An Interview with Art Wirtz

Gilbert, Arizona

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[00:00:05] **James Wall:** Could you tell me when and where you were born?

[00:00:07] **Art Wirtz:** I was born 1949 in Ames, Iowa.

[00:00:11] **James Wall:** A lot of Iowans become foresters, which I always find really interesting because I don't think forest when I think Iowa.

[00:00:19] **Art Wirtz:** No, but it's got Iowa State University, which is one of the oldest forestry schools in the nation.

[00:00:24] **James Wall:** A great forestry school. A lot of really good foresters come out of Iowa State. And did you grow up in Ames?

[00:00:30] **Art Wirtz:** I did grow up in Ames, yes.

[00:00:32] **James Wall:** And what were your parents' names?

[00:00:34] **Art Wirtz:** Their names? Oh yes. Lem [Lemuel] Wirtz and Norma Wirtz.

[00:00:42] **James Wall:** And what did they do for a living?

[00:00:43] **Art Wirtz:** My father had an auto parts store, and my mother was a bookkeeper for a large company that made sweatshirts and sporting goods, sporting active wear.

[00:01:00] **James Wall:** So, not a second-generation forester like some of these Forest Service brats. You were new to the outfit.

[00:01:08] **Art Wirtz:** Yes.

[00:01:09] **James Wall:** Now, were you an outdoorsy kid when you were growing up?

[00:01:11] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, very much. I was in very active in Boy Scouts and also every year when we went on vacation, we spent a lot of time, Colorado, Wyoming, and a lot of the western states on there. And it's just one of those things that I ended up coming to really like national parks. That was my main thing when I looked at the West.

[00:01:36] **James Wall:** Any in particular?

[00:01:37] **Art Wirtz:** Rocky Mountain National Park [Colorado]. Yellowstone [Wyoming] somewhat, but Rocky Mountain more.

[00:01:45] **James Wall:** So, you got up around that little corner. Did you go into Montana ever?

[00:01:50] **Art Wirtz:** No, not very often.

[00:01:54] **James Wall:** Well now that part of the country is overrun with the rich folk. Up in Jackson Hole [Wyoming] and Bozeman [Montana] now.

[00:02:00] **Art Wirtz:** And I spent a lot of time fighting fires during my career. A lot of time in Montana.

[00:02:06] **James Wall:** It smokes up there. Well, yes, I'm sure we'll hit that. When did you hear about the Forest Service for the first time?

[00:02:17] **Art Wirtz:** When I was in college, starting off they said they wanted you to declare a major and so after the first year I did declare a major, but what I really enjoyed was psychology and sociology. And so, I declared my major as psychology with a minor in sociology and went through there and went over three years as that as a major. And then just kind of felt like I can't see myself dealing strictly with this the rest of my life. So, I kind of did some soul searching and go, “What would I like to do?” And what came up was Iowa State was known for forestry. I'd lived in that town, and so I changed over to forestry. The really unique part about it was that a lot of my professors were parents of kids I went to high school and junior high with. So, I already knew a lot of the professors when I went there.

[00:03:14] **James Wall:** And when you were growing up, did you know that they were forestry professors, or you just knew them as "Steve's dad?"

[00:03:20] **Art Wirtz:** I knew a couple of them were.

[00:03:23] **James Wall:** So, before you made that switch, were you thinking, becoming a sort of clinical psychologist?

[00:03:33] **Art Wirtz:** Clinical psychologist, yes, is what I had in mind.

[00:03:37] **James Wall:** You're right though, I guess we'll talk about it, but it comes in handy when you become a district ranger, you are kind of a human-oriented employee. Iowa State, of course, like you said, a lot of great foresters came out there. And when you made, so you the switch at, you said three and a half years.

[00:04:01] **Art Wirtz:** A little over three. It was by quarter, so it was three years in one quarter, and then I still had two more quarters to graduate and then I shifted over. So, I went longer to pick up all my forestry courses and that type of thing. And what was really unique about that is Iowa State is famous for—they have a summer camp that you have to attend a summer camp, and they have it all over the United States, but the year I did it, they had it in Canada. So, I did forestry summer camp in Canada, in Ontario.

[00:04:33] **James Wall:** Well, that must've been infectious, gotten you into the spirit of it.

[00:04:38] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, absolutely. It was total immersion because we were essentially in a camp where it was partly a tent camp where you're out there all the time and you are actually right in the woods all the time. You are marking timber, laying out roads, doing all kinds of things and really tied in with the basics of forestry.

[00:05:02] **James Wall:** So, was it you and a bunch of eighteen, nineteen-year-olds and you were the senior statesman of the group?

