

Inside Interior:  
Bruce Babbitt

Bruce Babbitt was President Clinton's Interior Secretary from 1993 to 2001, the architect of some of the most controversial national monument designations and a leader in restoring public lands. This is the another in a monthly series of interviews with former Interior secretaries, conducted by Charles Wilkinson and Patricia Limerick, co-founders of the Center of the American West in Boulder, Colo.

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### Introduction

Patricia Limerick: The bulk of the introduction of the speaker is in direct correlation to the achievement and merit of the speaker so we'll be speaking for a little while longer up here. Charles Wilkinson will be introducing the speaker in terms of his life before Interior. Charles has known Bruce Babbitt for 35 years. Charles has followed Secretary Babbitt's career closely, and he has served assignments during Secretary Babbitt's administration including serving as special counsel for the drafting of the presidential proclamation creating the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument. Join me in welcoming Professor Charles Wilkinson.

Charles Wilkinson: Good evening. It's great having Bruce Babbitt back in Boulder. He's been here a lot and a close examination of the record will show that he's consistently come here for support, for comfort during the crises and controversies he was so regularly embroiled in and often created.

While it's true that a few people armed with a bullhorn offered up some truly energetic heckling one evening when Bruce was speaking over in Mackey, for Bruce, Boulder and the university have been mostly the civic equivalent of a hot tub at the end of a bad day. We hope it will be thus on this visit.

Born in Flagstaff, he went to college at Notre Dame and then took a master's in geology at Newcastle in England and a law degree at

Harvard. He joined the Phoenix firm of Brown and Bain and married the talented Hattie Coons, an international lawyer who among many other things later became U.S. ambassador to the Organization of American States.

Bruce had a diversified Arizona practice that included the Navajo Nation as a client. He ran statewide in 1974 and was elected Attorney General and more ominously to the office, second in succession to the governor.

Rather than focusing entirely on preserving what was left or worse, bemoaning what had been lost, Secretary Babbitt shifted his department's attention and the public's attention to putting things back together.

In 1978, he slithered unelected into the highest elected office in Arizona after Raul Castro resigned in favor of an ambassadorship in Argentina and Castro's successor, Wesley Bolin, passed away while in office. Bruce then made it on his own in two elections and really does remain a beloved figure in his home state, in spite of the earnest young woman at the Scottsdale Hotel front desk a year ago who asked him if he'd ever been in Arizona before.

Bruce ran for president in 1988, but I'll move on unless there are among us some aficionados of attractive, substantive, but relentlessly single-digit presidential hopefuls. He then practiced law and served as president of the League of Conservation Voters before taking office as Secretary in January of 1993.

This is a complicated and multi-faceted person, and it's interesting to look at some of the factors that made him the most-qualified person ever to be appointed to the most influential office in the American West and, history will show, one of the two greatest Secretaries of the Interior ever, along with Stewart Udall.

When Bruce grew up in Flagstaff in the '40s and '50s, it was in every way an archetypal Western town. His family, one of the leading in the state, having settled there early in 1886, had large ranch and retail holdings, and most of his classmates were children of loggers, miners and ranchers and Forest Service and BLM employees. He liked and respected them and the way of life, and he carries that

with him today. At the same time, he was a deeply intellectual person even as a boy who knew there was more.

Wallace Stegner died just three months after Bruce took office, and Bruce did a memorable thing. Ten days after Stegner's death, he held a ceremony specifically for Interior Department employees with the aim of reminding them of an important part of the institution's history. Stewart Udall had brought Stegner back to Washington to the administration as a writer-in-residence. It was an emotional event celebrating Stegner's life and relationship to the Interior Department, and after others had made remarks, Bruce had some other deeply personal words.

Speaking without notes, he recounted growing up in Flagstaff and one day he saw Stegner's epic book: "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West." The title captivated him and he took the book home and started reading it. Then at that session, he paused and said, "That was the rock that broke through the window."

From that point on, reading Stegner, Aldo Leopold and many others he joined his on-the-ground knowledge of the West with the philosophy of the West and its changes. Soon to be blended into that mix was his passion for science. Born in the spectacular landscape of the West, and his growing belief that science ought to play a central role in making public policy in the West.

The classic qualification for Secretary of the Interior is to serve as a Western governor, and Bruce's long tenure easily satisfied that. Further, although all Western governors deal with natural resource issues, he did so far more than most. He was a centrist, partly out of inclination, partly out of the staunchly Republican Legislature.

I'll exclude from this characterization as a centrist, his much-publicized veto of a resolution supporting the Sagebrush Rebellion. No matter, Arizona law provides for legislative overrides.

The Arizona Groundwater Act of 1980 is the most noteworthy of the group decision-making process Bruce believes in. The state's groundwater tables were dropping precipitously. He called in all the key players ... and urged them to come up with a system to stabilize groundwater extraction.

It took awhile, and there was plenty of contentiousness, and the result is imperfect, but in the end they crafted an approach that now maybe a quarter of a century later is as progressive a water policy as any Western state has ever adopted.

As a private person, Bruce can probably be described as while not an introvert, as shy. His public persona is very different. As most of you know or will soon experience, the public Bruce Babbitt is expansive and outgoing in the extreme. And, to put it mildly, he believes to his core that humor disarms and leavens and softens and binds us together.

Let me give you an example. A while back, I'm quite sure it was the Spring of 1987, the Civic Club of Portland invited Bruce up to give the monthly luncheon address — Oregon's premier speaking engagement. It was a poorly kept secret that this little-known governor from an arid state with designs on Pacific Northwest water was about to announce for president. The civic club wanted to size him up early on. It was standing room only with lots of press when Bruce took the podium. He thanked the club for their invitation and then described his plane flight in. When Bruce tells a story it can get mightily embellished and even more lengthy. But here is an abbreviated version.

