An Interview with Bill Timko

Fairfax, Virginia

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[00:00:04] **James Wall:** Could you tell me when and where you were born?

[00:00:09] **Bill Timko:** Martins Ferry, Ohio, July 3, 1952.

[00:00:13] **James Wall:** Where is Martins Ferry?

[00:00:14] **Bill Timko:** It's across the river from Wheeling, West Virginia.

[00:00:18] **James Wall:** You're kind of on the southern tip of Ohio there.

[00:00:23] **Bill Timko:** Actually, it's due east, dead-center east, on Interstate 70.

[00:00:28] **James Wall:** How did your people end up in Martins Ferry?

[00:00:34] **Bill Timko:** I don't know. Grandparents—both sides all immigrated in the late 1800s from Poland and Slovakia. One was a coal miner, and one was a farmer.

[00:00:48] **James Wall:** Yes, a lot of Polish—it's interesting how in those days where you came from would be in a lot of ways where you settled, but also what you did. Certain ethnicities tended to be coal miners. Some were farmers. but yes, the more Eastern European folks ended up being more industrial, I guess.

[00:01:10] **Bill Timko:** We were a small town. Many small towns, but ours you were either Polish, Slovak or Italian and you worked in the coal mine. You worked in the steel mill. That was kind of the choice. If you lived up on the hills, you were a farmer.

[00:01:28] **James Wall:** Right. Tell me about your folks. What were their names?

[00:01:32] **Bill Timko:** Charlie and Steffy. [Charles and Stephanie]

[00:01:34] **James Wall:** Charlie and Steffy.

[00:01:35] **Bill Timko:** Charlie and Steffy Timko. First generation. They both made it, I think, to eighth grade. My sister says she's not sure if they got all the way to eighth grade, but they did get to eighth grade, I think.

[00:01:48] **James Wall:** What did they do to pay the bills?

[00:01:51] **Bill Timko:** My dad was a coal miner, and mines would go up and down. They went down during [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower, so he worked for a local guy doing construction type stuff. Then he got back in the coal mines.

[00:02:08] **James Wall:** Yes. Your mother, was she a homemaker?

[00:02:11] **Bill Timko:** Stayed home. Stay at home homemaker.

[00:02:13] **James Wall:** Was it a big family?

[00:02:14] **Bill Timko:** No, I was a surprise. My brother is seventeen years older than me. My sister is fourteen years older than me.

[00:02:26] **James Wall:** You were, yes—

[00:02:27] **Bill Timko:** I was a surprise.

[00:02:29] **James Wall:** You were a happy surprise. Were you effectively kind of an only child by the time you were growing up. Everybody else had flown the coop?

[00:02:36] **Bill Timko:** Most definitely. My brother left when I was one. My sister left when I was probably three or four.

[00:02:44] **James Wall:** Yes, so Martins Ferry was kind of a coal mining area?

[00:02:48] **Bill Timko:** No, Martins Ferry was a mill town, but that's where I was born. We were from outside Bridgeport [Ohio], a town called Wolfhurst [Ohio]. We always laughed about it because the entering and leaving signs were on the same telephone pole.

[00:03:05] **James Wall:** What is there to do in Wolfhurst, growing up in a small town, besides getting into trouble?

[00:03:13] **Bill Timko:** We had a lot of kids. It was the baby boom. There were so many people to hang around with, and then the school was right there in town. Catholic school—everybody went to it, but we had [Boy] Scouts, we had little league. We had just always something to do. Friday nights were roller skating at the school gym.

[00:03:40] **James Wall:** Yes. Was it a foregone conclusion that you were going to go to college, or did you happen upon that?

[00:03:47] **Bill Timko:** No, it was definitely a foregone conclusion.

[00:03:50] **James Wall:** I see.

[00:03:50] **Bill Timko:** My brother, who was much older than me, the first one to go to college in the family, went through General Motors, got a degree in mechanical engineering, went to Carnegie Mellon [University], got a PhD in mechanical engineering. He was considered a math genius, and so I was always going to go to college and be an engineer.

[00:04:12] **James Wall:** The kind of left brain engineering style and knowledge runs in the family, you would say.

[00:04:18] **Bill Timko:** It ran in my brother.

[00:04:19] **James Wall:** Yes. You chose a different path.

[00:04:22] **Bill Timko:** My sister and I are totally different than my brother.

[00:04:27] **James Wall:** High school, growing up, did you know anything about the Forest Service?

[00:04:31] **Bill Timko:** Not at all.

[00:04:33] **James Wall:** Were you an outdoorsy kid?

[00:04:35] **Bill Timko:** Most definitely. We were either at the creek, up on the hill, or in the woods—a gang of hanging around with the kids. We were never in town. We were always out somewhere.

[00:04:46] **James Wall:** Yes, that's a part of the good thing. Back then parents didn't seem to—you know the term helicopter parents now, they're just constantly supervising their kids and all this stuff. Back then they just cut you loose and let you do whatever.

[00:05:01] **Bill Timko:** It was like, "Please leave. Get out of here."

[00:05:02] **James Wall:** "Be back by dinner."

[00:05:03] **Bill Timko:** Be back by dinner.

[00:05:05] **James Wall:** When the streetlights come on.

[00:05:06] **Bill Timko:** Right, when it gets dark, come home.

[00:05:08] **James Wall:** Were you out on the—is the Monongahela [National Forest, Huttonsville, West Virginia] close to where you grew up?

[00:05:17] **Bill Timko:** Not particularly.

[00:05:19] **James Wall:** How did you happen upon forestry?

[00:05:24] **Bill Timko:** I started at Ohio State [University, Columbus, Ohio], being an Ohio kid, in engineering, and I did not do well. They were on quarters. My first quarter was a total disaster, even to the point that when I had an introduction to mechanical drawing course and I was the only person in the course that had never had mechanical drawing in high school, and the professor hated that and would not teach me anything. I didn't know how to draw a straight line. I didn't know how to hold a pencil, and he wasn't about to spend time with me. That was my better class. [laughs]

[00:06:11] **James Wall:** Inauspicious beginnings.

[00:06:13] **Bill Timko:** Yes, that was a bad beginning. Then back at my dorm, my two best friends, my roommate and the guy in the room next to us, were one of them. My roommate was in fisheries. The guy next to us was in forestry, and I ended up spending more time on their homework than my homework and talking to them about it. Then I got interested in forestry through Tom, of which we still communicate to this day, and so that was kind of where I got into it.

[00:06:51] **James Wall:** Are you still a big Buckeye fan?

[00:06:54] **Bill Timko:** Yes, still. It's hard to shake.

[00:06:58] **James Wall:** They're not bad. I mean, they still do every year—it is interesting how these places across the country like Tuscaloosa, Alabama and Athens, Georgia and Columbus, Ohio, how they became just

powerhouses. I don't know how you would get a kid to go to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, but I guess they make it work. Did you finish up at "The U?"

[00:07:20] **Bill Timko:** No. At the time, Ohio State did not have an accredited forestry program, and so what they did have was you did two first two years at Ohio State. Then you would finish at Michigan State [Lansing, Michigan], which did have an accredited forestry program, and you would only pay in-state tuition even though it was out of state, but you had to have a 3.0 GPA to go there. My buddies in the Forest Service that went to Ohio State knew that; they always introduced me as, "Well, when he found out what 'GPA' meant, he transferred to West Virginia." [laughs] I did. I transferred to West Virginia after four quarters, got to wipe my slate clean and got a degree from WVU [West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia].

[00:08:12] **James Wall:** Yes, Morgantown, that's a college town for sure. I know a few people who went there. Apparently, it's easy to find a beer in Morgantown. It's got that frontier spirit to it. How did you like Morgantown?

[00:08:32] **Bill Timko:** It was fine. I didn't like the campus. It was all over. Forestry School was in Evansdale or Evansville—I can't remember, one of the "Evans." The main campus was downtown, it was all kind of divided up, and so you had to take a bus, and you have different schedules, and so if you were in your forestry program, you would be out at one campus, and then it just didn't have a real college feel after being at Ohio State.

[00:09:03] **James Wall:** It kind of felt like you were a bit separated from the herd.

[00:09:06] **Bill Timko:** Even the campus where the forestry school was that you took buses between the buildings, it was so scattered out.

[00:09:14] **James Wall:** Yikes. What did you gravitate towards? Did they churn out folks for the Forest Service or was it a Weyerhaeuser type of university?

[00:09:23] **Bill Timko:** I think it was an industrial university. They mainly taught and talked about private forestry, and it was more making private foresters, commercial foresters. Talked about more growth yield and stuff. Didn't spend a lot of time on the other aspects of the forest.

[00:09:47] **James Wall:** Yes, so it was the usual curriculum: andrology, mensuration…

[00:09:52] **Bill Timko:** Oh gosh, yes. Finance, silviculture.

[00:09:55] **James Wall:** Silviculture.

[00:09:56] **Bill Timko:** Mensuration, wood products, wood identification, wildlife, hydrology, soils.

[00:10:03] **James Wall:** Yes. What year was this that you were finishing up?

[00:10:06] **Bill Timko:** I graduated in 1974.

[00:10:09] **James Wall:** You entered the workforce sort of in that immediate post NEPA [National Environmental Protection Act] haze, and National Forest Management Act was coming down the line.

[00:10:21] **Bill Timko:** No, I went to graduate school after that.

[00:10:23] **James Wall:** Oh, you did?

[00:10:24] **Bill Timko:** Yes.

[00:10:24] **James Wall:** Where did you end up for that?

[00:10:27] **Bill Timko:** I ended up my senior year. I didn't know quite what I was going to do. No one was getting jobs in 1974. It was really difficult to find a job. A couple of my professors at WVU pulled me aside and said, "Hey, do you want to go to Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut]?" I said, "Sure, but how am I going to do that? I can't afford it. This is a joke." They said, "No, you'll get in, don't worry about the money." I did all the paperwork, got accepted, and Yale gave me a full ride plus a small stipend each month to go there and get a master's degree. I spent the next two years at Yale getting a master's.

[00:11:07] **James Wall:** You went from not having the grades for Michigan State to Yale?

[00:11:12] **Bill Timko:** Yes.

[00:11:13] **James Wall:** That must have been a big surprise for you.

[00:11:17] **Bill Timko:** Well, when they got erased, when I switched campuses, I was able to graduate summa cum laude after two and a half years at WVU. They were mainly all forestry classes, and I found them really interesting, and I just got into them.

[00:11:37] **James Wall:** Yes, and you went to school with Rich there, Rich Guldin. A lot of people came out of Yale master's in forestry at that time.