[00:05:07] **Art Wirtz:** You're right. That's a good thing on there. I was the only one—I was married at that time and there wasn't any of them—I think there was twenty-two in there and I was the oh, second oldest. There was another guy that was a year older than I was, but yes, I was kind of the senior one.

[00:05:29] **James Wall:** So, you must've gotten a slightly later start into the outfit because I'm imagining you had to tack on a couple of years to do the forestry classes.

[00:05:37] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, but in 1971, I sat out a couple of quarters so that I could take a job in New Mexico on the Lincoln National Forest because there was an opportunity in timber harvest administration there and sale layout. And so, I went to New Mexico and did that, and it was so worthwhile because it reinforced my understanding of what the total forestry job was,

and it was a real good experience. So, I was there about seven months, something like that in New Mexico.

[00:06:21] **James Wall:** Walk me through getting to the elusive permanent job because the early seventies, it wasn't super—it wasn't always so easy for a lot of people in that era after Nixon and the budget cuts and reshuffling of the outfit to get your permanent job. How did you go about getting there?

[00:06:41] **Art Wirtz:** Well, the job that I took in Cloudcroft, New Mexico on the Lincoln on there, I was working for a forester on there, the staff forester for the district on there and got to be good friends with him. And we went through a lot of different things, and I talked to him. And so, I go back to school to go back to finish it up. And when I got close to my last quarter in forestry, I gave him a call and he says, "I'll take you right now. What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, what do you think would be a good thing for me?" He says, "Well, you've got a lot of the timber experience." He says, "I've got a fire crew foreman. I know you can do it. Would you be a fire crew foreman down here on Roosevelt Lake?" And I said, "You got it." So, I came down and spent the summer running a fire crew out of the district on Roosevelt Lake.

[00:07:36] **James Wall:** And how much fire work had you done up to that point?

[00:07:38] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, I had done quite a bit. During that time when I was at Cloudcroft, yes, we're in timber, but all of a sudden, they pull off and they say, "Hey, we got a fire. You're going here, you're going there." And I'll tell you, I talked about total immersion. The first fire I went on, I'd already had some basic training they had given me on there that they drive me out to an area where there's a fire that it's really moving and it's starting to crown out and everything else. "Okay, here's a little area here. We want you to just kind of keep this little fire, this part herded up." And I said, "You're leaving me here?" And he said, "Yes, we'll keep checking on you." So, I spent the night there keeping this little part of the fire all herded up, so it didn't go anywhere. And that was my introduction into fire, and I loved it. I loved the challenge. I loved the understanding you had to have of the forest environment and the fuels and how fire moved through a forested environment. It just intrigued me.

[00:08:38] **James Wall:** Well, the first fire you see, people always have a visceral memory of that. Do you remember, was that the first fire, the one that they tossed you in on?

[00:08:46] **Art Wirtz:** That was the one—that was the first one.

[00:08:48] **James Wall:** You must not have gotten very much sleep that night.

[00:08:49] **Art Wirtz:** No, not at all. Not a bit of sleep.

[00:08:52] **James Wall:** Just staring at that…

[00:08:54] **Art Wirtz:** And doing the best job to make sure that I had a good fire line around it. And it wasn't chance of jumping over the line.

[00:09:02] **James Wall:** And digging fire line will get you into pretty good shape, right?

[00:09:02] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, absolutely. But then also working in timber, we were walking all day long laying out sales, so I was in great shape to start with.

[00:09:12] **James Wall:** Yes. Well, that's a great thing about these working outdoors is that people remember is that it was being outdoors that was the really special part and getting paid in the most beautiful places on planet Earth. So, what was the name of that staff forester that gave you your first shot?

[00:09:29] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, Jerry Elson.

[00:09:31] **James Wall:** Jerry Ellison?

[00:09:32] **Art Wirtz:** Elson. E-L-S-O-N.

[00:09:37] **James Wall:** Did you stay in touch with him over the years?

[00:09:39] **Art Wirtz:** Yes. He also mentored me on some future jobs too, and through a lot of my career, whenever I put in it, I put him down as a reference on there. He was great. He was a great mentor on there.

[00:09:52] **James Wall:** It seems to be a common theme in a lot of people's Forest Service career is that there was somebody who remembered them from

their seasonal and either they reached out, but anyway, they gave that person a shot and made sure that they were looked after and that sounds like him. So that early job on the Lincoln, you're running a fire crew dealing with people and dealing with motivating people.

[00:10:26] **Art Wirtz:** Well, running fire crew was on the Tonto [National Forest, Arizona] at Roosevelt. Yes.

[00:10:30] **James Wall:** So, this Lincoln job that you were on? Was that fire related?