"I can't tell you," he told the audience, "what a beautiful and moving airline flight I had up here. The skies were completely clear in the late afternoon. I could see forever. Out on the right was the whole Cascade range, the green Willamette National Forest. The Willamette Valley, the destination of the Oregon trail was spread out on the left. I studied geology at the University of Oregon for one semester and loved it. Then, the jet banked to the left and headed down toward Portland. And there it was, with the sunset out beyond it, the Columbia, the river of Lewis and Clark, one of the world's great salmon rivers, all 160 million acre-feet of it." And with that savior-fare, the next thing we knew, he was Mr. Secretary.

PL: Secretary Bruce Babbitt tied Secretary Stewart Udall for second place for the longest term held by Secretary of Interior. They came in second to Franklin Roosevelt's remarkably durable Harold Ickes.

Bruce Babbitt's confirmation hearings had some memorable and fun moments. There was, for instance, the occasion when the conservative Sen. Malcolm Wallop was reading, with quite a critical edge, a set of old quotations from earlier episodes in Gov. Babbitt's career. This was Bruce Babbitt's response to Sen. Wallop's persistent citing of his earlier and forcible statements: "A friend once said," he remarked, 'Bruce, your greatest failing in public life is that you have never had an unwritten thought.' "

At the hearing, Sen. Larry Craig from Idaho posed this interesting and challenging question to the nominee, "Who are you going to be? The old or the new or a combination of them both? The fellow who we got to know as the governor of Arizona or the advocate we got to know as the president of the League of Conservation Voters?"

To explain Sen. Craig's question a little, we can call to mind a quotation written in a report of the League of Conservation Voters by its president Bruce Babbitt, "We must identify our enemies and drive them into oblivion." Which surely must be its own fine testimony to the fact that even centrist Democrats can sometimes be pushed too far.

Yet even with a peppy statement of off-the-leash polarization every now and then, the incoming Secretary was actually the same person as the two-term governor of Arizona, as this sentence from the testimony at the confirmation hearing indicates:

"As governor of a state not known for political liberalism, and mighty scarce in terms of elected Democrats, I learned in the midst of this crossfire some things about how to rectify these conflicts. We seem to be in some cases a nation short on rituals and ceremonies, but there is a well-established ritual at confirmation hearings for the Secretary of the Interior at which the candidate must declare his devotion to balance."

And Secretary Babbitt performed this ritual in this sentence: "My vision for the Interior Department would be to improve the management of the nation's natural resources and to balance needed development and with stewardship and conservation."

Although through most of the hearings, he kept his own counsel on just what the definition of the word "balance" might come to hold.

One of the big questions that Secretary Udall brought to our attention at the start of this series in September involves the degree of delegation from the president to the Secretary, and the degree of support that the Secretary will get from the president on particular initiatives.

With the high proportion of public lands in Western states, Gov. Cecil Andrus of Idaho says he became Secretary so that he could control more of his state than he could control as governor. The smart move of being governor becomes quickly clear since former Gov. Clinton and former Gov. Babbitt had a background of familiarity to draw on as they started out in federal office.

And yet Secretary Babbitt's first couple of years could be described as demoralizing and frustrating. An effort to raise the grazing fees for public land ranching set off a political firestorm and the long process of forums and discussions on rangeland reform wore at the Secretary's patience.

Some of the environmentalists who supported him for office began to express their disapproval, a chorus of condemnation oddly echoed by an opposite and equal chorus from the representatives of the ranching and mining industries. Still administrative reform of grazing did yield results and opened the door to an ongoing experiment in addressing ecosystem health and public lands grazing.

The first two years with a Democratic majority in Congress were difficult and challenging, and then came 1994 and the congressional elections. The Gingrich Revolution and along came the Contract with America. Inspired by a memo from his press secretary, Secretary Babbitt changed his operating mode and got out into the nation, traveling constantly and engaging in an extraordinary effort to engage ordinary citizens in the work of Interior. Again, the scale of travel, the number of people he met, the places he visited can leave you breathless.

Since there was little hope of passing new legislation, Secretary Babbitt then undertook a number of remarkable experiments in finding new applications and uses of existing laws, in particular, the Endangered Species Act. Not only in the reintroduction of wolves

into Yellowstone but also in the development of the Northwest Forest Plan and the creation of critical habitat conservation plans in Southern California — an innovation that had been latent in existing legislation but not really mobilized. In those ways, he found ways to use administrative actions to make up for the fact that there was not much to do with Congress.

In 1996, President Clinton used the 1906 Antiquities Act to create the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument in Utah. Secretary Babbitt convinced President Clinton that if he took this and similar opportunities that he (President Clinton) could match Theodore Roosevelt's achievements in conservation.

President Clinton, though a modest and unassuming man, thought this was a pretty appealing proposition. The result was 21 big national monuments and also a very interesting ripple effect in the direction of improved land management, once Secretary Babbitt's powers to persuade the president became recognized in the West.

To a historian, one of the most engaging and appealing aspects of Secretary Babbitt's time in office involves his adoption of restoration as a goal and as a new conservation practice.

-- finding remedies for past injuries, a vision that truly has been at the core of the Center's last two series of lectures on healing the West.

Then there were the actual encounters of the Secretary with concrete, mediated by that famous sledgehammer. A quotation by Secretary Babbitt said that he was not going to take down all the dams but said, "We should strike a balance between the needs of the river and the demands of river users. There can be no doubt that we have a long way to go toward a better balance."

The Yellowstone Fires of 1988 had brought the matter of management of fire on public lands to general attention, but it was Bruce Babbitt who really took possession of the problem launching as he said, "a conservation movement that puts prescribed fire back on the landscape and increases the health and the productivity of the land, and reduces the risk and destruction of wildfires that do occur."

His personal engagement with this issue is extremely intense. He responded rapidly to the terrible news of the deaths at South Canyon in 1994, and we are coming up very close to the 10th anniversary of that tragic blow-up. He himself worked repeatedly on the fire lines.