[00:11:45] **Bill Timko:** Yes, Rich was a classmate in a master's program. Then he stayed on for a PhD and I went and tried to get in the workforce.

[00:11:57] **James Wall:** You didn't want to go the full four or five years or whatever to get the PhD?

[00:12:03] **Bill Timko:** No, I don't think I was cut out for that.

[00:12:06] **James Wall:** Yes, that makes sense. You probably made the right call. When you got out, was it easier to get a job or did you still have to kind of crack your way in with seasonals?

[00:12:15] **Bill Timko:** No. Jobs were difficult. I took a seasonal position on the Nez Perce National Forest [Idaho] at Red River Ranger District, which I do not think exists anymore. It was at the end of the road. Well, you could have went over to Dixie [National Forest, Cedar City, Utah] at the time, but electricity I think just barely made it to Dixie back then. I was a presale forester technician there on Red River. They kept me to about November then finally kicked me out. I went back home, didn't have anything to do. Well, I went over to Portland [Oregon], checked with [United States Federal] Civil Service because my name wasn't coming up. They actually let me in the office at Civil Service. I was talking to a person, and they said, "Well, let's get your file." Took me back to where the file cabinets were. Things were different back then and they couldn't find my folder, and so they searched and searched and finally they found that it was misfiled and that's why I was not making any search or getting any jobs because my name was in the wrong place in the alphabet.

[00:13:24] **James Wall:** It's a good thing you went and checked that out.

[00:13:27] **Bill Timko:** Just one of those weird little things that you do in your life to drive from Red River, Idaho over to Portland, that was a day drive.

[00:13:37] **James Wall:** Back then the highway system wasn't what it is now probably.

[00:13:42] **Bill Timko:** And how we ended up finding that. Then, like I said, I went back for the holidays back to Ohio and I got a call from Forks, Washington, the Forest Service. They had a job. It was one of the "When Actually Employed," a "WAE," but it was only like three days a week. At the same time, I got a call from the BLM [Bureau of Land Management] in Western Oregon, Salem, Oregon, and they had a When Actually Employed, WAE: 25 and 1, 25 pay periods full with one pay period part-time, five days a week. They didn't think they would be able to reach me. Then they called and said, "Would you come out?" I went out to Oregon and started with the BLM in my first permanent position, and that was almost a year after I graduated. It took a while, and a lot of my classmates never did end up in forestry jobs.

[00:14:48] **James Wall:** Yes, that was around the Carter Administration, all the inflation and tough economic times, cutting the budgets and all that.

[00:14:59] **Bill Timko:** Yep.

[00:15:02] **James Wall:** You cracked in through the BLM. What were you doing for the BLM in Oregon?

[00:15:06] **Bill Timko:** I was a forester putting up timber sales. At that time, the very large Douglas fir, old growth, the trees that were ninety inches in diameter or better and a couple hundred feet tall and one truck, one log loads. They would go down a road, one log on a logging truck, and that was what was still going on. I was a presale forester there. BLM brought a bunch of us in that year from all over. Several of us were new and they were rotating us through different positions.

[00:15:41] **James Wall:** Did you think when you were working with BLM, this is just for the time being and then you're going to lateral or promote yourself into the Forest Service?

[00:15:52] **Bill Timko:** Yes. There was some of that run around, and primarily because the BLM, the majority of their foresters were in the Oregon and California O&C [Oregon and California Railroad Revested Lands] lands on the western side of Oregon. There were people there that had made it up to a GS-11 and were there for fifteen years and had no promotion potential

and they were waiting for someone to retire so that there would be a hole somewhere and they could move up because there were only a limited number of BLM people in a limited space. There were very few job openings and most of us that came in, we would have gotten to about a GS-9 and that would have been it.

[00:16:38] **Bill Timko:** I was thinking about, "Okay, what are we going to do?" However, we really liked western Oregon. Living in Salem at that time was very nice. It was still a small, big town. The weather was great, even though while we were there during a lot of the drought, it really wasn't that rainy. Interestingly, the Forest Service then called me from the Lewis and Clark National Forest [Neihart, Montana]. John Skinner was the planner there and he had heard word of me, and he called and wanted to know if I wanted a lateral to Lewis and Clark to work in forest planning because NFMA [National Forest Management Act] had just come out. We were starting forest plans, and he had found out that I had classes in linear programming and I had worked on stuff with NFMA when I was in graduate school. I almost turned it down because it was in Great Falls, Montana. I'm sitting there thinking, "Salem, Oregon—Great Falls, Montana. Let's think this through." I ended up taking it. Basically, it was Forest Service. There was more opportunity.

[00:17:49] **James Wall:** Yes, Great Falls is interesting. The only thing I know about Great Falls is they have a bar where there's a mermaid or something in the back. I can't remember what it's called, but that's one of the big tourist traps there now. It's definitely not Salem, Oregon. It's definitely a different vibe. How did you like Great Falls?

[00:18:12] **Bill Timko:** It was nice. Our first child was born there. We bought our first home there. We had a lot of good friends. The downside was when you're in Great Falls, it's almost like you're on an island. If you want to go to the mountains, you want to go do anything, you've got to drive a long way.

[00:18:30] **James Wall:** Yes, it's like two hours to everywhere.

[00:18:32] **Bill Timko:** Anything. You're on the island. That was a downside. It was flat. It was kind of windy. It was very windy when we were there. One thing though, I did think about—I left West Virginia, which was kind of an industrial school, and really didn't know much about the National Forest. When I was at Yale, we had a visiting professor, Andy Anderson, who was a retired Forest Supervisor on the Superior [National Forest, Duluth,

Minnesota] and the Bitterroot [National Forest, Montana/Idaho]. Andy and I would talk for hours about working for the public and managing public lands. Andy was the one that really got me interested in the Forest Service and public land management.

[00:19:22] **James Wall:** What was his sort of ethos, his big lesson about what the meaning is of the job?

[00:19:31] **Bill Timko:** Andy viewed it as working for the people. I remember what he used to say, because he ran into some real controversies. On the Bitterroot, he had the Bitterroot situation. Then he went to Superior and had all the snowmobiles, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, all that controversy. His big statement was always, "If people are yelling at you from every side, you're probably in the right spot. If there's somebody that's not yelling at you, you may be wanting to look at what's going on."

[00:20:03] **James Wall:** You might be not doing it exactly right. That is true of the Forest Service in a lot of these eras, especially if you're doing anything with forest planning, somebody's going to be pissed off. Either it's going to be the timber folks or the locals or the agency or somebody.

[00:20:20] **Bill Timko:** Recreation. The people you got—people that want to graze cows, the people that don't want cows. No matter what you do, you're going to get—

[00:20:31] **James Wall:** You were starting to lay out the forest plan for the Lewis and Clark?

[00:20:36] **Bill Timko:** Correct.

[00:20:37] **James Wall:** How were they planning on doing that? What was the general gist of it?

[00:20:43] **Bill Timko:** Lewis and Clark at that time, there were a handful of forests in Region 1 that had GS-13 Forest Supervisors. We happened to have Ken Weyers was ours, and Ken hired a couple of us young folks and wanted to get this forest plan and we started working on it. Lewis and Clark was not a lead forest. The Lolo [National Forest, Missoula, Montana] was the lead forest in Region 1, but we kept on getting ahead of the Lolo and being told to slow up to get behind the Lolo. We were ahead of them in many things

and Ken just let us run. John Skinner was our director, our immediate supervisor, and we had a blast. We really did.

[00:21:32] **Bill Timko:** We just looked at it so much different. Many of the people in the—we were all under thirty for the most part. Well, Skinner wasn't. Ken definitely wasn't. We did a lot of innovative things. We digitized the whole Lewis and Clark National Forest. We have a group that we called "The Coders" that worked for me. I was a GS-5, GS-7, GS-9 there. We took little USGS maps and we had all the land types done by the soils guy, Herb Holdorf. He had done that. We had the habitat types. We had all that information, and we had these little squares, and the coders coded all that, and we could take the computer and make multiple overlays—similar to the GIS [Geographic Information System] of the Lewis and Clark—and tell you where elk habitat was versus where certain trees were. I got called back to D.C. to talk about that. They were kind of like, "Whoa, what are you guys doing out there?" It was a fun time.

[00:22:45] **James Wall:** Was it the gigantic mainframe computer with the punch cards and all of that?

[00:22:51] **Bill Timko:** No, we coded them in on those big [deck writers?] The computer was in Fort Collins [Colorado]. I imagine it took up a building in Fort Collins—and we had to get on the telephone. We had to get there. Somebody always got there really early in the morning because the people in the East were already online, so you would have to get a line and listen to the squeak and plug it in and send your information. Then we moved up to where we had SICORP or something where they were relatively large computers we could have in the office, and then we could send things overnight and at night. We would run in our linear programming models, we would put a model in and submit it, but then the next day we would come in, and it would print off on the big computer paper, just sit there and print.

[00:23:50] **James Wall:** Well, they have come a long way technologically.

[00:23:52] **Bill Timko:** They really have.

[00:23:53] **James Wall:** It was a lot of work. You were one of the first forests to be using that type of technology to map out the forest?

[00:24:00] **Bill Timko:** Yes, best as I know.

[00:24:06] **James Wall:** This was 1977 to 1981, around that time. The typical sort of three year cycle where when you get close to your third year early on, "Don't plant a garden" type of thing? That you're going to get moved? Or were you thinking, "This is going to be a pretty long stop?"

[00:24:26] **Bill Timko:** No, we were enjoying it. A couple things were coming together. One, we had a meeting in Arizona where there were people from around the country and different places. The Eisenhower Consortium [for Western Environmental Forestry Research] put it on, and it was on forest planning. We were talking in one of our sessions and then the people asked if I would put on a session at night and I said, "Sure." I said, "I'll come back at night at seven." Ended up, I spent two hours, and the room was packed with everybody there and we were talking about how we did the mapping, how we did capability areas, how we did analysis areas. My Forest Supervisor, Ken, was there at the time. After that session, I get a knock at the door of my room, and it was John Skinner, my boss, and he comes in, he goes, "Well, the boss sent me over. He said he was really kind of worried that you're the least paid guy down here and you're teaching everybody else how to do this." He said, "He wants you promoted." I got a GS-11. So, we were staying, and we were going, "Hey, this is pretty good."

