



CELEBRATING OUR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION HERITAGE - The C.O.W.C.H. Project

Goal: *"To document the history of the profession of wildlife management from those who made it happen."*

Background: The professional field of wildlife management/conservation began in the 1930's with Aldo Leopold's publication of "Game Management" and the founding of a Department of Game Management at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Many of the first generation of wildlife professionals have passed away; several key individuals in 1999. It is imperative that the thoughts, recollections, and impressions of the individuals who played key roles in the evolution of the wildlife profession be captured and preserved before they are lost forever. In 1999, The Wildlife Society Council adopted the COWCH Project to accomplish this goal through the use of video and/or audio taped interviews of these living historians.

How It Will Work: The COWCH Project will be carried out at the State TWS Chapter level with coordination from TWS Section Representatives. Each Chapter will have a COWCH Coordinator, and perhaps a small committee, who will identify key people to interview and facilitate the interviews. Student TWS Chapters might assist with interviews. Interviewees could include TWS charter members, Leopold Medal winners, past-presidents of TWS, people who have received noteworthy Chapter and Section recognition, and others who State Chapter members feel have made noteworthy contributions to wildlife conservation in their state or region.

For the present, tapes will be archived at the national headquarters of The Wildlife Society with copies to persons interviewed and the State TWS Chapter. In the future, these historical materials could become part of a "National Center for Wildlife Conservation" type repository. They also will be available for historical research, documentary films, and other educational uses.



Minnesota Chapter-TWS Historian, John Moriarty, interviewing Art Hawkins, 17 June 2000.

Preparing for the Interview: The success of an interview depends on the preparation of two people, the **interviewer** and the **narrator**. The interviewer should describe the **COWCH Project** to the narrator and state how the narrator's career is important to the project. Therefore, the interviewer will need to know something about the person and their accomplishments. Obtaining a resume or biographic sketch beforehand is recommended. Become familiar with the enclosed, **GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS**. For each person, find out if they would like you to ask specific questions before the interview.

A Pre-interview Checklist:

1. Use a good quality video camera (preferably digital) mounted on a tripod. If using analog tape, 60 minute tapes are more stable than longer-running tapes.
2. If using an audio recorder instead of, or in addition to, the video camera, use cd-quality Audio- Maxel, TDK, or Hibias tapes or Sony Minidisks.
3. If available, an external microphone is generally better than an internal one. Lapel microphones can work well but attach inconspicuously under clothing if possible.
4. Have a notebook handy to record questions that occur to you during the interview. Jot down names and places to verify spellings or get additional explanations. Don't interrupt an interview to get spelling or minor clarifications.
5. Have spare batteries, tapes, and an extension cord for both the electrical supply and the microphone. Have a couple of 3-prong/2-prong electrical adapters to accommodate wiring in older homes.
6. Whatever equipment is used, make sure you familiarize yourself with it ahead of time.

Preparing the Narrator Before the Interview: Contact the narrator prior to the interview to get acquainted, provide background for the project, and give them a copy of this guide sheet so they know what to expect. If the narrator would like to show any pictures, letters, maps, etc., ask them to prepare them ahead of time.

The Interview: Key to a successful interview is the right setting. Make sure the narrator feels at ease and pick a quiet location, such as a living room or den. **Have the narrator sit in their favorite chair if possible.** The interviewer and narrator could be seated in comfortable chairs facing a coffee table. If a third person is operating the camera, the camera could include both the interviewer and narrator initially, but should then zoom in on the narrator.

Make sure lighting is appropriate. Good artificial light (perhaps bring a supplemental source) is better than natural light coming through windows that creates shadows. Shades may need to be drawn.

Minimize distracting noises. Avoid air conditioners, heaters and fans, TV's, radios, and other appliances that make a lot of background noise. Suggest disconnecting the phone. Any noise will be amplified on the tape. If near a highway, close doors and windows if possible.

A good interview is more monologue than dialogue. Be attentive, courteous and responsive, but remain largely silent. Nodding in affirmation is better than "agreement vocalizations."

Do not handle the microphone while the machine is recording and keep it away from rustling papers, tapping fingers, etc.

Allow the narrator time to think or collect thoughts. If there is an obvious break, ask a question from the list, or clarify points from notes taken earlier in the interview.

Keep track of time and plan a short break after 1 hour for bathroom and coffee break, change tape and/or battery, and discuss topics left to cover. Be patient and allow 4 hours for a 2-hour interview.

Don't use the same tape for more than one interview.

If the narrator used visual aids, maps, or photographs, identify these and if possible include a copy with the interview tape.

Create a **key word index** with personal and place names, project titles, events, and years.

Have fun and enjoy the interview. Remember this is a celebration of our profession!

GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS: Use the following questions as guidelines, not as questions that must all be answered. Try to get the narrator talking and keep the flow going. Use the questions to guide the interview and stay on course. Try to make sure most of the information below is covered (although the order in which it is covered is not important). Pauses while the narrator collects his/her thoughts are fine, but if the interview lags, pull a question off the list to get it going again. Finally, try to get the narrator answering open-ended questions that evoke his/her personal history and reflections.

Personal Information:

Birthplace and date.

Your parent's names.

Where and how did you spend your early years?

What hobbies, books, or events influenced you most?

What jobs did you have as a child?

Did you hunt or fish?

Education:

What high school? Where?

When did you graduate?

What University did you attend? When? What degree? Master's degree? Where and when?

PhD? Where and when?

What aspect of your formal education equipped you for the future?

Who most influenced your education and career track? (Your early mentors)

Were there courses that especially stuck with you?

Military Service:

Branch of the armed services?

Years served?

Duty served?

Overseas duty?

Decorations?

What was your job?

Did military service relate in any way to your employment as a wildlife professional?

Family:

- Tell about your spouse.
- When and where did you meet and marry?
- Any children? Names?
- What are they doing now?
- How did your career affect your family?

Career/Professional experience:

- What was your first professional position-state, federal, other?
- What did you do?
- Where did you go from there? Duty stations? Kinds of positions?
- What were the pay and benefits like?
- Were there promotion opportunities?
- Describe the wildlife profession of the day and the changes you observed.
- What tools and instruments did you use over the course of your career?
- What sorts of projects were you involved in?
- What were the major issues you had to deal with and how were those issues resolved?
- What was the most pressing issue?
- Has your perspective or opinion on that issue changed with time?
- What was the major impediment(s) to your job? To your career?
- What was the high point of your career?
- What was the low point of your career?
- What was your most dangerous or frightening experience?
- What was your most humorous experience?
- What would you like to tell others about your career?
- What were your 3 most significant contributions to the field?
- Who were the individuals who most shaped your career?
- In your opinion, who were the individuals who most shaped the development of the field of wildlife management and why?
- What are your thoughts on the future of the profession?
- What would you do differently if you could do it all over again?
- Were there any key insights on wildlife management that you gained in your career but never had an opportunity to publish them or explore them in more detail?

Post Interview Check List:

1. Ask the narrator to sign the **GIFT AND RELEASE AGREEMENT**.
2. Ask the narrator if they have any photographs or documents to donate, share, or copy, as well as any wildlife-related equipment.
3. Complete the **TAPE IDENTIFICATION and INTERVIEW REPORT** part of the form.
4. Remove tabs on tapes to avoid over-taping.
5. Label each tape with narrator's name, interviewer's name, date, tape number, and location of interview.
6. Send the tape and completed form to:

The COWCH Project
The Wildlife Society
5410 Grosvenor Lane
Bethesda, MD 20814-2197

TITLE IDENTIFICATION and INTERVIEW REPORT

All of the information in this report was obtained through personal observation. The writer has no other source of information. It is the responsibility of the writer to ensure that the information is accurate and complete. The writer has no other source of information.

For the purpose of this report, the following information was obtained from the interview. This information was obtained from the interview and is not to be used for any other purpose. The writer has no other source of information.

GIFT AND RELEASE AGREEMENT

I, _____ do hereby give and grant to The

Narrator's Name

Wildlife Society all literary and property rights, title, and interest which I may possess to the recording and the transcripts of the interview conducted at _____

Address

City

State/Zip

on _____ for the **Celebrate Our Wildlife Conservation Heritage**

Date

(C.O.W.C.H.) Project of The Wildlife Society, which gift I will never revoke or recall.

Narrator's signature _____ Date _____

Interviewer's signature _____ Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____

TAPE IDENTIFICATION and INTERVIEW REPORT

All of this information is fairly straightforward although immensely important. The better you are able to identify the most important subjects discussed, the easier it will be for researchers to tell the history involved. Please identify keywords and subject shortly after you conduct the actual interview.

For the Tape Identification Number, use the following format: State, interviewer's initial, and date (2 digits for day, month, year). For example: Interview conducted in Minnesota by W. Daniel Svedarsky on January 2, 1999 would be identified as Tape # MNWDS010299

Others present _____

Location of interview _____

Address

City

State/Zip

Indexed by _____ Date _____

Did the narrator request a copy of the videotape/audiotape? Yes No

Comments _____

Suggested keywords discussed: _____

Personal names mentioned _____

Places mentioned _____

Projects discussed _____

Important issues _____

NOTE: This interview format was adapted largely from the "Oral History Project Guide" pamphlet developed by Mark Madison, Historian, and his co-workers at the National Conservation Training Center of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We are grateful for their thoughtful development of the guide.