In an administrative change that carries resonance for the whole big effort of uniting the disciplines for a better understanding of nature, Bruce Babbitt first created a new agency, the National Biological Service, clustering the biological scientists from the different agencies of Interior and then watching as the Biological Services was merged into the United States Geological Survey, bringing life sciences and physical sciences into a dynamic new relationship.

We have learned on other occasions in this series the burdens of public office. We have also learned the ways in which the Department of Interior functions as a target for frustration and anger for partisans and advocates of many different causes. I turned to a quotation from John Leshy, Interior Solicitor during Babbitt's time for a summation of what this meant in practice:

"Focus and perseverance were especially valuable because Babbitt endured more than his share of vilification when in office. It is something of a puzzle as to why such a generally reasonable, open-minded and mild-mannered person provoked such strong feelings of opposition, but he did." Lest that seem too abstract, let's try a couple of examples.

Here's one from the left: "Babbitt appears to be affixed to the edifice of the administration like some strange, grinning gargoyle sporting bovine horns and hooves, a living articulation of the latest cachet of Clintonesque kitsch." Some English teacher really fell down.

"He is Captain Consensus. The eco-friend of the rangeworn cowboy, the gypo logger and the pick-ax miner who endlessly spouts the empty argot of ecosystem management at any focus group that will listen."

And now from the right: "It will certainly be a great relief for Americans to not have quite so many extreme environmentalists, including Bruce Babbitt and Al Gore, kicking everyone else around."

Patron saint of consensus. You'll hear tonight some interesting complexities and dimensions to that but Bruce Babbitt's ability to deal with this ongoing litany of complaint was indeed extraordinary. As he says here: "My real audience is the 80 percent who are on either side. That's the bottom line and that's who I am really speaking to."

As he said on another occasion, "The environmentalists' job is to move the goal post. When you get near the goal post, they celebrate briefly and then they say you haven't done enough. It's part of the job."

A final remark on this subject: "I don't take personal offense to anything. This job is a job for grown-ups."

This quote is from a letter from Arizona Sen. John McCain made in support during Secretary Babbitt's confirmation hearings: "The job of the Secretary of Interior is one of the most difficult in the government. One that can truly test a man's faith."

Speaking of faith, in 1995 Bruce Babbitt began speaking publicly on the subject of his own religious belief and making a case for the ties between Christian belief and concern for the preservation of species. "Commanding Noah to include every living thing in the Ark, God specified the whole of creation. Then in the words of the covenant with Noah, 'When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all the living things on earth.' Thus, we are instructed that this everlasting covenant was made to protect the whole of creation, not just for the exclusive use and disposition of mankind, but for the purposes of the Creator."

The willingness to speak publicly about his faith, served as a rallying point for a number of religious groups and leaders who became involved in the campaign to protect the Endangered Species Act from being repealed.

Stepping down from office in 2001, Bruce Babbitt told a reporter that he had written a letter to his successor, Gale Norton, and he summed up the contents this way. "The tone I tried to convey in this letter is, 'Look, you are part of a great American historical process. The Department of Interior has been at the center of the conservation and use of our natural resources. It is a fabulous organization. Good luck.' "

In that same interview, Babbitt characterized the Department of Interior as a crucible of conflict. But then he went on to declare his gratitude for the chance to hold the office of Secretary. It's been a marvelous and important experience. I wouldn't miss this opportunity for anything. For the chance to work on these conservation issues, to serve my country, to work for this president, I would do it all over again, every single minute.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my honor and privilege to present to you Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt.

CW: ... try to understand the Secretary's role is how priorities are set and the ways in which you ... lay out a broad game plan for addressing them and also do some hands-on work. I'd like to take the Endangered Species Act as an example because early on in your tenure, it was clear that pressure was building to cut way back on the Endangered Species Act. How much of a priority did you give it and what things did you do to try to reach your objectives?

Endangered Species Act and the California Gnatcatcher

Bruce Babbitt: Charles, that's an interesting issue, if I can take it back just a bit. When I first met with Clinton after the election in Little Rock, and we were talking about possible jobs, I told him I didn't really want to do Secretary of Interior.

I said, "Look, I've been quarreling with these same people and these same issues all of my life and I'm sick and tired of it and I know they're sick and tired of me. I'd like to move on."

And I told him I'd like to be special trade representative and he said fine. The releases went out and I went to Little Rock two days before Christmas. I'd been vetted, I'd written my little speech and I thought

this would be really neat. I could use the emerging global economy as a way to get at global environmental standards.

But my friends in the environmental community, always ready to be a hair shirt, started bombarding Clinton in Little Rock: "Why isn't Babbitt Secretary of Interior?" Clinton calls me up, right before Christmas, we're sitting down in Little Rock, and said, "We changed our mind." I said, "Are you ever going to come to a conclusion?"

He said, "Would you consider being Secretary of the Interior?"

I'm thinking that it's not a bad deal, getting a job serving the president, so I said, "Yes." But I did say, "The one thing that makes me most interested in this job, that is really new, is the Endangered Species Act." Because it's about reordering priorities on the land, not just on public lands but everywhere in the country, and it's almost dead because nobody ever tried to make it work. That's a new challenge. So I'd be willing to get on an airplane, go back and continue meeting with cowboys and miners and loggers and going through this endless hassle that I've been going at for 30 years. Because this job now has this new, national dimension. It was at the top of my list the day I unpacked my suitcase.

If I may mention just one more thing. It wasn't at the top of my agenda just because I wanted it to be. In my first month in office, the Fish and Wildlife Service brought me a listing decision for a bird called the California gnatcatcher. I thought that was really interesting. It was just routine so I signed off the listing. What nobody told me, was that the habitat of the California gnatcatcher, which would then be off limits to any kind of modification or development, consisted of all of the undeveloped land between Los Angeles and San Diego.

And I'm kind of coming up for air and the folks in the White House are cautious. Does this bird really need 80,000 square miles and are you aware, it is generally thought that President Clinton might be running for re-election?