[00:25:43] **Bill Timko:** I went over GS-5, GS-7, GS-9, got a GS-11 going along. Then Pam got pregnant, and we were going to have our second kid, and our house was really tiny. We really had a tiny little house, two bedroom house. She goes, "Man, this is going to be really tight when we get two kids in here and us." We were thinking, "Well, maybe we should move." At that time, the RO [Regional Office] came over and asked if I would apply for a job in the RO, a GS-12. I said, "Well, yes, I could do that." I ended up getting that GS-12 in Missoula. We ended up getting a bigger house two weeks after we moved in, our daughter was born. Exactly two weeks. I was in Missoula.

[00:26:33] **James Wall:** Yes, Missoula was definitely a different town back then.

[00:26:36] **Bill Timko:** Oh, we liked Missoula.

[00:26:37] **James Wall:** Did they still have the pulp mills around the town with all the smoke and everything?

[00:26:45] **Bill Timko:** Yes, the Tipi burners were on the way out. Everybody had a wood burning stove, so we had a lot of particulate pollution. Smurfit-Stone [Container Corporation] was in Missoula. Interestingly, my brother, the mechanical engineer, worked for Stone Container as their Vice President of Engineering. When something would happen at the Missoula mill, he would fly out to Missoula and work on the mill while we lived there.

[00:27:19] **Bill Timko:** We really liked it, and I was working on—from a regional perspective—working with the individual forest in the region on forest planning. At that time, our director was Jim Reed, and he sent us on a couple missions. One was that he wanted to tie forest planning to the budget, and the budget to RPA [Resources Planning Act]. We made a system that we could then go in electronically, find out what was in the forest plan, hook it to the budget, and come up with a predictive budget for it—which was kind of what the RPA budget was—and it was way out of control. It didn't have the constraints that are really there. It was like the RPA budget that went up to Congress every year: "Oh, we need this many dollars to do recreation to standard, but we're only going to get like forty percent of that money."

[00:28:23] **James Wall:** The forests—were you working in the Lolo, the Bitterroot, the Clearwater, all those around Missoula? Would you get out to those forests a lot?

[00:28:34] **Bill Timko:** No, we didn't. A field trip from that position was going to their office, and mainly they came in. It seemed to be people would come in more than we would go out. To actually go out and kick dirt and be on the ground was pretty much unheard of from that position. Then we worked on some pretty interesting things there. Again, I had a couple of details back to D.C. to work on stuff. Darrel Kenops, you and I talked about, he was the RPA Coordinator for Region 1. He left and I became the RPA Coordinator. Besides being a regional planner and working on forest planning, I was also doing RPA for the region. We used to do a lot of collection of data and so forth with RPA at that time.

[00:29:32] **James Wall:** They were keeping you busy, really.

[00:29:35] **Bill Timko:** Yes.

[00:29:38] **James Wall:** That was a GS-12?

[00:29:39] **Bill Timko:** Yep.

[00:29:41] **James Wall:** You were there for about five years, right?

[00:29:44] **Bill Timko:** Pretty close. May have been a little over. We moved on Halloween, and we left, yes.

[00:29:52] **James Wall:** Who was the Regional Forester when you were in Region 1?

[00:29:59] **Bill Timko:** Oh lord, I remember him very well. I went on trips with—oh gosh, somebody else's name popped in my head and I can't—

[00:30:11] **James Wall:** This was before Dale Bosworth, right?

[00:30:13] **Bill Timko:** Oh, way before. Dale was with us on the staff. He was on the staff with me.

[00:30:18] **James Wall:** Oh, okay.

[00:30:19] **Bill Timko:** I'd have to look that up. I'd have to try to figure that out. I don't know if you want… I don't even know if I could do it that quick.

[00:30:37] **James Wall:** No, that's fine. I was just curious.

[00:30:39] **Bill Timko:** Yes, I remember one time I was trying to go out as a ranger. That was one of the things I really noticed when I was in the RO that I said, that the route I took—which is kind of unprecedented—working as a seasonal at a district. Then at an SO [Supervisor's Office] and then at the RO and the people I worked with as such as Dale Bosworth you mentioned, or Larry Larson or Fred Trevey were all kind of my peers and contemporaries and such in the RO all had this background they could go to, and I was always missing this ground background. I really wanted to go work on the ground.

[00:31:19] **Bill Timko:** The Regional Forester was Tom Coston. Tom and I were traveling one time, and I asked him, I said, "Geez, could you give me some help? I'd like to go out as a ranger." He goes, "No." I go, "What do you mean 'No'?" He said, "Well, if I call Forest Supervisors and say, 'I'd like you to look at Timko for a job,' they'd take it as an order." So, Tom wouldn't help me. Then Bosworth and I got into it because Dale, he was kind of my immediate supervisor there, and I was talking to him about it

and he said, "Well, you don't have this type of experience, and you don't have that." I started mentioning names of other people that were similar. He was like, "Oh, you're right. Why are they getting ranger jobs and you're not?" Then I left on vacation to drive across the country, came back to Ohio to see the grandparents with the kids. While I was there, he called and said, "Hey, on the way back, stop in Big Timber [Montana] if you want to work there." That's how I got the ranger job in Big Timber. They had that all worked out, and so then I went to be a ranger, and filled in that missing gap in my experience.

[00:32:36] **James Wall:** Yes, it was that time, though, where it was very rigid. There was a plan for everybody that wanted to make ranger.

[00:32:46] **Bill Timko:** Oh, yes.

[00:32:47] **James Wall:** It was "the old boys forestry network," and people got pigeonholed pretty fast. If you were an RO person, they just wanted you to stay at the desk jobs.

[00:32:58] **Bill Timko:** Yes. Orville Daniels played a role in that also because Orville was Acting [Forest Supervisor]. I don't know where Jim Reed was at the time, but I had such a non-traditional trajectory. The other thing that was going on at that time was a lot of the rangers that were coming up, they had spent a lot of years at the district, and when they became rangers, they ended up carrying their previous job into their ranger job, and they didn't really expand out to the whole district, and they were trying to break that. Where it was really starting to show is that the rangers were starting to come off the east side of Montana where there was less emphasis on timber and more emphasis on all the programs.

[00:33:50] **Bill Timko:** So, that came over. Being in Big Timber, I was definitely on the other side. It was also interesting that when I was on the management team on the Gallatin, I was the only member of the forest management team, Forest Supervisor's staff, and rangers that had ever worked above a forest. Most of them had never worked above a ranger district. Things that they thought were really special and important and, "Oh, we've got to tell the Regional Forester about this." I go, "Guys, you're not going to get the time of day. It's really for us to handle. That's what we're paid for—to do this." They thought it was really something big, but their experience, their world was very shrunk at the time.

[00:34:44] **James Wall:** Well, Big Timber is—I've been there. It's a windy, small town district. It's a lot different from working in the RO in Missoula, where it's a big pond, right?

[00:34:57] **Bill Timko:** Oh, yes.

[00:34:57] **James Wall:** Everybody knows you and if you do something right or wrong, somebody's going to be at your door the next day telling you about it, right?

[00:35:07] **Bill Timko:** Right. The Gallatin was a bigger pile, but they still had a very small look. And Big Timber, the ranger district was interesting in the fact that other than a ski area, it probably had everything the Forest Service does.

[00:35:24] **James Wall:** Yes, there's a lot of ranchers around there?

[00:35:26] **Bill Timko:** I had thirty-three permittees.

[00:35:28] **James Wall:** Yes. So, it's a big grazing district.

[00:35:29] **Bill Timko:** Including sheep in the wilderness, in grizzly bear habitat.

[00:35:35] **James Wall:** You like working on that type of district. Did the ranchers get along with the Forest Service or were they a bit prickly?

[00:35:47] **Bill Timko:** The ranchers for the most part were very good. They weren't prickly to us, but there were things, the government, because they were reintroducing the wolf, we had grizzly bears. They didn't want the wolf to come. In fact, the picture behind you on the wall was a going away present from Big Timber. When I brought that out at the grand and the ranchers that were come to my going away [party] saw that, they go, "What's this all about?" I had to make up a story and make it up quick, but it reminds me of the controversy I had. There was a lot of controversy at Big Timber when I was there.

[00:36:27] **James Wall:** Controversy over?

[00:36:28] **Bill Timko:** Oh, we had the introduction of wolves, grizzly bears, sheep grazing, and the wilderness and grizzly bear habitat. The Platinum Mine was coming in. They had those things going. We had elk. We had some

research on elk and sheep. There was just that plus, at that time, Sweetgrass County and Big Timber was the geographic center of the Republican Party in Montana. The head of the Republican Party in Montana lived there. His daughter married Mark Racicot, who eventually became Governor. Ron Marlenee—they used to joke about Ron Marlenee that he never made any decision unless he called his buddy Norm Starr, who lived in Big Timber.

[00:37:25] **James Wall:** It wasn't the most pro-government area to work in.

[00:37:30] **Bill Timko:** No. I don't know if it was the Norwegian German background—it's ninety-eight percent Norwegian or German—but they were very courteous and nice. I never had a problem.

[00:37:43] **James Wall:** Yes. How did the family like moving to a small town?

[00:37:48] **Bill Timko:** The kids were kids. They were little. Sarah wasn't even in school yet. Andy, he was second grade to probably sixth or seventh grade. It's hard to break into a small town. Pam did not care for it. It was difficult. The local people, we still have good friends we communicate with back there, but some of them said, "Well, one, we don't like to make friends the Forest Service because you guys move, you don't stay around." Other ones, it just takes a while. I remember one of the meetings we had with the commissioners when the mine was coming in, they had a guy from Chevron Resources talking, and he said, "Well, we're going to hire locals." somebody in the audience goes, "How do you define a local?" He says, "Well, somebody that has been here a year or two." All of a sudden, this voice comes out of the back and goes, "Hell, I've been here forty years and I'm still an outsider." [laughs]

[00:38:53] **Bill Timko:** Small towns are small towns. One of the parting gifts I got from Missoula—which really was interesting and I can't find it—it was a sociology book by Professor [Raymond L.] Gold from the University of Montana, and it talked about the coal mines in eastern Montana moving into these small towns and how the social fabric of the town was really torn apart.[1] I read that book more than once and religiously looked at it, and you could just see things happening. The real commission's meetings happened in the back of the drugstore at a table back there over coffee, if

[1] Gold, Raymond L., *Ranching, Mining, and the Human Impact of Natural Resource Development*. Transaction Books, 1985.

you really want to know what was going on in the county, not at the public ones. There were things Gold said in his book, that, "If a local person had too much to drink and the deputy catches him on the road, they pull him over, he calls for somebody else to drive him home, they take care of his car, they get him home, tuck him in bed."