[00:10:37] **Art Wirtz:** I did fire on there when they called on it, but it was primarily a timber sale preparation job on there. So, we were marking timber all day long and that type of thing. So, there was three of us that were working out there laying out timber sale and looking around because the bears in the forest were curious as to what we were doing, spraying paint on trees. So, you look around and they would hide behind trees and watch us as we laid out the sale.

[00:11:08] **James Wall:** These were black bears, I'm assuming.

[00:11:10] **Art Wirtz:** Black bears. They never caused us any problems, but they were just curious.

[00:11:15] **James Wall:** Then the first time you see, is that a bear or is that, what is it?

[00:11:19] **Art Wirtz:** Well, that's what it was. They said, "Look at that. Look behind the tree." And they would peek around, look at it, and then they'd hide back behind the tree.

[00:11:27] **James Wall:** So that was Cloudcroft. And then two years later you're running the fire crew at Tonto. We've interviewed a fair amount of people about the Tonto, and I'll ask you about it, but one of the things people say about the Tonto is that it's a little bit of everything. It's a huge forest. It's got recreation, it's got timber, it's got these interesting archeological sites and things like that. Is that your estimation of it?

[00:11:56] **Art Wirtz:** Well, not only that. When I came down Jerry Elson, who helped me that I worked for on the Cloudcroft district on there, he was the district ranger there, and he also gave me a few different projects on there that weren't typically that you give a fire crew foreman. Because I was working

for a forestry degree, he gave me some things to work with. And so, I had three little projects that I worked on that when I got back to college I did some write-ups on there and I met my requirements for some of the classes as far as writing those up. And I got to know the fire management officer for the forest and got to talk with him quite a bit and explain some of the things we've got and how we fit in with the overall fire management program on the Tonto, which it's a very active program on there. I think we had thirty-one fires during that summer that I was down there. And so, that's a significant amount of fires.

[00:12:58] **James Wall:** Thirty-one. Yes, that's a bunch. And one of the things that Patti Fenner told me is about the invasive weeds and things like that and the grasses that are growing on the Tonto and how they are kind of accelerants for fire and for that reason, it was getting kind of worse and worse on the Tonto.

[00:13:26] **Art Wirtz:** It makes the vegetation atypical of what the natural was in there. But also, a lot of ours was around the Roosevelt Lake and early in the century, a lot of that area was grazed very heavily by sheep. And so, it had taken out a lot of different species, and so there were invasive species coming in that would carry a fire. And so, it was a little bit different on there, but once you start to get where you understand how explosive some of those fuels are and actually how you can back off and still put the fire out, that was a lot of the things that we did there.

We also had it kind of unique too, because we had Roosevelt Lake in there that we had a fire crew that we had a pontoon boat, so if we had to go on one side of the lake, we would get in the pontoon boat to make initial attack or we had an engine on there or we had a crew, stateside carrier that we took people into. So, we were always talking about those. And then we had a helipad and there were a couple helicopters available out of Payson [Arizona] and out of Young [Arizona] that we would call. So we went between air, land, and sea to go after fires in that summer.

[00:14:44] **James Wall:** That's the first I've heard of a pontoon boat being used in an initial attack.

[00:14:48] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, I know. It makes it unique.

[00:14:50] **James Wall:** I've interviewed a lot of fire people. So, did you feel at the time that the Tonto was a place that you could really make a mark or were you prepared to start moving around like they did to a lot of people?

[00:15:04] **Art Wirtz:** It surprised me because I came there because Jerry Elson was the ranger, but also it surprised me that I enjoyed it. It was different than a heavily forested area like I was in on the Lincoln, so it was a change, but it still had some of the same characteristics, and I enjoyed it too. I really did. I enjoyed the desert one in comparison. Also, we got on a couple fires that got into the timber area just north of the lake.

[00:15:33] **James Wall:** So out of those thirty-some odd fires, was there a big one or any one that really kind of stuck with you?

[00:15:43] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, Gunsight [Pass] Fire [Arizona]. It took us, we started hiking into it at like five o'clock in the afternoon, and we didn't get to the fire until five o'clock in the morning. It was very rough, very rugged, just some really tough country on there so it took us a while to get there. And in fact, by the time we got there finally the sun was coming up and they were shuttling in firefighters in helicopter. So, we fought fire for about four hours, and they loaded us on helicopter and took us out.

[00:16:17] **James Wall:** So, you hiked all that way and then you immediately had to start digging fire line and things like that. That must have been taxing to say the least. And then you made, so you went from fire to PIO [Public Information Officer] and contract admin at the Prescott?