That crisis kind of dumped me into what turned out to be a really fabulous opportunity to craft an entirely new approach. That's a long answer for a short question but it serves you right, I get to do the talking.

CW: You developed habitat conservation plans and took them to a new level and without getting too technical about that, and I'm thinking in part of bringing in Joe Sachs, how did that proceed? To what extent did you map out that strategy and what extent did you work with that on the ground?

### Northwest Forest Plan

BB: The evolution of the Endangered Species Act I think was driven by two issues. I described one. It was the gnatcatcher listing, which was about private land and urban development. That came at us from one direction. The other one, of course, was the Northwest Forest Plan; that process was preset in a very appropriate way. ... President Bush was in Washington standing on the back of a logging truck saying if you re-elect me president, we'll get people back to work and get rid of these owls and forests. A little bit of license there but ...

Clinton was standing in the (Portland, Ore.,) backyard as the essential Bill Clinton. He's speaking to both constituencies, saying there's no conflict here that can't be resolved with goodwill and affirmative leadership. He said, if I'm elected I'll be back and we'll get on with it. He was elected and the Northwest remembered the promise and he delivered. He went out to Portland and set up a daylong meeting and said we are going to resolve this and the federal agencies are going to come together and we're going to get it done.

So he empowered me in a remarkable way to wrap my arms around that one, and I went back to Portland about a week later and I got all of the federal employees, state, everybody, all of the science people in a room just like this. I stood up in front of them and behind me was a map of the Pacific coastline from Seattle clear down to San Francisco, the entire ecosystem.

I said to these folks, "We're going to erase these jurisdictional lines and you out there in the audience are going to tear off your agency badges and deposit them at the door and we are going to create a scientifically driven ecosystem plan based on the viability analysis of 200 species and produce a result.

That plan, empowered by the president, went on through, the injunction was lifted and it was an extraordinary achievement because it was mandatory, multi-species science, put into a public land result.

The private lands were obviously much more difficult, and in some in California, the moratorium was the condition precedent to getting it solved. Because you see you put all the developers in jail and I'm the guy with the key. Because we can't lift the moratorium until we have worked out a system of reserves and space planned sufficient to ensure the long-term viability of the species.

Now just to finish this, that took a different approach because there are hundreds of thousands of landowners, county commissioners and local governments, and I just basically had to go out and live in Southern California and wander around. County Supervisor Rod Roberts, when I came in in San Diego, he's kind of star struck. His first response is, "Secretary of Interior is in my office?" And the second response is outrage. "What the hell is a federal official doing here lecturing me about land-use planning?"

So it took a couple of years of living on the landscape and bringing people together and saying, "Look, we've got to solve this problem. I've got these scientists here and this bird ain't going to go away." But the California gnatcatcher is now a land-use planner.

Yet out of the crucible of all that mixture, we got a really fabulous set of plans that became really the template for doing this on private land.

CW: Now that was a really public negotiation but the Northwest Forest Plan was not and gets criticized on the grounds of being too secret and having too much science in it. Just turning too much over to scientists not responsive to the public and working largely in secret. Working literally in closed rooms. Looking back on it would you do that differently?

BB: I think the wrath was essentially correct. Looking back on it, I think part of it was that the old-growth forests were, and are, public land. This wasn't about dealing with thousands of public land owners in Southern California, this was about dealing with national forest, BLM lands that are public property. The president had

campaigned on a platform, the issue had been debated on a front end of an election, and the people had elected a president who said I am going to solve this by putting science out front.

As I look at it in retrospect, I think that is kind of the sense of it. We had a mandate as a function of the political process. If I were doing it again, would I counsel more public participation? Yeah, I think so.

I think what I learned in eight years was that when you're dealing with these complex issues across landscapes, whether it's rangelands, forests, public lands or private lands, or coastal lands in south Florida, the best way to work this, first of all, is to understand that you have to have a legislative stick to get anywhere. You have to come from a position with some power to cause a result that will inflict pain.

That's the bottom line. That's what those moratoriums are all about. It's what my use of the delegated power from the president to use the Antiquities Act is about. It was a stick and we'll talk about that more. But once you have the power and the legal authority to save an Endangered Species Act, put timber off-limits, declare a national monument, it's then imperative to me in the process, that you then turn around and say, "OK, folks, we're going to sit here until the last dog is gone and talk this through and hear everybody and work toward reconciling competing interests in the best way that's compatible with the legal objective that we've got the power to enforce."

And I think if there's one process that I take out of eight years, that's it. It's really messy, it's extraordinarily time-consuming and Pat is right, I didn't live in Washington during eight years. I was out hanging around the landscape until people were often sick and tired of me, saying "I can go back and do this. We can work something out that will meet my legal objective and it will be better for all the participation." Some spectacular examples here in Colorado and elsewhere. So that's kind of my bottom line.

CW: You mention the monuments and the Antiquities Act. Let me ask you a multi-part question and have you talk about that set of developments. Talk about your communications with Clinton over the national monuments, about whether really there wasn't a serious mistake made with the Grand Staircase-Escalante in terms

of complete secrecy. A policy you changed later. Whether you think it was a mistake putting the BLM in charge of the monument. And you have an interesting take on the role of the condor as kind of a metaphor for some of this.

## Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument

BB: First of all, the last challenge for the Grand Staircase Monument was dismissed by a federal judge in Salt Lake City today so I can, in public for the first time, tell you the real story.

It's an amazing story. The president, during the first term, didn't really hear the music of the environmental issues. It really wasn't his thing. I didn't have a lot of luck, kind of moving back up into the White House, with an agenda. Most of these endangered species things and these other things were then kind of under my own kind of initiative.

I went back to my office and took out an index card and sat at my desk and split it in two. In one column, I put William Jefferson Clinton and in the right-hand column I put Theodore Roosevelt. In the right-hand column, I tallied up all the acreage and the numbers of monuments, a kind of matrix, if you will, that had put Theodore Roosevelt into history. And then I did the Clinton matrix.