[00:39:56] **Bill Timko:** Well, when outsiders in the mine comes in, you have to become more formal. You can't do that. That was actually happening in Big Timber. One of my permittees used to have too much to drink in town, and they would end up taking him home. They wouldn't arrest him. Small towns work like that. A lot of people wanted the mine to come in because they wanted the economic benefits of it, but they didn't want people or any change to come in. It was a difficult thing for the town.

[00:40:33] **Bill Timko:** Fascinating for me, because some of the discussions I would get in on that mine, which was going to employ like 600 workers and where they would live and how they would associate with it, was even the school. If the school ended up with a couple special needs children, they would have to add teachers and restructure and do all kinds of work to accommodate. The sewage system wasn't capable of handling additional buildings. There were just so many little side trips that were all associated with that mining project.

[00:41:16] **James Wall:** Did you know when you started this job that the mine was coming already, that they had been planning this for a while? Or did that planning process start while you were Ranger?

[00:41:27] **Bill Timko:** Mine and I was there and we knew the resource was there in Big Timber. They had already done an EA [Environmental Assessment] for an exploration at it years before I got there. There was a geologist as part of the district before I got there. When I got there, the geologist was gone because it was always an up and down kind of oil and gas and mining and the Forest Service. The companies come in very fast. The Forest Service moves very slow. By the time we are in position and have people, the companies have lost interest and have gone, and now we're staffed up with nothing to do. It was in that cycle.

[00:42:13] **Bill Timko:** When they came back, they wanted to go back to their old EA [environmental assessment] NEPA document and wanted to put this in very close to the top of the Beartooth Plateau, which is about 9,000 feet. They would've had to cross the river a couple times. I said, "No, that's an

old EA. We're not going to do that." Well, they went to Congress, they went to the governor, they went to the Regional Forester, and I got called in. John Mumma was Regional Forester, and he asked me, "Okay, what are you going to do?" I said, "This EA is old, John." I said, "We're not going to do this." I said, "I'll do a real quick one and we will do it right." He said, "Fine, go for it. I'll take the heat."

[00:43:00] **Bill Timko:** I went out, and in two months, we did a new EA and we came up with the third alternative. They had their proposal, no action, and we came up with a new one that required them to build three miles of adit through rock before they got to the ore body—but it didn't cross the river and it didn't go up in this box canyon and Chevron sent their bunch of people up there to talk about it. I said, "No, this is the environmentally preferred alternative. We have a Clean Water Act in Montana and some other things that are quite strict." Then I said, "Plus, if you guys actually want to develop this, you're going to put an adit right where I'm saying you should have one because you don't want to haul ore up. You want gravity to bring ore down and it's all downhill if you put your adit here." They came back and said, "Okay, we've got to go with the environmentally preferred alternative. We can't show that we're not environmental." That's what they went with, and that's what their current mine is developed around, that site that Sherm Sollid, our geologist and I, worked on for where they should do their exploration.

[00:44:17] **James Wall:** Yes, I interviewed Sherm and Mike Burnside and Dick Bacon and all these guys.

[00:44:27] **Bill Timko:** Sherm should have talked about that adit at Big Timber.

[00:44:29] **James Wall:** Well, they were mostly talking about the Crown Butte Mine issue.

[00:44:34] **Bill Timko:** Oh, up in Jardine [Montana], joint venture?

[00:44:36] **James Wall:** Where they got kind of torpedoed by the environmentalists and [President Bill] Clinton leaned on them to kill it and all that. By all accounts, there was really nothing environmentally threatening about it. All these Sierra Club and Izaak Walton League would oppose almost anything just because.

[00:45:02] **Bill Timko:** See, I got appeals on that EA from the Greater Yellowstone Coalition and Northern Plains Resource Council, but when I was working there, we would go twice a year and meet with them at their office and sit down and talk about what's going on in the district and stuff. They basically said they had to appeal us to show they were doing something; they had to make a statement. We worked through the appeal, and they had some concerns, and the company said they could live with it. We settled the appeal, and they went on with that. I left before they did. We started working on the mine and then I transferred. I never got to see the mine through, but going back and seeing it, I never envisioned it being as big as it is. That tailings pond and the infrastructure up there is quite large.

[00:46:03] **James Wall:** Is it still going?

[00:46:04] **Bill Timko:** Yes. Somebody told me recently they were laying off people and cutting back, even though the price of platinum and palladium is up. That would've been almost thirty years ago. Maybe they're running out of place to mine. I don't know.

[00:46:21] **James Wall:** Or it's gotten so hard to get the environmentalists either at bay or happy. There's so much paperwork now to do anything.

[00:46:32] **Bill Timko:** Yes, I don't know what, but I did hear it was cutting back. I don't know if it's cutting back production or just cutting back employees or something going around with it. When they did it, it was very rich. Palladium could have almost carried it, but they were really after platinum. What is it? There's ten PGM platinum minerals. Platinum is the one, they kind of got all the glory, but I think it was richest in palladium.

[00:47:08] **James Wall:** You said you worked under John Mumma?

[00:47:13] **Bill Timko:** Well, he was our Regional Forester when I was District Ranger there.

[00:47:16] **James Wall:** He had your back, and he was willing to stand up to whoever, and then he ended up resigning at some point. He was a guy that wasn't going to roll over.

[00:47:29] **Bill Timko:** No, he didn't come in and tell me, "Hey, go back, do this. You've got to make this." He just kind of listened to me when I told him

why I was doing it—that it was an old NEPA document. I didn't like the decision they had made in the past. John didn't say much. He just said, "Go ahead, keep up. I'll take care of it."

[00:47:50] **James Wall:** That's a good boss. Were you thinking that you were going to continue as a line officer up to Supervisor, Regional Forester?

[00:47:58] **Bill Timko:** That was my plan. That was where I was thinking I was going. That last year I was in Big Timber I was applying for jobs. I think I had this thing in my head that I applied for ten jobs and lost ten jobs. I didn't get selected ten times. It was kind of like the one day Bosworth called me up, he was the Deputy Director for Timber in D.C., and he says, "Hey, I've got a couple jobs back here. Why don't you apply for them?" I thought about it and talked to Pam. At that time you kind of—what was the thing we used? It wasn't your ticket punched—coming to D.C. helped. It was a plus.

[00:48:54] **James Wall:** That was usually the route for people who made it to Forest Supervisor.

[00:48:57] **Bill Timko:** If you wanted to be a Forest Supervisor.

[00:48:58] **James Wall:** They would go for a couple years, get their ticket punched.

[00:49:00] **Bill Timko:** Ticket punched, yes.

[00:49:01] **James Wall:** Then they would come back west and have a Sup job.

[00:49:05] **Bill Timko:** I could get a punch. The other thing was from the family; we had applied for jobs in the East and had not been successful. We would be closer to grandparents. Remember, my brother is seventeen years older than me. My parents were born in 1907 and 1908.

[00:49:28] **James Wall:** Oh my gosh.

[00:49:28] **Bill Timko:** They're not young. My dad had passed. My mom was getting old. Pam's parents were in their beginning seventies, all her brothers and sisters, my sister back here. We had a lot of family in Ohio, and we were closer. We were kind of looking to try to move back east for a while, for the kids so they can get to know the family, know their grandparents, know their cousins, uncles, aunts. We say, "Hey, this is a fit. We'll come back. I applied and I got one." I remember one of the comments I made to our

realtor was, "The ones, twos and threes at the beginning of the price of these—were they first choice, second choice, third choice?" He goes, "No, those are hundred thousands." It was like, "Whoa." This house was $100,000 more than the house we had built in Big Timber. Our salary went up about what, $3,000 from Big Timber to here? Four thousand maybe.

[00:50:39] **James Wall:** Well, now it's probably worth three or four times that.

[00:50:43] **Bill Timko:** Oh yes, it's worth considerably more. The bank said, "Oh, you've got two choices. You can buy a house with a basement and not a garage. Or you could buy a house with a garage, but no basement." We took that garage and no basement and somewhat in, or we could have moved fifteen more miles out of town. We didn't want to do that. At the time, we didn't—Pam didn't have a teaching job, and the banks frowned on that. Without a real contract, you couldn't do anything. It was just on my salary. Nowadays, when I left, when I retired and even think about it today, I sit there and go, "What we came back on, the salary we came back on, we could not move to this neighborhood. I would have been totally excluded from here. How do people do it now? How do they?"

[00:51:38] **James Wall:** Well, they probably just can't afford to buy a house anymore. If you get a job in D.C., unless you're coming into D.C. as a GS-14 or GS-15 or something.

[00:51:49] **Bill Timko:** Or you sold something that had a lot of money. We owned three homes in Montana over fourteen years. I think on one of them we made a few thousand. The second one, we lost money. The third one we broke even. After owning three homes, our equity was like $6,000 for fourteen years. We went through the [President Ronald] Reagan times when things really turned south in Montana. We went through the sixteen percent interest on homes. We went through that.

[00:52:22] **James Wall:** You were just probably lucky to get any home during that era, the "Volcker Shock" days of massive interest rates and recessions and all that.

[00:52:31] **Bill Timko:** Yes. The house we bought in Missoula, it was an assumable loan, and we assumed it for ten percent. People couldn't believe we had a ten percent loan, how lucky we were. Then after a couple years, the bank sent us a letter saying they were going to revoke it, and then they sent a

letter that said, "We're going to do that. If you ever sell it, it's no longer assumable."

[00:52:56] **James Wall:** Yikes. Did y'all just bite the bullet and buy this house and make it work?

[00:53:00] **Bill Timko:** Yes, we made it work. The mortgage, if your salary goes up, your percentage of your mortgage goes down. Then we ended up with interest rates changing. I think we bought this house on a buy-down. It was like seven, eight, nine percent. Then a year later, interest rates came down and we refinanced. We refinanced again. Then by the time we paid off the house, we were probably down to like five percent or something. It was pretty reasonable. Pam got a teaching job. I got promotions, we got cost-of-living [raises]. The house was no longer a third of our income.

[00:53:47] **James Wall:** Yes, you thought you were going to get your ticket punched. Next thing you know, you're here for nine years in that job.

[00:53:54] **Bill Timko:** Well, yes, correct. We thought Sarah would've been out of high school in eight years. She's the youngest. Thought we would get our ticket punched and then we would have moved on. As it turned out, Andy went to college when Pam became a full-time instructional assistant, and so she could pay for his college. Then right before Sarah, we had two of them in college, she got a full-time position, teaching position, and she could pay for both kids' college. It's like, "Do we really want to move? Or we'll just keep staying here and pay for college." Then once Sarah got out of college, Pam started getting vested in Fairfax County, and Virginia was really somewhat generous. They let her buy back her years of teaching in West Virginia and Oregon and Montana. She could buy it—it was relatively cheap, like two percent or something, not much money. I think she made like $6,000 in West Virginia and Virginia let her buy that back for—what would that be, 120 bucks or something?