[00:16:39] **Art Wirtz:** I did in, it's interesting, 1974. I'll tell you, Jerry Elson had moved to the Prescott National Forest. He had one district up there. And when I got out, I contacted him, he says, "Yes, I think in the next district over, they have a vacancy that's a combination contractor administrator essentially for thinning contracts and also does PIO. I know you've done programs so that's right down your aisle." So, he got me lined up, and so I went to the Thumb Butte District of the Prescott on there. And not only did I do programs—there are camps everywhere—all kinds of camps around Prescott. And so, I think the most I ever did one day I did four programs in one day at four different camps. And so, I would do those. And once you start getting some of those, you can adjust to a program and do a lot of different things on there. So, it was a lot of fun.

[00:17:44] **James Wall:** Four programs in one day, almost a logistical nightmare.

[00:17:50] **Art Wirtz:** Well, the camps were fairly close together.

[00:17:55] **James Wall:** So, it seems like wherever you go, it's like trial by fire. You get thrown right into the mix. And even with the PIO aspect of that.

[00:18:02] **Art Wirtz:** I'll tell you the one funny part was I was doing that and at the end of the program I would bring it up and say, "Okay, do you have any questions?" So, a lot of these campers were, the campers probably were averaging from about ten to about fourteen. Most of the camps were that they had in there. And so, they'd ask questions and I'd answer ones on there. And one day we got in there and they started saying, "Are there any snakes around here?" And so rather than playing it down, I went ahead and started answering questions about snakes and what they've got. And a lot of times they're seeking out some places warm for themselves to go or underground or whatever else like that. Well, what happened was that it scared a few of them, and they started talking to the counselors. So, the counselor said, "We love your program, but don't talk about snakes anymore. A couple of our little kids didn't like that," so I kind of cut that part out.

[00:18:56] **James Wall:** Well live and learn, I suppose.

[00:18:58] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, yes.

[00:19:00] **James Wall:** And the contract side of that, that must've been sort of a new—

[00:19:05] **Art Wirtz:** It was thinning Ponderosa pine, and so essentially, they had a lot of ongoing contracts, so you had to have an inspector. So, I would go out and do the inspections on there and get those things, do the write-ups of the inspections, and then turn it into the timber staff on the district.

[00:19:21] **James Wall:** So, you were wearing a lot of hats in these early years. Going from different aspects of the outfit and things like that. And that was one year that you were doing that particular job, PIO, and contract administrator and then back to New Mexico?

[00:19:42] **Art Wirtz:** Well, before we leave that one, I'll tell you on there too, when I was the PIO and the contract administrator, I got to talking to the district ranger on that district at that time. His name is Lee Pogue [phonetic] [00:19:54], and we talked quite a bit and went through, and he said, "What would you like to do and what's your plans and everything else like that?" And I got to be a really good friend with Lee, and he started giving me some advice for career advice and everything else like that. And what happened was in the region, they came up with some—I think it was five positions of entry level forestry positions within Region Three—Arizona and New Mexico—and they had those five positions. And so, it was competing for people that had forestry degrees that were in technical series—I was in a technical series—and they came up with one on the Gila National Forest, and Lee said, "You've got to come in here."

We sat down and Lee talked to me for a long time. He says, "This is ideal for you. This is what you need to do. He says, it's going to be really remote. It's one of the more remote ranger stations, but he says, you'll do well there. You got my support." And he went on and on about that and gave me some pointers as far as when I did the interview. And I got one of those five positions at the Beaverhead Ranger District [New Mexico], which at that time was the most remote ranger station in the US Forest Service. That was manned year-round. There were quite a few other ones that were more remote, but they weren't manned year-round. And so we were, I think it's eighty-three miles from town on a really poor road that you had to cross active streams eleven times just to get into town—drive through eleven active streams.

[00:21:39] **James Wall:** So, I guess it wasn't the typical in and out district because you were in. You were never out. You were there the whole time.

[00:21:46] **Art Wirtz:** We were there all the time.

[00:21:50] **James Wall:** And then what type of recreation did it get?

[00:21:51] **Art Wirtz:** Well, it wasn't real heavy recreation. A lot of hunting and some camping. There was one little lake not too far from the district office, but the rest was more hunting and more dispersed type recreation. But it was a heavy timber. We were doing a lot of logging. I had timber and fire, and so our fire crews were really active. There's lots of fire on the Gila National Forest, particularly when the lightning comes through. So, I was involved

with that quite a bit. And that's one of the things they liked is I had a timber background and I had fire background. And so, they went through there.

And one thing that was really good about the Gila National Forest, because it was a real fire forest, is they went all out. I went to more fire training than you could ever imagine. It just seemed like I was getting it all the time, and it was so valuable to me in that I thought, "Oh, I understand fire." No. I started understanding more about not only fire suppression and prevention and that type of deal, but also dealing with major catastrophic type fires and teams that are assigned to that to manage those fires. And so, I ended up doing some teams—getting on some teams at that time, and it was really—when I left that forest, I had a really good fire background.