But then during the re-election campaign of 1996, a guy named Dick Morris – Dick Morris was this kind of dark shadowy figure who took polls and talked to the president about triangulation and was the subject of the episode on the balcony of the Jefferson Hotel. He was an unknown figure in government. A political kind of operative who had surely never been near a national park. And his idea of a wilderness would probably not get beyond a parking lot with no stripes.

I will now tell you for the first time publicly the Grand Staircase is the work product of Dick Morris. How did it happen? Morris is polling in the lead-up to the election and he has discovered very astutely that the environmental issues are beginning to rise back up after this long dry period beginning '94, '95 and he goes back to us, the president's people, us, and says we need a dramatic environmental initiative.

It can't be Congress because you can't get anything out of Congress and it's got to be kind of an October surprise. Now, he's never heard the word "national monument." But everybody was now in the hands of this kind of Svengali figure. So let's hear some dramatic proposals. So let's hear some dramatic proposals, and the Grand Staircase jumped to the top of the list immediately. The rest of it is all public knowledge now. That dictated, that for political reasons, it be done in secret. Because that was the whole Morris kind of thing. If we're going to make the front page of the national press in a big splash, it's got to be a surprise.

Well, we paid a terrible political price for it and understandably. I may not get into all of that but it was really awful. Because the president had the legal authority to do it that way, there was no question about that at all. In fact, his predecessors who had often thrown national monuments over the transom on their way out of office, but in an era of higher expectation about transparency and process, we paid an awful price.

The result of that was the talk of national monuments was off the agenda – they were never mentioned again for several years. It was too broad. There was too much bad blood and rancor in Congress.

You asked a lot of questions. Let me just answer one more in the sequence. How to get it back on track. I began in 1997 kind of moving back. I had managed to kind of bulk up my direct relationship with the president and began kind of lobbying saying, this is important stuff.

Presidents have always done it as they become lame ducks, when Congress can't retaliate quite so effectively and I wasn't getting very far. Then one afternoon I went back to my office and took out an index card and sat at my desk and split it in two. In one column, I put William Jefferson Clinton and in the right-hand column I put Theodore Roosevelt. In the right-hand column, I tallied up all the acreage and the numbers of monuments, a kind of matrix, if you will, that had put Theodore Roosevelt into history. And then I did the Clinton matrix. And by then everything was pretty respectful. We had passed the California Desert Protection Act. We'd done the Northwest Forest Plan. The clear meaning of the card was there.

That night at a White House reception, I took the card out of my pocket in the receiving line and I handed it to him. He took it and he started to put it in his pocket and then he paused and he started looking and reading every detail. That was the moment. It wasn't the environment, it was legacy. That's the moment that I had his mandate to use at my discretion.

He'd call up in the middle of the night and say, "Bruce, do you got any more of those cards? How are we doing?"

The political process always doesn't work like you get it in the civics books. It really doesn't.

PL: The fire stuff. I want to hear your fire stories and I want from the ground level to the macro and I want to hear the dimensions about how it permits you to resolve the problem of agency location that had vexed previous officials.

### Fighting Fire

BB: The only time in eight years that I really go nervous about Charles Wilkinson was when I was talking to him once about three years into my tenure and he said, "Bruce, how did you come to run and be in charge of the Forest Service?" And I said, "Charles, if you ever put that in writing, you're going to ruin my plan for forest management."

What I mean by that is that most secretaries have been deeply resentful of the fact that Gifford Pinchot stole the Forest Service away from Interior and sent it over to the soybean crowd and all of my predecessors have shared a common resentment about that and in various ways tried to get it back.

Harold Ickes, who had a vast amount of power and did all sorts of remarkable things, even Harold Ickes couldn't get it back. God, he tried. But I'd been deeply interested in forestry and I started looking around and said, "It's not about the organization boxes, it's about a subversive kind of approach."

My real interest was following the ecology and so I said, "I've got to capture the affection and the confidence of the rank and file, of the people in all the forest agencies." So early on in 1993, I called in the

fire manager for the Interior Department and said, "I want to go west and join a fire crew and get out on the lines." The guy kind of rolls his eyes skyward and said, "You know you've got to be trained to do that."

I said, "Look, when I was in high school we went out and fought fires all the time. I know what that's about." And he kind of looked at me and said, "Yeah, we've changed a little bit since then. You've got to be trained now."

I stared at him and said, "Well, what does that mean?" He said, "You've got to have a red card." And I said, "Well, how do you get a red card?"

He thought here awhile and said, "You have to go to fire school in Boise for a full month," knowing that I couldn't possibly do that. But I didn't let loose and I said, "All right. Maybe you should think of this as the mountain coming to Mohammed. Maybe that fire school could come to Washington."

We struck a deal that the fire trainers would come for about a six-month period, quietly, every Saturday to the Interior Department, and me and the trainer would go to a classroom on the seventh floor, just the two of us, and I'd do the little books and listen to the films and bring back my homework.

It climaxed with the fire shelter deployment test which we couldn't do in the classroom so we climbed out on the top of the Interior Department and he got out his stopwatch, and I practiced ripping that fire shelter out of my pack and getting it over me and getting flat on the ground in 25 seconds. Then I went out and passed the running test after lots of Tylenol and got my red card. The rest was history.

Because I started then on the fire lines with a Pulaski working a 10-, 12-hour day, and by that fact I was in charge of fire policy and we managed to turn fire policy all the way around through a series of documents away from this fire suppression towards how we're going to manage these forests back into a fire cycle and make it work through all the complexities; and it was a lot of fun.

Again, it's a nice story. You can beat your head bloody trying to reorganize government but it's really a lot more fun just to get out and capture it.

PL: Some episodes of demoralization and discouragement and your response to that? You have a number of them so you can take your pick.