[00:55:15] **James Wall:** That's a pretty good deal.

[00:55:15] **Bill Timko:** She got a year's service in Virginia for 120 bucks. So, she started buying those back. Then we were getting older, and we did have one really big opportunity come up. It was a lateral, a reassignment to a Deputy Regional Forester. We looked at it, we spent hours and hours looking at it, but what it came out to is the location, we would have lost locality pay, so my salary would have gone down. Pam would have given

up a fairly lucrative—Fairfax County teachers at that time were paid well, if she would have even gotten the job in her fifties.

[00:56:09] **James Wall:** Where was that Deputy Regional Forester going to be?

[00:56:12] **Bill Timko:** That one? It was offered in Milwaukee. The basic reason I would have gone there is I had a brother in Chicago, and the Regional Forester was Randy Moore, who I would have loved to work for Randy. Randy and I. It finally came down to it, and I don't know if I would have got it. We were just pursuing it. I think Bosworth was involved. Randy was involved. I finally told Randy, I said, "Man, if everything goes right, we're only going to lose like $10-$15,000 a year in family income. If it goes sideways, we could lose as much as $50,000 a year, and we're getting kind of older." I turned it down and interestingly, the main draw was to work for Randy, and he ended up getting moved to California shortly after I would have arrived there. That worked out, and then we just stayed here in our retirement years, looking back, that was probably a really smart decision to stay here.

[00:57:24] **James Wall:** Who took over for Randy? Was it Butch Marita? Or did Randy replace Butch Marita?

[00:57:28] **Bill Timko:** I think Randy took over for Butch.

[00:57:30] **James Wall:** Yes. I can't remember who replaced him.

[00:57:34] **Bill Timko:** Who did? Wow, that's interesting. I don't know who came after. I would have to think about that.

[00:57:42] **James Wall:** Yes. Was it George something? I can't remember his name. Anyway, so you were pretty close with a couple of future Chiefs. Did you think when you were hanging around Dale that he was going to ever be in that stratosphere?

[00:58:04] **Bill Timko:** Not really.

[00:58:05] **James Wall:** Yes.

[00:58:05] **Bill Timko:** No. We were hoping he would be a Forest Supervisor or something.

[00:58:08] **James Wall:** Because he's not like a politician. Randy, he's entertaining all the time. Dale's a real level…

[00:58:23] **Bill Timko:** Yes. Dale, we used to have a lot of fun. Dale had a cabin at Flathead Lake. We would go up there, Trevey would bring his boat up, we would go water skiing and stuff.

[00:58:33] **James Wall:** Do you know Carma [Bosworth]?

[00:58:34] **Bill Timko:** Oh, yes.

[00:58:35] **James Wall:** Yes. She's a hoot.

[00:58:36] **Bill Timko:** Yes, I know Carma. We used to have Christmas parties and stuff in Missoula and hang out and go down to The Rusty Nail on Friday nights, and I don't know if the Rusty Nail is still there or not.

[00:58:48] **James Wall:** I don't think it is, no.

[00:58:50] **Bill Timko:** It was off of Reserve [Street] down there by—what's that grocery store there? Rosauers?

[00:58:57] **James Wall:** Rosauers.

[00:58:58] **Bill Timko:** Yes. It was behind the Rosauers.

[00:59:00] **James Wall:** Was The Rhino still downtown at that time?

[00:59:04] **Bill Timko:** I don't recall.

[00:59:05] **James Wall:** That's like the big dive bar now downtown. It's called The Rhino. There's been a lot of turnover in Missoula with these businesses and it's changing as well. You were talking about the outsider thing. That's still even more now a thing in Montana because when I moved up there from Dallas, I still had my Texas plates and people were like, "You've got to get rid of your Texas plates. You're going to get your ass kicked." I would drive around and people would shoot me dirty looks and because there's all these rich folks moving in from Texas and California, they will buy a really nice house. They'll stay there for the summer. They'll leave, and leave it vacant or Airbnb it. There's this whole, "We don't want all these

outsiders" there. I don't understand it. It's like, "Well, you're white, so you also uprooted somebody to be here."

[01:00:00] **Bill Timko:** Yes, Montana—we have not been around. We've gone back a few times to do a spoke tour, and we have friends that live there from back here and people through the Forest Service career are back there and retired. I remember, gosh, when we were in Great Falls, they had Democrat, Republican governors, they had Democratic senators, they had a Democratic House member. I remember in Great Falls walking around, and Ted Schwinden was governor, and you would just see Ted on the corner and start a conversation with him. Running and running races, [Max] Baucus was a runner. You would see him right there in the race. It was just a really small town for a state. Now it seems to have gone more conservative, I think. The east side was always conservative, and Missoula was always the evil place they never wanted the kids to go to from the east ranching side.

[01:01:12] **James Wall:** Yes. [Jon] Tester's kind of the last of that breed of rural state Democrats, and he's probably on his way out of here.

[01:01:20] **Bill Timko:** That's what I hear.

[01:01:21] **James Wall:** I don't think he can overcome—if Trump wasn't on the ticket, he might have a shot, but the down ballot implications of the red state, they're going to vote Trump and then probably just keep voting down the line.

[01:01:36] **Bill Timko:** Well, in Big Timber, it was interesting that the local elections—once you got out of House, Senate, Governor, President—but just the local sheriff, school board stuff, there was two choices: "R" and "I," and the independent was the person that lost the primary to the person that got the "R."

[01:02:01] **James Wall:** Not even a Democratic Party.

[01:02:01] **Bill Timko:** There weren't any "D's" on the card. No "D's."

[01:02:05] **James Wall:** Yes, that is the eastern side. It's still pretty red.

[01:02:09] **Bill Timko:** It was interesting. When I retired, the head commissioner gave a little talk. We had a going away party and a lot of the townspeople

came and the commissioner got up and took the podium and gave me a really nice letter that is somewhere in this house, and also gave a little speech and said, "You've been here for almost five years, and for five years we've been trying to figure out what party you are, and we can't do it. We've never been able to figure out what your party affiliation is." Because I registered as an independent, and he said, "You always did this, this, and some nice words and stuff, but he was scratching his head over that."

[01:02:51] **James Wall:** Sounds like you were the classic forester. Not a political appointee.

[01:02:58] **Bill Timko:** Just be fair.

[01:02:59] **James Wall:** Yes.

[01:02:59] **Bill Timko:** Be fair, honest, equitable.

[01:03:02] **James Wall:** Yes. That's the one rule definitely in a place like Big Timber. Once you lose the trust of the local folks or they think you're kind of too big for your britches, they'll come after you. So, back to DC: you got put in the budget shop. Those nine years that you were in charge of the budget were really sort of tumultuous. A lot of changes were going on in the Forest Service in the 1990s, right?

[01:03:37] **Bill Timko:** Oh God, yes. That was the big timber drop from nine billion board feet a year. I was on the timber staff. We changed it to Forest Management; Dave Hessel did when I was there. We went from nine billion down to around three for a while, and during that drop, one of the biggest issues I faced was OMB [Office of Management and Budget] and Congress kind of ran the timber program very linear—everything happened in a year. If they gave us ten million dollars and wanted more board feet, we just turned it on, and the board feet came out. They didn't realize we had to go through NEPA, we had to lay out the sales, we had to offer a contract. The logger had to actually cut it, and the trees would come out. It was always an annual event.

[01:04:44] **Bill Timko:** When the timber program dropped from nine down to, we went down kind of slow, like six, four, five. I remember Dale Robertson saying if we can, and George Leonard, let's try to keep at six, and that six billion feet, we could live there. It went way below six. Well, the folks there, they wanted to cut the budget, so if we went from nine to three, that

was one-third. They wanted to cut our budget to one-third of what it was. I had to put together a bunch of stuff and then go over to OMB and sit down, and we had very good OMB examiners at that time. They were willing to listen. I think they were almost apolitical at the time, and they started to understand that if we did that, we got into severance pay, we got into bumping. I ended up convincing them it was cheaper to continue to fund all those employees and reduce it slowly than it was to just whack it off. Because they would've had to give us extra money just to handle all that cost. That was tough. Then how you ran through that. Then we got the emergency salvage sale provisions during that time.

[01:06:08] **James Wall:** What were those?

[01:06:09] **Bill Timko:** That was by Congress, where they wanted us to increase our timber production, and they wrote into law that we really didn't have to follow the laws if we were salvaging timber. It was after some of the fires, so they were trying to increase the timber production. Jack Ward Thomas was the Chief at the time, and Jack came down and said, "Whatever we do, although Congress exempted us—." They never really did that. He said, "We've got to follow the spirit of the law." We still had to do NEPA. We still kept with the ESA [Endangered Species Act]. We still kept with [the] Clean Water [Act]. Even though Congress had kind of said we didn't have to, we still did that, and we tried to increase it, then we wouldn't get it. We were always getting these questions from Congress and the staffers up there. Again, we had people that were quite knowledgeable up on the hill that in fact, some of them came out of Forest Service training. They were ex-Forest Service and understood. We worked through a lot of that. It wasn't easy.

[01:07:31] **James Wall:** It was still less partisan than today probably.

[01:07:35] **Bill Timko:** Oh, yes. Oh, gosh. Yes. Very much so, less partisan.

[01:07:38] **James Wall:** They would still negotiate over the budget in good faith.

[01:07:42] **Bill Timko:** Oh, right. I mean, it was our budget staffers on the Hill in the House and the Senate, when the parties would shift, they would shift. I mean, Chris Topik, ex-Forest Service Botanist, was up on the Hill for years. He worked for [Ralph] Regula and [Sidney] Yates. They would just keep their roles and keep working on this stuff. I think they were truly trying to do good stuff with the Forest Service, but one wanted to do more.

One side wanted to kind of keep the budget down. They had differences, but they worked on their differences. Reforestation always was kind of a tough one in that some of the folks felt that reforestation only came because we harvested trees. I'd say, "Well, yes, it does, but we pay for that out of K-V funds [Knutson-Vandenberg]. The reforestation you're giving us is for the genetics. It's for the nurseries, it's for the wildfires, it's for the acquired lands, it's for all these other things. It's not for regenerating after harvest." Well, they didn't want to buy that, so they wanted to cut the reforestation so that we would harvest less trees because we couldn't meet NFMA to reforest.

