. They're like any other animal; they like to live with, where they can find something to their liking to eat.

CONLY: Uh huh. It's something else.

ELLIS: Well, I guess we've been just a rambling along from one subject to another.

CONLY: Well that's what we wanted to do. That's why it --- you getting tired of rambling I'll shut it (camcorder) off for a little bit.

(END OF TAPE)

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