### Gingrich Revolution and National Parks Closure Bill

BB: I think the worst was the interminable hassle over grazing. Actually, maybe the spring of 1995, the Gingrich crowd comes to town. They're busy getting ready to dismantle every environmental law in sight. It's really incredible.

It's hard to remember those days. But that's when my press secretary waited until my chief of staff and the others were out of town, and he came to me and handed me the most blistering memo. I couldn't believe that anybody who worked for me could write it.

He said, "Bruce, you are on the verge of being a complete failure. You will be remembered in history for having done nothing in the face of this sustained assault taking place in Congress." He said, "You can't make a difference in Washington. You've got to pack your bags and leave town and live on the landscape, kind of like a guerrilla. And your job is to get out on the landscape and get people together and for story and for metaphor and for making people, having them live with past achievements, get some energy out there in the country.

We started off in Cleveland where somebody had said to him the Cuyahoga River, which was once burning, is now a splendid success story of restoration. Nobody ever talks about it. So we went to Cleveland and gathered the fire boats off the lake and the developers and everybody and did this big thing and it really kind of worked.

So I lived on the land all through that spring and the final wonderful authentication of what Kevin Sweeney told me came in Atlanta, Ga. The Gingrich people at the height of this counterrevolution had

been dumb enough to put together a piece of legislation called the "Park Closure Bill."

I mean it does really seem to make them all seem crazy. But the theory behind the bill — and Jim Hansen was one of the originators of this — was that we have too many national parks. In aid of government efficiency, we should close some down. Kevin Sweeney said there's not a single American who believes we have too many national parks. You won't find one anywhere in America. These guys have gone too far.

Someone discovered that there is a unit of the National Park Service called the Chattahoochee National Recreation Area in Gingrich's district. I don't need to go any further. But I offered the people in Atlanta to float the Chattahoochee River with me, just one spin down, and Gingrich pulled the bill off the floor of the House the next day. The moral of the story is those were really the bad days, reminiscent of what's going on today.

PL: While they're doing that [writing questions], why don't you talk about nuclear energy?

BB: Let's talk about energy. As we deal with these issues, we have to be centered on facts. One reason I have been such a strong advocate of protecting public lands and indeed have said throughout my tenure that really multiple use is not the right image for public lands.

The right image for public lands is to say they are covered with a public servitude which says the public demands and wants that they be administered for the primary purpose of conserving the ecosystem, restoring degraded rivers, bringing back endangered species, protecting creation in all of its glory. There's room enough and space enough to do this in this country and that's what I believe the public mandate for public lands is.

## Nuclear Energy

So what about energy? These guys are saying the dominant purpose of public lands is to drill for oil and gas everywhere. It's an outrage, because the ecological values being compromised are not offset by any significant — there's not much out there. The total reserves of

fossil fuels in the United States are less than 3 percent in the world and we're consuming 25 percent of total production every day, worldwide. We can't drill our way out of this cul-de-sac and the idea that we sacrifice the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or the great lands of the Colorado Plateau for a few more weeks of production in the name of drilling our way out of the drilling crisis is just a fraudulent piece of politics.

These guys are saying the dominant purpose of public lands is to drill for oil and gas everywhere. It's an outrage, because the ecological values being compromised are not offset by any significant – there's not much out there.

Now the real issue is how are we going to get out of the fossil fuel trap? The issue of climate change and global warming is surely, by order of magnitude, the most ominous environmental threat that we face in this century. Because it's not just about local damage, it's about disrupting entire systems. It's about the snow disappearing from the southern Rockies, the Arctic icecap melting, sea level rising, huge threshold changes in patterns of precipitation, storms, droughts. It's truly a scenario we just can't blindly slide into.

We are going to have to take dramatic steps to get off of fossil fuels. Are we doing it? No. What we're doing is building coal-fired energy plants and pumping fossil fuels -- the carbon dioxide, the result of this, is ramping up rapidly.

What can we realistically do to bridge across to a future of renewable energy? We're not going to get there no matter how hard we try and we ought to be trying. But we can't get there quick enough and the only alternative for base load power to run our industrial civilization is nuclear power. That's 20 percent of our base power in this country, it's nearly 100 percent in France, nearly 75 to 80 percent in Japan, a huge amount in the United Kingdom. We can't walk away from that.

We've fried this planet in terms of climate change. My plea to my environmental audiences: Yes, we could get unhooked from fossil fuels by cutting our energy consumption by 75 percent, but it isn't going to happen in the short run and do you want to sit quietly by and let it happen or do you want to safely — we've got to make a choice between two alternatives.

One is managing the risk of a nuclear power base which we already have and which isn't going away and use it because it is a zero carbon dioxide scenario, or are we going to continue the cultural opposition to all things nuclear in a Hobson's choice which says we will continue to ramp up coal production which is not controversial in the short run, but the long-term consequences, damage consequences, vastly outweigh the risks attendant to nuclear power. I urge you to think about that.

PL: On behalf of our partners here in the Nature Conservancy, could you say a few words on the Baca Ranch, that project, and your rule on that?

Baca Ranch

BB: The Baca Ranch is a splendid tribute to a lot of people in Colorado, the Nature Conservancy, a lot of private sector people. From my perspective, it's an interesting story because the reason the Baca Ranch and the Great Sand Dunes National Monument was expanded by congressional action into a national park with modified boundaries encompassed the purchase of the Baca Ranch is because in 1997, after I had sent my card up to the president, got his mandate and went out West and he'd signed off on a bunch of these monuments, I looked around the Great Sand Dunes with Nighthorse-Campbell and Scott McGinnis - there was a wonderful picture on the front page of the Post of us standing on one of these great sand dunes - but the story behind that was that sometimes Republican legislators when they feel real heat, see the light.

And the heat was that I had previously been down to Great Sand Dunes and taken a little trip and just casually mentioned that this looked like a place where maybe I could recommend to the president that he use the Antiquities Act and that was kind of the stick.