[01:09:22] **James Wall:** Yes, so this was in the mid-1990s. Didn't they have a big kind of buyout of forcing—or not forcing—but offering people early retirement to slice down the budget?

[01:09:36] **Bill Timko:** Yes, we did. In the mid-1990s, we lost quite a few people. That may have been 1993, 1994, 1995, somewhere in that vicinity. It was after the timber program came down. We were buying out people. I think they offered them like $25,000 if you retired. A lot of them were retiring anyway. They just got a $25 handshake, and we couldn't replace them. If they never got the $25,000, they would probably still retire.

[01:10:11] **James Wall:** Wow. That's a pretty good deal for them.

[01:10:13] **Bill Timko:** Yes. If you went out early, why wouldn't you go out early for $25,000?

[01:10:18] **James Wall:** Right.

[01:10:19] **Bill Timko:** In fact, I know one guy was going to retire anyway, and he said, "Hey, they bought me a pickup truck for a retirement present."

[01:10:30] **James Wall:** This is one of those topics that's probably difficult for the average person to get around is intricacies of the budget process for the Forest Service, how you're trying to move money around to keep people employed in these tough times. Was it still like, you get a big pool of money, fire is going to take up most of it, and then you've got to work to figure out, "Okay, how much is research going to get?" Or "Are there silos where the money would be kind of untouched?" "This percentage is going to go to research every year," or something?

[01:11:15] **Bill Timko:** It changed. When I came in the 1990s, we would still present Congress with what we really needed in RPA [Resources Planning Act] and then we would put what our constrained budget was, and the Chief and the Deputy Chiefs would sit down and we would have these big meetings with the pukey budget coordinators like me in there with the Chiefs working on the budget and asking what we needed. We would ask for Research, State and Private, National Forest System. Then once you got the National Forest System, we would break it out by the resources. At that time, we had like sixty-seven line items in the Forest Service. I think Forest Management, we had over thirteen or so line items. Like timber, we had timber planning, sale prep, sale administration, silvicultural exam, reforestation, timber stand improvement, and genetics—and that was just the appropriated. Those line items—appropriation law—you can't move money from one line item to the next, above a certain amount without going to Congress through OMB. We had to put money in each one of those.

[01:12:38] **Bill Timko:** Then Timber and Forest Management had to compete with recreation. Recreation then competed with wildlife; then we started combining some of those together. We asked to combine it together because when I was a ranger, I worked under what was called, "The Big Bucket." I don't know if you've run across "The Big Bucket" stuff. I thought it was wonderful. We increased all of our outputs and decreased our cost under "The Big Bucket," but you had to really change your mindset to work in there. We made veg and water, and Congress agreed to it where we took soil, air, watershed, range, veg, reforestation, TSI [Timber Stand Improvement], and those all got lumped into one line item. Then we had the ability to move money between those and get a little more flexibility.

[01:13:40] **Bill Timko:** Later on—I think Dale [Bosworth] was Chief at the time. When was Dale there? The 2000s? Dale was there during [President George W.] Bush. He was there during the 2000s. It started just coming down and it was really confusing. We would just get, "Here's your money, here's what you got." It was like, "Why are we doing all this work from the ground up, putting the budget together?" We would get the stuff from the ground. Then we'd just get, "Okay, you get this much money for timber. Then we had to spread it out to the regions." The regions would tell us, "Well, if you give me this much money, I'll give you this many boards." So, we would try to make how many boards we could get for how much money and who would get it. Then we had all kind of—Congress used to call it—one of the staffers up there called it, "Timko's Voodoo Economics," how we

got that money put. I was Deputy Director at the time. How we got that money put out to these different regions.

[01:14:51] **Bill Timko:** It was quite the job among the people in the National Forest System. I don't think Research and State and Private had quite the issues. They didn't have as many line items or resources, but we had to compete with wildlife and recreation and grazing and forest management and all these different things. How we put the money out to the regions—I remember one of the things we used to call it was, "The Region 9 Effect." Some regions got money because they had something they could deliver. Region 6 had timber. Region 5 had fire. Some of Region 2 had the recreation, the ski areas and stuff like that. Region 9 was good at everything but not great at anything. So, they always ended up—when Wildlife would put their budget together and Forest Management would put theirs and grazing would put theirs—Region 9 was always kind of in the middle. When you looked at their total budget, they were always taking a nosedive. Then the Chiefs would come back and say, "No, we can't do that to Region 9 and then want to pump it back up."

[01:16:08] **James Wall:** At the end of the day, the Chief had some latitude to reroute money if he thought it was going to be inequitable.

[01:16:20] **Bill Timko:** Among the regions he could do something. I think they also got to move money or decide how much went to the different silos. It was tricky. I remember one year when Corbin Newman was our director, we had a big battle going on in that veg and water where I said we had reforestation, the grazing, the watershed and all those. We had this watershed analysis going on in Region 6, and they wanted a bunch of money for that, and there wasn't enough money in the pot. I just said, "Hey, we're just not going to have any reforestation." I went up and talked to Dale—he was Chief—and I said, "Hey, we're not going to do reforestation. They want money for watershed. They want money for these noxious weeds. These are all important. We've got K-V. We're just not going to do it." So, we sent it up to Congress that way. Man, did we get a call, and we actually got some more money. It was a game. Doing the budget, I used to always tell folks it was an art and a science. You can do so much mathematically, but then it comes down to an art.

[01:17:35] **James Wall:** You've got to be creative.

[01:17:36] **Bill Timko:** One of the big issues we always faced in Forest Management was if you looked at below cost timber sales or any of those types of pressures, there are a lot of communities where if you really wanted to do it purely mathematically, you may not send any money for the forestry program to Region 4, except possibly maybe up by the Payette in Boise [Idaho]. You might not send any money to Region 2 except for the Black Hills. Region 1, you may just send some money to Idaho. Region 3, I don't know if you would send them any money, maybe the Coconino [Arizona] might. Would you really cut off all those forests and those communities? That's where people go, "Oh God, no." Even Congress: "No, we don't want to do that." So, you start thinning out the money you have by trying to run programs in areas where it's very difficult. You're not going to ever make money in Utah selling timber, but personal use firewood, doing it for other resource reasons? You might need a forestry program there, but it's not going to be a forestry program to keep a sawmill going, even though there are sawmills in Utah.

[01:19:06] **James Wall:** This is just a part of the bigger trend of dwindling timber cuts across the board. Did they start to move away from tying it so much—the budget—to timber cutting? Or did they want you to keep paying for your own work?

[01:19:31] **Bill Timko:** We made a lot of movement when Dale was Chief. I think he started the ball rolling with stewardship contracting and some of the other programs where it wasn't what you removed, it's what you left. Don't over promise. We used to go to Congress with numbers we couldn't achieve, but Congress would fund them. One of the things I always thought in the Forest Management Program was it was a program where Congress could see, "Oh, we put federal dollars in… They offer timber for sale. They cut trees, those trees paid loggers, those trees paid truckers. Those trees played sawmill workers. There were boards. We put money in. Boards came out." When you went to some of our other programs, recreation and stuff, that direct tie, and it seemed like that job and paying, even though recreation creates a tremendous amount of jobs and people rely on it, it just didn't seem to be as direct. There were going to be so many people going to see the Gallatin [National Forest, Montana] every year, whether you gave them this much money or that much money. You changed the quality of the experience maybe and the standard, but did you actually change how many people saw it and did it actually generate revenue that came back to the government? Not really.

[01:21:20] **James Wall:** The packers and guides, they're lobbying. Their pockets are not as deep as the timber industry. They have less influence on Congress, who's ultimately going to pressure you to put more money in the pot.

[01:21:36] **Bill Timko:** If you look at it in other ways, take the range people, grazing. If you were a rancher and you had an allotment on the National Forest and Forest Service had to go out and inspect it and keep up with you and do all this stuff. If you lobby Congress, would you lobby for more money so you could have them come out and inspect you more or would you lobby congress for less money, so they'd come out and inspect you less?

[01:22:02] **James Wall:** Right.

[01:22:03] **Bill Timko:** Yes. There's a lot of—

[01:22:05] **James Wall:** That's interesting. I didn't think of that. Yes, they actually want you to be less funded.

[01:22:10] **Bill Timko:** Less money.

[01:22:11] **James Wall:** You don't bother them as much, and the grazing fees haven't risen by any real degree in years.

[01:22:18] **Bill Timko:** They're probably still $1.86 or whatever.

[01:22:20] **James Wall:** Ridiculously cheap, yet they still bitch about having to do anything on those allotments. It sounds like you had a constant stream of work trying to do that balancing act.

[01:22:38] **Bill Timko:** Yes, I mean it was because we got into stewardship contract, and we started that and that was trading goods for services. A lot of work with, "What's a contract? How do you interpret the law?" We went into The Healthy Forest Initiative. One of our staff, Doug MacCleery, was up on hill. I don't know if you've interviewed Doug or you're going to interview Doug.

[01:23:04] **James Wall:** Tomorrow.

[01:23:04] **Bill Timko:** Yes. He may tell you about his time. He was up on the Hill for a year writing that. Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Act. I worked on that. When the people of The Nature Conservancy came in, they

had some of their original drafts and I went through it with them and said, "Hey, this is doable. This isn't doable. This doesn't make sense." They then rewrote the law and got it. It came to the Forest Service. I always thought it was written for fuels reduction. No one was picking it up. Tom Peterson was the director, and I said, "Tom," I said, "We've got to run with this thing. Congress is expecting us to have something put together, a little skunk works. Basically, just a couple of people. One from fuels, one from silviculture." I think there may have been somebody else on that team. I'm sorry if I can't remember.

[01:23:56] **Bill Timko:** Then one of the first things we ran into is everybody wanted a regulation. I talked to Peterson and then I talked to—I can't remember who was Chief at the time—and we said, "Why do we need regulations?" I went over to our OGC General Counsel and talked. I said, "This law is so specific. Why do we want to take a very specific law, write a very specific regulation that basically says what the law says, go through all of that to get a regulation to implement it. Why can't we just write guidance to implement the law as it's written? They bought that, and we never wrote regs for CFLRA [Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program].

[01:24:43] **James Wall:** Nine years is a long time to be in that kind of position.

[01:24:47] **Bill Timko:** Well, this was way after nine years.

[01:24:49] **James Wall:** Oh, okay. After around 2000 is when you moved to the Whitten Building, right? To the Undersecretary's Office for a year?