[00:23:19] **James Wall:** So, you were on Type 1, Type 2 incident teams?

[00:23:20] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, yes. Both Type 1 and Type 2.

[00:23:26] **James Wall:** Yes, that part of New Mexico gets very dry.

[00:23:31] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, yes.

[00:23:32] **James Wall:** And hot.

[00:23:33] **Art Wirtz:** If you look at the maps of where lightning is in the United States, you get a lot of lightning in Florida and a couple other little places. But when you looked at New Mexico over the Gila, it shows always a lot of marks that there's a lot of lightning storms there.

[00:23:49] **James Wall:** I think I interviewed somebody that was on the Gila, Carl Pence. Was he around there? I think he was his deputy supervisor or something on the Gila.

[00:23:58] **Art Wirtz:** I don't recognize that one.

[00:24:00] **James Wall:** Who else was on the Gila? A lot of people have made their way through the Gila, but I can't remember. So trial by fire again, I guess you would say. They keep throwing you into these situations where you

challenge yourself and then you get better, and that's really the best way to get better.

[00:24:16] **Art Wirtz:** I also got onto that on that district—the district Granger was John Holt—and John Holt got to be another mentor for me in that he was talking about different things. He says, "Don't you plan to be here for lots of years. You'll be here three, four years, and then you need to move on and go on to some other ones." And he was really good about that.

One thing that came up in there, I was doing a lot of sale administration and there was a lot of logging companies that were working there, so I was dealing with those. And one of them, I went out and they were not maintaining spark arresters on their equipment during the highest part of the fire season. So, I went to shut them down, and the guy that ran the company—I never forget—his last name was Muzzy. He came up when I was in my truck and came up and he was going to punch my lights out, and it was just touch and go for a while. I had one of my employees was sitting beside me in the truck and later on he says, "I thought he was going to punch you out right there."

So essentially what reason I bring that up is because it was something that, "Okay, was I doing everything right?" Yes. I was administering the contract, and it was to the point where he had been given different chances to do the right thing and he didn't. And so, we shut it down that way, and we ended up, the forest was very supportive on there, and they went through everything and they got it tied in with law enforcement, and he was taken to court and found guilty of threatening a federal officer. Yes. And with that, they talked about it made a big difference to a lot of the other contractors on the forest saying, "Oh my gosh, make sure we don't do that."

[00:26:12] **Art Wirtz:** Did he do any time on that?

[00:26:14] **Art Wirtz:** No. No. He was, I think it was six months of probation type thing. And yes, he was 65 years old.

[00:26:27] **James Wall:** Tough to get those folks to change their minds at that point. That might be the first story I've heard like that. I mean, I've heard of people getting ornery and vague threats or not storming at somebody like

that. That's pretty unique. But everybody else fell in line after that, I guess. And your boss had your back.

[00:26:59] **Art Wirtz:** But it also, overall, it gives you a little bit more—I wouldn't know if I say background—it gives it a little bit more perspective as far as in dealing with businesses and contractors and that type of thing on the national forest on there. It just made me, I would double think on different things, making sure that they were treated fairly and make sure that if we were imposing any regulations, they were the correct ones—that we weren't getting overly aggressive on any of those type of things.

[00:27:35] **James Wall:** So, outside of that you'd say, how would you characterize the relationship with timber companies throughout your career? Are they amicable?

[00:27:43] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, absolutely. Yes.

[00:27:47] **James Wall:** Now, did you grow to enjoy the remote nature of the Beaverhead District?

[00:27:55] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, yes. And here's the unique part. That's when my first child was born when we were out there. And something that I found out later on, and my wife was surprised when I did it, that when she was like nine months pregnant, they had a newspaper out of Albuquerque that came down because we had one of the last cattle drives in New Mexico driving to the railhead. And so, they came out to take pictures and things of that. So, they got to the ranger station, and it was kind of like, "You guys live here?" "Yes." "Do you have electricity?" "Well, we have generators." "Do you have telephones?" "Well, radio telephones only," and went through the whole deal. And they're looking around there and all of a sudden, they see my wife, who is nine months pregnant, and they go, "You have a wife out here who's nine months pregnant?" They wanted to interview her.

So, they interviewed her, and they had a big picture of her sitting there looking very pregnant in the Albuquerque Journal. And when we went to Albuquerque at different times, we would get stopped and they said, "Haven't we seen you somewhere before?" I'd say, "Oh, yes, it's probably in the newspaper." But yes, that was one of the things that we had on there is being out there in the remote and going through that.