By then everyone in the West understood that when I showed up and said, "Well, maybe I'll talk to the president about whether or not he might possibly think a little more about a national monument ..." the translation was "That sonofabitch is going to get him to do it right away. We'd better do something."

So again, that kind of the creative forcing mechanism and the result of that was vastly preferable to a presidential decree because it was congressional legislation, and it had a lot of really wonderful boundary provisions and management provisions that are properly the province of Congress.

And I would never be one to denigrate the efforts of Nighthorse-Campbell and Scott McGinnis until they are now on the way out of office and I'm not. But they are entitled to the credit. They did it. But it was the kind of behind-the-scenes, action-forcing mechanism that brought it about. And it was a great result, a fabulous result.

CW: I'd like you to speak to one thing and that's the Yellowstone wolves. What sort of personal satisfaction do you take from that and will history look at that as a symbolic act or one of real substance?

Wolves in Yellowstone

BB: It's a fabulous, multifaceted thing. First of all, let me say the wolves in Yellowstone were not my singular invention. There had been a long and courageous set of Westerners who had been working this issue.

Jim McClure, when he was a senator from Idaho. It had been festering for a long time and the space was opening up due to the effort of a number of people in Congress and leaders elsewhere. The opportunity was moving up.

What we did was recognize that the Gingrich Revolution was shutting this all down, we had a tiny little window of opportunity before it was going to get closed down and we, of course, seized it very aggressively.

The recovery of the Yellowstone ecosystem, I'm sure you've all heard this story, it's really a miraculous example of this power of this concept called restoration, of imagining what the landscape once was like and then turning back and using the power of imagination in reference to say we can bring it back.

There's no question that the elk were out of control in Yellowstone and that the damage to the ecosystem you could see, particularly in the riparian areas. The beaver were gone and the aspens.

Yellowstone was beginning to look like the King Ranch was running the place with cattle, but it was elk. The wolf shows up and those tens of thousands of elk were lounging around in the creek bottoms, the wolf just electrified the place and knocked the elk herds back, and the riparian systems have come back, the beaver and aquatic components of the river systems of the Yellowstone, the aspens. A fabulous example of this concept called ecosystem restoration whether it's in Yellowstone or the Everglades or wherever.

Lastly, let me say that the wolf to me has even a larger value and it is as it now spreads across public lands, the carrier of a message that I want to be heard in the West. And that is about the dominant public servitude on western lands.

The wolf has priority because he is a representative of the natural ecosystems and the landscape of the West that the public, I believe is saying, should supplant these old ideas of multiple use. There's a primary use, not a lot of equal uses, and the wolf is the bearer of that message.

The wolf is not saying you've got to take all the cattle off public lands. The wolf is saying that I have the first right to be here and the people who run livestock are going to have to live with the costs of intact ecosystems and the top priorities.

When my family was ranching in the West at the turn of the century, the modern idea of the ranch was to clean out all the competition: bobcats, mountain lions, golden eagles, anything that imposed any cost on – they called it clean ranching. You try to eliminate everything. Forage competitors, you slaughtered everything and said this is the domain of livestock production.

A century later it's now different. The wolf is the carrier of that message and it's a very elegant and beautiful – yeah, it's a very emotional thing. I love to watch them in Yellowstone but it's kind of an anthropologic kind of beauty: that wolf's got my message. He's out there selling it.

Question and Answer Period

Q. What do you think of the current administration's environmental policy?

A. When I get that question, my normal response is this administration makes me nostalgic, positively nostalgic, for Jim Watt. People say would you say that? And the answer is, I really mean it. Because I am very respectful in personal terms with all my predecessors, you know that's the American way. But I don't think it's an injustice to say what Jim Watt was about was getting in front of the American people and raking his fingernails down the blackboard. And it was a style which prompted so much opposition that there was this huge backlash of response.

The problem with this group is, it's the exact opposite. Beneath the smiling facade of Clear Skies and Healthy Forests, are dirty skies and we'll save the forests by cutting them down.

It's being done, not in a frontal fashion, it's being done in incremental kinds of change. Chipping, chipping, chipping, chipping. In a way that's enormously subtle.

He awakened the American people to the need to talk back. The Sierra Club doubled its membership and the result was that for all of the talk, not much really changed. The problem with this group is, it's the exact opposite. Beneath the smiling facade of Clear Skies and Healthy Forests, are dirty skies and we'll save the forests by cutting them down.

It's being done, not in a frontal fashion, it's being done in incremental kinds of change. Chipping, chipping, chipping, chipping. In a way that's enormously subtle. It's very hard to get the people of the Northwest upset about the inventory and clear ahead of logging cuts under the Northwest Forest Plan. Nobody even knows what it means: inventory and clearance. It's a snoozer. It has huge implications. The marginal changes under the Clean Water Act in terms of jurisdiction. They're oftentimes explaining the limits of the navigability doctrine of isolated water bodies and explaining what an ephemeral stream is and it's just a — every Friday there will be another press release explaining an improved administration of the Clean Water Act which is actually a contraction of the jurisdiction. It goes on and on and on. Washington, is just a dead

zone. It's kind of like the Chesapeake Bay — all these nutrients being washed in, killing everything.

Let me just say, I don't want to be kind of a Jeremiah up here. The encouraging thing as I move around the country, getting involved in every kind of thing, salmon groups on the Columbia River, the group to restore and protect the San Pedro River, the Florida people, there's a lot of good stuff going on at the grassroots level and it's an encouraging thing about America.

When the senator is dead, there's often kind of a revival — it's not a political revival which I lament, it doesn't seem to translate into a big political backwash, but it has sort of stirred up people to look a little more deeply at what they can do in their communities and state governments.

A wonderful thing is happening in California. Schwarzenegger is a good guy. He's got some wonderful fabulous environmental people. California under a Republican governor has got better, more progressive environmental law enforcement than anywhere in the country.