[01:24:58] **Bill Timko:** That was 1999. I wasn't there a year because people on the Senate Energy Committee saw that I was over there and wrote a nasty letter to Secretary [Dan Glickman] telling him to send me back home because I wasn't allowed to be there that long.

[01:25:14] **James Wall:** They had a cap on how long you could do that job?

[01:25:16] **Bill Timko:** There were only so many days you were supposed to be over there. Then the "D's" on Senate Energy called up and asked if I would come up and work for Senate Energy. I went up and worked for Senate Energy.

[01:25:31] **James Wall:** You got your time on the Hill seeing how the sausage was made.

[01:25:36] **Bill Timko:** Then in the meantime, I left there early because I ended up getting the job as Deputy Director for Forest Management. That was a busy year.

[01:25:48] **James Wall:** Yes, it sounds like it. Who were you working under when you were Deputy Director?

[01:25:55] **Bill Timko:** Ann Bartuska.

[01:25:56] **James Wall:** Right.

[01:25:57] **Bill Timko:** Ann was the director at the time.

[01:26:02] **James Wall:** What did y'all get up to? What were you working on in your time as Deputy Director?

[01:26:08] **Bill Timko:** The big thing that Ann had going was we eliminated the Director of Range in trying to combine Range and Forest Management as a staff unit in the Washington Office. Ann actually had that done. People's expectations of it were much easier than the actual implementation. It was kind of one of those things, those that if you don't—what is that saying? "If you don't have to do it, it's easy," or something. Trying to put it together. One of the examples was we had people that worked in contracts in Forest Management. Range had people that worked in permits. They were saying, "Oh, well you can eliminate some bodies when you put that together. Well, a range permit to occupy the National Forest is much different than the timber contract to cut trees. They're not alike at all.

[01:27:19] **Bill Timko:** It was dramatically different. The same with botany and vegetation. Silviculture is not range ecology. They know some of the background stuff, but the trees are different, the grasses are different—much of the stuff didn't marry. Where we did have some marriages and we were eliminating those was the administrative staff. Do we need two executive assistants to track one director? Do we need—at that time, I think we still had people that handled travel on the staff. A lot of those positions got eliminated anyway. Then when we ended up more to the resource-oriented versus the administrative-oriented folks, there weren't a lot of combinations we could make. Then the cowboys and the loggers were seeing it differently depending on who you've got in there. If you

were a logger, you really didn't know much about range. If you were a range person, your logging was kind of weak.

[01:28:36] **Bill Timko:** The analogy I like to use is back when I first went to Missoula in the early 1980s, we had a Deputy Regional Forester for Resources. We had a wildlife staff, a range staff, a Forest Management staff, and they ran their programs, and they were experts in their programs. Then over time we started lumping them together in big super-staffs. Instead of having three GS-15 staff directors, we had one super-staff staff director who then had a staff up with a GS-14 that really ran the program. We just moved it down and we just kept on making somebody run the program. The other thing that happened when you went to that super staff is they were no longer catching stuff. it was like everything kept on getting bumped up. The things where you had expertise were no longer there. We were watering down what a person could know. I don't know if that makes sense or not.

[01:29:50] **James Wall:** It's kind of an awkward marriage. One side is not going to be happy because you're going to have a stronger Range or Forest Management, depending on who's in charge.

[01:30:02] **Bill Timko:** Then they end up working with the sub-staff and the Director is the one working with the Regional Forester or the Chief. It's not the people that are actually running the program. You're getting the program specifics further away from leadership. Then after Ann left, Janette Kaiser came in and she picked up the program. Well, Janette was more of a range person and when she was there, then I think we split the staffs back out. Janette went to Range and Chuck Myers came in as an Acting Director for Forest Management.

[01:30:54] **James Wall:** Sounds kind of clunky.

[01:30:54] **Bill Timko:** Yes. We got together. That's what we kind of worked on when Ann was there. It was a lot of that. We also had Jeanne Wade Evans, and I were both Deputy Directors. Jeanne was the Deputy Director in Range. I was the Deputy Director in Forest Management. We had two deputy directors. HR said, "We can't have two deputy directors. It's not possible." So, we kept on arguing, "Well, we need two deputy directors, one for Range and one for Forest Management because we really didn't know the others' programs at all." They said, "No, you can't." I think Fire is allowed to have two deputy directors in the Forest Service. Nobody else does,

which, there really shouldn't be two Deputy Directors. You only have one alter ego of the director.

[01:31:42] **James Wall:** Yes. Well, if they hadn't "Frankenstein'd" those programs together, you wouldn't need two, you would just have separate programs.

[Recording Paused]

[01:31:52] **James Wall:** We were talking about your time, fourteen years, Deputy Director of Forest Management. You must've been doing something right to be able to stick around that long inside the Beltway.

[01:32:06] **Bill Timko:** Don't know. It just, it came out, like I said, I had an opportunity to move. I applied for some other jobs and wasn't successful, but very many success—I had a lot of bosses that turned out very successful in their careers and leadership.

[01:32:28] **James Wall:** Was Deputy Director an SES [Senior Executive Service] position?

[01:32:31] **Bill Timko:** No.

[01:32:31] **James Wall:** Well, the problem with SES is once you're in it, they can move you anywhere. At least you had some stability.

[01:32:38] **Bill Timko:** Yes, I had stability. Interestingly, on several of those people, I probably was paid better than they were because there's an overlap with the GS-15 and the SES. I used to tease them that I trained them.

[01:32:55] **James Wall:** Yes. What else was going on in this time, big projects that you were working on? It sounds like there were a lot of consolidation efforts or talking about consolidating. This is after the Albuquerque Center was set up, I'm assuming?

[01:33:13] **Bill Timko:** Yes, the Albuquerque was set up. We had the whole—

[01:33:16] **James Wall:** Forests are being combined.

[01:33:19] **Bill Timko:** Then we had that huge restructure—what the heck was that called? That big restructuring exercise.

[01:33:24] **James Wall:** Oh, the OMB [Circular No. A-] 76?

[01:33:27] **Bill Timko:** No, they were looking for different ways to run the Forest Service, I think. Randy Moore was involved in that. I was on a team to work on that. We came up with some really interesting ways of doing it.

[01:33:45] **James Wall:** That was the competition kind of thing where they had everybody—

[01:33:49] **Bill Timko:** It was self-inflicted.

[01:33:50] **James Wall:** —Compete to see how much you could streamline each department.

[01:33:55] **Bill Timko:** Well, however we were doing it, I was trying to think. Randy was involved. Maybe Dale was involved. Restructuring for transition. I can't remember the name of it, but I remember what the team came up with, and then the whole thing kind of died. We came up with zones of specialists and then Regional Foresters would just be really small staffed, and they would do political stuff.

[01:34:24] **James Wall:** Oh, I see.

[01:34:25] **Bill Timko:** The actual work on the ground was going to be carried out by three zones across the nation. It didn't fly, to say the least. Then we had CFLRA. Oh, we had the whole budget thing, the integrated resource, IRA [Inflation Reduction Act], where we were trying to get Congress to go more towards "The Big Bucket." I understand they have a totally different budget structure since I left. We were working under this more of a big bucket where we took the money, then we used it for landscape scale type, the projects. That was kind of towards the end. Oh, also it was A to Z. I just saw something on the A to Z contract. I don't know if you're familiar with that. That's with the Vaagen Bros. up in Spokane, that corner of Washington. Tracy Beck, I don't know if he's on your list of people from Region 6.

[01:35:32] **James Wall:** No, I haven't seen that.

[01:35:34] **Bill Timko:** Vaagen Brothers. Yes. The A to Z project was where Vaagen brothers approached Region 6 that they would pay for NEPA and do the project that Tracy brought to me from Region 6. I said, "Huh, well let's see

if that will fly." I talked to some folks in the Forest Service and most of the thing was, "No, you can't do that. You can't have the proponent pay for NEPA." I said, "Well, what if we're the ones that make the decision? What if we're the ones that just sign the paperwork? What if we oversee it?" they go, "No." I go, "Well, I'll go to OGC." Well, I think people were confident that OGC would tell me no. We went over and talked to OGC, and they said, "Yes, you can do that."

[01:36:31] **Bill Timko:** So, we put some rules together of what Vaagen could do and what they couldn't, and where the Forest Service had a play in this. Then it's more under a Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration. They work with the community and come up with what they want to do. Then do the NEPA and the Forest Service signs it. I just saw something in the SAF [Society of American Foresters]—I can't think which Vaagen it is—talking about how well that's working, and they're trying another one now.

[01:37:04] **James Wall:** Was one of the stipulations that you got to pick the firm that did the NEPA? Because otherwise I would imagine they could just hire a cupcake firm.

[01:37:14] **Bill Timko:** I don't know what they ended up with, but yes, we had a lot of things like that. The firm worked for us even though they paid for it.

[01:37:23] **James Wall:** I see.

[01:37:24] **Bill Timko:** When I did the platinum mine expiration, it was the same thing. Montana has a mineral mining act, and Chevron had to hire a consultant, and the consultant was paid by Chevron through the state. The state paid them, but Chevron paid it.

[01:37:43] **James Wall:** It's not too dissimilar from the kind of road building credits that they used to give timber companies.

[01:37:51] **Bill Timko:** Oh, timber perch credit.

[01:37:52] **James Wall:** Yes, which is an interest-free loan, basically.

[01:37:57] **Bill Timko:** Yes, that one there was real controversial. We spent a lot of time on that one. People called it a subsidy. I remember one time, Tom Brokaw sent one of his producers down and we spent like four hours

talking about that. Finally, he went away, said, "No, we're not going to deal with this."

[01:38:24] **James Wall:** This isn't entertaining enough.

[01:38:27] **Bill Timko:** Because he came down that it was a subsidy and we were paying the timber and all this. I think the story I used on him was—I said that Brokaw had a place on my ranger district up the West Boulder. I said, "What if he came in and hired a logger and says, 'I want to get a little money off my land here. I want you to cut those trees up there. I want to open up for cows.'" Logger says, "Yes, I can do that. I'll give you this many dollars." He said, "How are you going to cross the creek, the river, West Boulder?" He said, "Well, I'm going to drop a bridge in there, a temporary bridge and I'll put it in." He goes, "Well, what if you put a permanent bridge in there so I can get across there?" The guy says, "Well, I can leave you a permanent bridge, but I'm going to reduce how much I'm going to give you because you're now getting a bridge plus money." When I went through that, the guy said, "Is that what that's all about?" The Forest Service was getting the road and paying for it with the value of the trees, which is what stewardship contracting does. We get a fuels treatment paid by the value of the trees.