And what I found out was that the forest and their support was—the forest supervisor when he found out that she was pregnant—we had two helicopters at that time on the forest. And the directive was that if they got called that she had to go to the hospital, even if those helicopters were on a fire, they would be pulled and used to transport her to probably El Paso or Silver City, either one. They're both fairly close. And we didn't know that. We also found out that they'd contact the New Mexico State Police, and as soon as it was identified that they were going to send an officer in from the Magdalena side, from the north side on a gravel road, and also one coming in from Truth or Consequences on the semi-paved road on there. And if we were going to drive her out, they were there to meet and transport her into the car and take her to the hospital. And that was all directed by the forest to make sure that she was taken care of.

[00:30:26] **James Wall:** And you had found out about that later?

[00:30:28] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, I found out about that later that they had said, yes, I talked to the ones in fire, and they said, "Did you know that the fire helicopters had a number one priority above what they were doing?" I go, "No." So, they told us about that.

[00:30:44] **James Wall:** Did y'all ever get a copy of that photo of her that the journal took?

[00:30:47] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, we have it somewhere.

[00:30:50] **James Wall:** That'd be interesting to see. What is your wife's name?

[00:30:53] **Art Wirtz:** Kathy, with a K.

[00:30:55] **James Wall:** We have this podcast that we do, I don't know if you know about the Wives of the Forest Service. We've interviewed a few. No,

[00:31:02] **Art Wirtz:** No, I don't think she knows about that.

[00:31:03] **James Wall:** And it's called “What Did We Get Ourselves Into?” And that was the name of a book that somebody wrote a while back. Did she know what she was getting herself into when she married you?

[00:31:12] **Art Wirtz:** No. And also, particularly there at Beaverhead, she got into things that you were surprised because I had a radio in my double wide trailer at that ranger station on there, and so I had the radio at the house there. And at different times when everybody was out fighting fire and things like that, there'd be calls that came in and a couple times, she's not an employee, but she had to take calls and get it to the right person on there. And we had district clerk that got sick and wasn't available on there. So, she went over and worked as a district clerk there for a while. And it was just kind of a, "You're the only one available."

[00:31:55] **James Wall:** Next man up or next woman up. I always said somebody could get a PhD by calculating the amount of money that the Forest Service saved in labor costs if you calculated the amount of hours that the wives actually did work as a clerk or as a dispatch in those moments over the scope of the agency, it'd be remarkable. They were really unpaid employees, but all was well, and the kid was delivered. And that's interesting though that they did that.

[00:32:30] **Art Wirtz:** And that child that was delivered is now a doctor. She just got her doctorate.

[00:32:35] **James Wall:** Bless her heart. I know how that can be. So then after that, well, before we wrap up the Gila, are there any other sort of stories from the Gila that we didn't hit?

[00:32:55] **Art Wirtz:** No.

[00:32:57] **James Wall:** Then it's back to Cloudcroft where it all began after that?

[00:33:02] **Art Wirtz:** No.

[00:33:03] **James Wall:** Oh, sorry. I said…

[00:33:04] **Art Wirtz:** No, I went—was a district timber staff on the Kaibab in Williams [Arizona].

[00:33:11] **James Wall:** And when was that?

[00:33:15] **Art Wirtz:** That was 1978. Yes.

[00:33:20] **James Wall:** And where is that particular forest? I'm not familiar.

[00:33:24] **Art Wirtz:** It's just west of Flagstaff on the main I-40.

[00:33:31] **James Wall:** So, going high up in elevation.

[00:33:33] **Art Wirtz:** Yes.

[00:33:37] **James Wall:** And how was that job?

[00:33:38] **Art Wirtz:** It was a good job. It was one, I did an awful lot of writing environmental documents on there, and since I got into the agency—I got into the agency in 1971 the first time—and that's right after NEPA had been signed off on. So, we were getting all kinds of documentation of how to implement NEPA and how to make sure we had different things on there. So, it seemed like every place I went, even when I was fire crew foreman, I was getting some more input as far as environmental documents. And so, we were getting a lot of timber up there. And so, I did a lot of writing EA's [Environmental Assessment] for timber sale harvest.

[00:34:21] **James Wall:** You're having to deal with wildlife and you're having to deal with making sure that these things are protected and the archaeological sites.

[00:34:28] **Art Wirtz:** A little bit of everything on there.

[00:34:31] **James Wall:** From an archaeological standpoint, the Arizona and New Mexico corridor, that's just packed with prehistoric sites and things like that.

[00:34:39] **Art Wirtz:** Absolutely.