Q. Mr. Secretary, who would you like to see our next President Kerry appoint as Secretary of the Interior?

A. I am definitely out of public life, theoretically out of public life, but I honestly believe if one strives to lead a useful life that there is a progression and after a big chunk of public service the most useful thing you can do is not to try to hang around forever. The important thing in public life is to get off the stage while the audience is still applauding. And then to move on to kind of a different role which says I am going to use what I've learned and the things that we have done to try to be an advocate, and not just a shrill screamer, but an advocate really talking up, and using whatever convening power you have to validate the dialogue into a kind of workable solutions.

Where does that leave us? There are a lot of great people. There are some Western governors who would be great candidates. The governor of Arizona, actually is one who comes to mind. The governor of Oregon, my deputy of Interior was one of the most talented people I have ever worked with, but I'm not on the list.

Actually, I wouldn't be on the list even if I wanted to be on the list for the simple reason that you accumulate so many scars that offering me to a Senate committee for confirmation would provoke a lot of activity.

## Global Warming

Q. Mr. Secretary, in 1997 you spoke at CU on the threat of global warming. That was the most heartfelt and compelling inspirational call to arms I have ever heard from a political leader. Seven years later, things have only grown worse. Can you share your current vision on what America must do to effectively address this threat?

A. A job-related question. I didn't realize I was here seven years ago and spoke about global warming. I remember that now because this was one of these deals the people in the White House were starting to get interested in this and someone on the staff said, "Babbitt, you were great back in 1995 roaming around the country carrying a suitcase talking. Why don't you go do it again?" But I did, I packed my suitcase and spent some time traveling around the country talking about global warming, any place I could find 50 people who were willing to sit who knew about it — generally on university campuses or anywhere — now another seven years have gone by.

In 20 years, in the American political process we have moved this far. Twenty years ago, the ideologues, the anti-silence, anti-fact, anti-government crowd were saying global warming doesn't exist. After 20 years, we've moved to the position, here's progress.

I really shouldn't announce this. Yes, global warming probably is occurring but there's no need to do anything about it. Yes, that's 20 years. And the carbon dioxide continues to build up and up and the irreversible effects continue to accumulate. The American people, as a political culture, we're fabulous when we have a crisis to which to respond: A great depression, a world war, a burgeoning civil rights movement which galvanized the attention of the country in the streets of the South in the 1960s.

But short of a galvanizing crisis, we are a society of happy complacency. Most of the time it's an American strength in an odd way. People don't want to hear from their government, they want to go about their lives and keep things moving. It has its admirable

side. But when it comes to these slowly emerging problems, without threshold crises, it becomes an alarmingly difficult issue.

I can tell you all kinds of stories about what different people have tried to do about it, all the scenarios. We can see the declining snow packs and glaciers. In Glacier National Park, there are these signs when you're on the trail showing where the glacier was four years ago, 30 years ago, 10 years. There won't be any glaciers left in Glacier National Park in my lifetime.

The Arctic Sea will be a bluevale ocean. There are endless examples and I will of course leave you with just one more thought. We can't even muster our political leaders to do anything about automobile efficiency. It's incredible. Back in the 1970s, the Congress actually mandated efficiency standards. You got 13 miles to the gallon then and Congress, with leadership and a sense of responsibility, not about global warming just about the energy transition generally, said we're going to double auto mileage to 26.

Detroit resisted it bitterly, said we can't do it, there's not technology. And Congress said you will do it. And, of course, Detroit did do it. Here we are, 30 years later, the standards have been whittled back. They've effectively dropped back to about 20 miles per gallon, and we could overnight double the efficiency standards to 40 miles per gallon and cut our fossil fuel production in the transportation sector by half. The difference this time would be that there are no unknowns. If you want to know how to do it, all you have to do is go down to the Toyota showroom and drive a Prius around the block.

Our political system has become so unresponsive and so slack, that the United States Congress cannot even muster the will to mandate a change which has virtually no unknowns or pains of any kind. I'm sinking into despair again. We must not. It is our task to remember that we can rule the future. That the essential pact of humanity is to rule the future in all of its possibilities and to set individually about doing it, confident that they're in American history tells us that we walk along the edge of a precipice staring into it and finally coming into our senses, and it is our task to get there sooner rather than later.

Q. Mr. Secretary, what's the most grave threat in your estimation facing Western public lands today?

A. Global warming. It really is. The Colorado River, and you in Colorado are aware of that. When you look in the public lands future, you're going to have to throw away all those license plates that show snowcapped peaks. You'd better just chuck them out. Tell the ski industry they're moving to Montana and think of the scenarios in which the reservoirs on the mountaintops, the snowcaps are really the biggest reservoirs of all, and they have timed sequential release across the growing season and throughout until autumn.

It is our task to remember that we can rule the future. That the essential pact of humanity is to rule the future in all of its possibilities and to set individually about doing it, confident that they're in American history tells us that we walk along the edge of a precipice staring into it and finally coming into our senses, and it is our task to get there sooner rather than later.

Now all that stuff, and there's probably going to be less, is all coming down at once and there's going to be chaos in the watershed of the Colorado River and to make it worse, we're stuck with a compact, which was based on a lot of inaccurate information and a lot of assumptions that is going to put incredible stress on Colorado in these downstream scenarios in which Arizona and California have a priority call on delivery in the system. Those are all ominous threats.

Apart from that, all of these issues, all of the resource issues, mining, grazing, timber, still have not been resolved. It is not about driving all the users off the public lands. That's really the reason I kept those monuments in BLM because I wanted to make BLM a conservation agency. I never wanted to say I wanted the West to be a national park, where there's no hunting, no grazing, no nothing. I wanted to say we can have communities on the land, we can have resource use, but we've got to finish the task of subordinating them to the restoration of the functioning ecosystems.

I just want to say to all the federal employees, I know there are some BLM, Forest Service and Park people and GS people here and I just want you to know that what you're doing is really fabulous, I've

believed that ever since I was a kid, working on fire lines. I know you're under a lot of stress, but you can outlast them.