[01:39:36] **James Wall:** Now the Forest Service has more roads than it knows what to do with. They're just wasting away, right?

[01:39:42] **Bill Timko:** Oh, yes.

[01:39:44] **James Wall:** They're not maintained. They still have to fix that unmaintained road system or let them go back to nature, I guess.

[01:39:55] **Bill Timko:** They could recover, they could restore them. There was one time up on the Hill, and I can't remember what law it was—may have been CFLRA—where they said the law was written: "No new road construction." We were talking about that. I go, "Well, wait a minute. That's real restrictive. Why don't you say, 'No net increase in roads?'" I said, "Well, what if you had a road that went around along the creek and it was in a really bad place, but you wanted to get rid of that road and to access it through another route that was less environmentally damaging. You can't do that because you said, "no new road construction." That's a new road construction."

[01:40:42] **James Wall:** Yes, I think it was Jack Ward Thomas who tried to put a freeze for a while on building roads. He had to fight for that. Everybody was upset about that.

[01:40:51] **Bill Timko:** People get really twisted on some of this.

[01:40:54] **James Wall:** When did you know that it was going to be time to hang it up? Was it a years thing or did you have something you wanted to accomplish?

[01:41:02] **Bill Timko:** I never had anything. Oh, you changed the thought. My thought went, "What have I accomplished?" There was so much to accomplish. I enjoyed my job tremendously. I loved every day I went in. I always had a challenge. There was always something coming up. One of the things I really liked doing during my fourteen years as Deputy was I felt that forest management needs to be involved in everything. I tried to keep us in every vegetation-fuels thing, anything going on. I was always going around the building trying to see how we could get our nose in that tent, that it was important enough. We did. I just really enjoyed that.

[01:41:47] **Bill Timko:** At that point, I didn't have anything really planned. I knew I was going to retire sometime. Pam retired. She was retired for a couple years, and I said, "Maybe I'll retire at the end of the year." She goes, "Why are you going to waste summer?" She said, "Why are you going to retire in the winter? You can't do anything. Retire in the spring." I said, "Oh, okay, maybe I'll retire. We need some young people in here. Somebody else take over. I've done this." I did not like the commute. It was a carpool, and [Interstate] 66 was a disaster. In fact, I was carpooling with Mr. [Dick] Fitzgerald, and I did not like the commute. Other than that, that was the only downside about going to work in my job.

[01:42:38] **James Wall:** You hung it up in the spring of 2014?

[01:42:41] **Bill Timko:** Spring of 2014.

[01:42:43] **James Wall:** How many years was that for you? Let's see.

[01:42:45] **Bill Timko:** It was just short of thirty-eight. If I had waited until August, I think it would have been thirty-eight.

[01:42:52] **James Wall:** Yes. Would you retire too? Was it tough? Working in D.C., it's so hectic all the time that you actually take a breath. Is it difficult to slow down?

[01:43:07] **Bill Timko:** No, it wasn't. I surprised myself because I heard so many people say they had difficulty with retirement. One piece of advice that I took and stuck with was somebody told me not to commit or do anything for six months. Just retire. I remember I retired, and when Monday came along, I just got up and started doing things around the house and just doing a different life, and I never lost sleep. I never had nightmares. I didn't dream about the job. It just vanished.

[01:43:48] **Bill Timko:** Then I got involved with the retirees. I like with the NAFSR [National Association of Forest Service Retirees], because I do get involved in some of the policy and stuff. I go to summits. I go to that thing on old growth or mature and old growth. I went to that for a couple days, got to see some of the people. I like keeping my finger on some of this policy stuff and writing some things and stuff like that. I could also just decide not to do that. It really wasn't that big a deal.

[01:44:16] **James Wall:** Right. Well, that's good to hear. Some people just can't make that transition as easy, but not committing to something for six months means that when you finally do, it's more of a pure thing. You're not doing it just because you're afraid of the boredom. It's something you really want to do.

[01:44:35] **Bill Timko:** Yes, and I don't know why. I just never really found the boredom.

[01:44:42] **James Wall:** Well, there's always something to do.

[01:44:42] **Bill Timko:** Yes. I do go back. I go back to the Chief's Reception. I go back. I don't know many people there anymore. A lot of the people I followed and tried to help have now left the agency and gone. There's just so much change. I think Covid really threw a—because my philosophy was I always wanted to go—instead of calling somebody or emailing them—I wanted to go sit at their desk. I like to sit at their desk and look at them. They would end up saying, "Hey, did you hear about this? Did you hear this?" New things would come up. That's how I kept my nose under the tent, I guess.

[01:45:32] **James Wall:** Alright, are you ready for the last few questions?

[01:45:34] **Bill Timko:** Sure.

[01:45:36] **James Wall:** You had said that one of the things your mentors did is teach you how to cool off a bit. Did you come in sort of guns-a-blazing as a young man in the agency or taking on fights that weren't worth it or things like that?

[01:46:00] **Bill Timko:** Yes. I wasn't guns-a-blazing. I didn't realize how much it took to deal with the bureaucracy as big as the Forest Service. I was told one time that steering the Forest Service is like steering a freight liner ship. It's not a speed boat. It takes a lot of planning and effort to make a turn. You just don't turn. Then another person once told me—I don't even know what happened to him—Don Renton. I remember he pulled me aside one time and said his phrase: "Bill, it's not ripe." What it was there was you had to get your timing. If your timing wasn't right, you weren't going to go anywhere. Even though you had a good idea and you had it all thought out and you were sure it was great, that if it wasn't the right time, it wasn't going to go anywhere. It was just going to die. You had to wait for those opportunities to bring things up. It was a lot of that.

[01:47:21] **James Wall:** Who was it that told you, "There's no better way to look like a jackass than to argue with one?"

[01:47:27] **Bill Timko:** That was Ken Weyers. I still keep in touch. We get Christmas cards from Ken and Joy Scott. Ken retired—oh my lord. Were we living in Missoula at the time? Yes, Sarah was around. She was a couple of years old, and Sarah is in her mid-forties now, so that was forty years ago. Ken retired. He's got to be getting pretty old. I was a GS-5 or GS-7, working on planning on the Lewis and Clark. He was the Forest Supervisor. We had the staff there and it was something with forest planning and timber and the staff officer for timber on Lewis and Clark was an old line. We've got to get out there and cut. I'm sitting there arguing, and Ken goes, "We need to take a break." It was down at the old post office where our office was. We went down, I went down to the bathroom, I needed a break, and I went in there, and next thing I know nobody came in. Then Ken came in, only guy there. He looks at me and he goes, "There's no better way to look like a jackass than argue with one." He left. I thought that was good advice. I always kept that.

[01:48:46] **James Wall:** That is good advice. That's a good way of putting it. What was your favorite district that you worked on? Your favorite time where you were having the most fun?

[01:48:55] **Bill Timko:** Oh, it had to be Big Timber. I didn't work on that many districts, and I was ranger of Big Timber, and I had a great staff. We had a lot of things going on there. We had so many different things going on. It was a really small district. Golly Moses, we had some of the people on the staff, if they wanted to move on, they moved on and were very successful. One became a RF [Regional Forester], Faye Krueger, I don't know if you know Faye. Faye worked for me. Others became rangers and staff officers and some just stayed there. They loved living in Montana and Big Timber and hunting and fishing and doing the stuff they wanted to do. If they wanted to do something, they did. If they didn't, they didn't. Dick Rath was part of that crew. You know Dick.

[01:49:45] **James Wall:** Yes, Carl [Ronneberg] worked the same job for twenty, thirty years. Still there.

[01:49:50] **Bill Timko:** Twenty, thirty, may have been more than that.

[01:49:53] **James Wall:** Probably more. Yes. He didn't move and was still at it.

[01:49:57] **Bill Timko:** Yes.

[01:49:58] **James Wall:** He's retired now. Yes, a lot of the folks that were at tech or that level, they were happy with it.

[01:50:07] **Bill Timko:** We just really had a lot of fun down there and people, I used to get a lot of, got questioned a couple of times because we would fly a job at Big Timber, and Big Timber, it's not Aspen, it's not Bozeman. There's no draw to go to Big Timber.

[01:50:27] **James Wall:** There's some fishing, but other than that…

[01:50:29] **Bill Timko:** Hunting. And I would get tons of applications to come to Big Timber. We had a reputation. We had a lot of fun there.

[01:50:41] **James Wall:** Usually when I ask that question, it's usually the first ranger job, almost ninety percent of the time, because it's the first job, it's usually a smaller town. You get to know everybody, but you're also basically the boss. You get to take the reins for the first time. I think that's powerful for people. They come back to it. Well, the last question is the toughest one. What does the Forest Service mean to you, now that you're on the other side of it? How do you feel about it as a force in your life and where it's at?

[01:51:21] **Bill Timko:** I really like the Forest Service. I just can't imagine how it would be that you have an agency in the government that has all those acres. What is it, 193, 194 million acres that they manage for people? You get to be a part of that, doing something for people. It's just so enriching. All the different people we get to meet. All the people we get to work with, and to be a part of that. It would just kill me if something happened to the Forest Service, if they decided to sell it off or do something.

[01:52:18] **James Wall:** Or break it up.

[01:52:19] **Bill Timko:** Maybe I'm more in love with the National Forest System than the Forest Service. Look at the great research. What countries, what places have wilderness? What places have a research division as strong as the Forest Service? What places have state foresters and fire that's all tied together? It is just really something. The [National] Park Service, they have land, but they just do park stuff, preserve and teach. Fish and Wildlife Service, they have some land, but it's mainly for wildlife. BLM has land, but it's kind of scattered across everything. They can't really pull it together. It really is the land nobody wanted. Then you got the Forest Service. We have these great lands and they're open to people. It does bother me when I see limitations put on it, but I know why they're there. I know that we are going to get overrun and stuff, but I just feel so good about that.

[01:53:27] **James Wall:** Yes. Well, it sounds like you had a good run.

[01:53:29] **Bill Timko:** Oh yes. Couldn't think back anything better. How I got there—sometimes I think it was just a series of nicks and clips and turns and opportunities. I knew people that had their careers written out on a piece of paper in their drawer and their whole struggle in life was to follow that path. I was more like, "Oh, this is a job I'm doing. I'm going to do this." My dad used to say, "Whatever job you do, be the best at that job." If I was the budget guy for Timber, I was going to be the best budget guy.

[01:54:07] **James Wall:** Yes, that's a good way of putting it. All right, well, we'll go ahead and take you off the clock here.

[End of Interview]