[00:34:41] **James Wall:** Scott Wood was saying that when they first came up with that law or the executive order to inventory all the historic sites, they had no idea. The Forest Service had no idea just how much of it was going to be prehistoric in those things. And yet then all that work is there. Was there historic sites that you had to then identify and protect on that district?

[00:35:06] **Art Wirtz:** There were prehistoric sites identified, but also isolated finds. And essentially what those are is when we'd have some of our timber

markers were out laying it out, they would find something that was very unique, and I had told them, I said, "Okay, if you do mark it down on your map, you've got the map, you've got market down, describe what it is and then we'll take care of it." Essentially, it was isolated finds from, it's not actually a site, but it's things that came up.

There was one that I remember that I just thought was so neat. It was an igneous rock that had been chipped into the shape of a bear, and they found it on one of the timber sales on there. And I said, "No, it's not the shape of a bear." He said, "Yes, you got to go see it." So, they went out and got it and they took it, and we got the archaeologist out there and he went out and gathered it up, and it was really, somebody had taken a lot of time to make it that way, and it was the tribes that were in those areas. They said either it was a tribe in the area, or it was an item that was traded between another tribe because they liked to make things unique, and then they could trade it with another tribe for something that they wanted.

[00:36:24] **James Wall:** And those trade routes are pretty well developed.

[00:36:26] **Art Wirtz:** Oh yes. Absolutely.

[00:36:28] **James Wall:** At the Cahokia [Collinsville, IL], that big historic site in near St. Louis, they know that those sites were trading as far south as where the Aztecs were because they would find maize and corn that could only have come from there. And so that's just so interesting to find.

[00:36:47] **Art Wirtz:** We also had our timber markers and all the people that were working in the woods, they went and became para-archeologists so they could identify when they found isolated finds or whatever. But also, in part of that, they went over to part of the things where volcanic activity had been more recent, which is thousands of years ago, but still it's more recent and there was a lot of obsidian. And we got to look around there and our archeologists was saying, "This is not just look at these things. Aren't these unusual?" And you could see where the indigenous tribes had been in there actually working the obsidian, making arrowheads. Obsidian is so sharp of an edge that there's even some surgical instruments that we use today that have obsidian as an edge. And so, we were sitting there making arrowheads. We were lousy at it, but also, we got to see how it was done. And then the archeologists would gather up all of our chips and say,

"We don't want to contaminate the site." And they would take those off, but we would find a lot of them. It was very interesting.

[00:37:52] **James Wall:** So, there was a lot to sort of work around and also New Mexico, Arizona, these places have significant nearby native tribes and things like that. What was the relationship like with, what was the tribe in the area? Did you have one?

[00:38:13] **Art Wirtz:** You have Havasupais, but you had the, God, I don't even remember which one.

[00:38:22] **James Wall:** The Zuni?

[00:38:24] **Art Wirtz:** The Zuni are farther to the east of there. And then you go south of there and you get down to the—the Yavapais come up there. So, there's Yavapai that a lot of these isolated finds were they attributed to tie in with the Yavapais. That's right around Prescott where a lot of the Yavapais are.

[00:38:42] **James Wall:** And what about the wildlife on that district?

[00:38:47] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, it was interesting. You go out and all of a sudden, you're finding elk antlers and you're finding all kinds of different indications up there of different animals. And it was—what's funny is sometimes you have to step off the side because a lot of deer coming through an area, and they weren't paying attention. They were just shooting through an area.

[00:39:12] **James Wall:** So, it sounds like an interesting place to be writing EAs and things like that.

[00:39:19] **Art Wirtz:** It was. It really was because a lot of went into it. In fact, when I wrote an environmental document for timber sale, my part that I wrote for the whole thing was about eighty-three pages. The wildlife part typically on there was usually about one hundred and five, one hundred and ten pages—in addition to what I'd already written. That was just the wildlife portion that comes in there. So, it was pretty significant.

[00:39:44] **James Wall:** So how long would it take you to produce an EA at that time?

[00:39:49] **Art Wirtz:** Usually a couple months. That's after I got all the documentation in from the specialist and things like that, and I started putting it together.

[00:40:02] **James Wall:** So that must've been a big learning experience. So, you're starting to build back then, of course, if you were eventually going to end up as a ranger, they wanted you to do all manner of things, and it seems like you were hitting a lot of different zones.

[00:40:17] **Art Wirtz:** The ranger I had there was Pete Kahan [phonetic] [00:40:19], and he was very good. He originally came from Region Nine, and yes, we had talked about a lot of different things on there. And he said, "Yes, you need to get involved with a lot of different things. What are some of the things—" I said, "Well, I have interest in recreation too." He says, "Well, we have a small ski area. Would you be interested in getting involved with that?" And I said, "What do you want?" So, he went through there and he said, "Okay, we need a few snow rangers. Can you ski?" "I said, no." He said, "Would you like to learn how?" I said, "Yes." So, I learned how to ski, got up to the minimum level that they needed on there, which is intermediate, is what they would do on there. And so, I got certified as a snow ranger on there, went over to Snowbowl, got checked out there too. And so, I did a lot of snow rangering there at Williams Ski Area.

[00:41:14] **James Wall:** Just hitting all the different boxes. How long were you on Williams?

[00:41:25] **Art Wirtz:** I was on Williams from 1978, two years and eight months, I think.

[00:41:42] **James Wall:** And so, at that point, were you sort of intentionally having the district ranger job in your sites?

[00:41:51] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, absolutely. yes.

[00:41:52] **James Wall:** You knew that's what you wanted.

[00:41:54] **Art Wirtz:** And when I'd bring it up, being a staff officer when I'm getting my performance rating and everything else, talking with the ranger, and I would bring it up and say, "Yes, that's my logical thing on there." And as soon as I would say that, then they would start going into, "Well, here's

something. We need to get you involved in this and we need to get you involved with that," which was really good for overall experience and everything.

[00:42:22] **James Wall:** And so, was it from there that you went to the Cloudcroft?

[00:42:24] **Art Wirtz:** Went back to the district I started on.

[00:42:26] **James Wall:** I feel like that never or hardly ever happens. Usually if you start out somewhere, that's probably a good indication that you're going to go other places and move around. Now, who brought you back to the Cloudcroft? Do you remember who gave you the call on that one?

[00:42:43] **Art Wirtz:** That was one that just came up. It was a recreation and fire job. The fire job I had, and I had some recreation, not a lot compared to different ones on there, but the forestry degree, I did an awful lot of stuff related to recreation on there. And so, when I got that one, they said, "Okay, this is great. We don't have a fire staff right now. So, you're the fire staff also." So that's what I did when I got to Cloudcroft and the good part, I didn't have to learn the district again. I already knew the district. I'd been there before.

[00:43:18] **James Wall:** Were there still people that had been there when you were there that said, welcome back, good to see you again.

[00:43:25] **Art Wirtz:** Yes. Some of the people in fire were the same ones that were there when I'd been there before and they were glad to have me come back, which was kind of welcome home type of thing.

[00:43:39] **James Wall:** So, you started out as a tech and then you came back as kind of a higher up. Interesting. So, Recreation, Lands and Fire, right? Is that your title there?

[00:43:50] **Art Wirtz:** Yes.

[00:43:51] **James Wall:** That's a lot.

[00:43:51] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, it is. That district has a lot of stuff going on, heavy recreation. Also, the opportunity to increase a lot of the developed recreation on there. There was a lot of campgrounds at the high elevation.

It was about almost 9,000 feet, and so there were a lot of recreation there. We had a ski area within two miles of the office, and so we didn't have anybody that was really interested being a snow ranger. So, at different times I would just go, "Okay, I am caught up on this and that." I'd grab the government skis and I'd go out and ski the slopes, write up an inspection and come back in. And so, I was doing snow rangering at that time just to make sure that it got done.

[00:44:37] **James Wall:** So, you're a jack of all trades really at that point.

[00:44:42] **Art Wirtz:** Another thing that was interesting at Cloudcroft is Cloudcroft gets dirt bikes, a lot of the ones that go out and they ride them on the trails and this type of deal. Well, from West Texas, that's where they want to come. They want to come to the High Mountains. They don't want to ride all the time in Texas where it's flat so they would come. So, we would have a lot of small events. We'd also have one national Enduro every year. And so, every year at that, I would spend probably maybe two to three weeks on a motorcycle checking out the routes that they had planned and saying, "Yes, you can do this. No, you can't do that. Reroute it, do this, do that, whatever." And then when the event was on, I was out there on the motorcycle. Then after it was over, I had to ride the whole thing and document what was—they had to come back in and maybe do some repair on a trail or something like that. So, I did an awful lot of time on a motorcycle.

[00:45:43] **James Wall:** That's pretty fun.

[00:45:44] **Art Wirtz:** What's funny is when I went to get my motorcycle license, I go down to Alamogordo [New Mexico] there and go through and they said, "Okay, well we'll have to have you ride." I said, "I don't own a motorcycle." "You don't have one? You don't have one available." I said, "I only ride government motorcycles." So, we talked for a long time and the guy said, "Have you ridden them before?" I said, "Oh, yes, yes, for years on there, but I don't own one on there." So, they signed off. They said, "You got it." So, I got my driver's license on there.

[00:46:15] **James Wall:** Wow, that's a lot you can point to. And that was a going to be one of your longer jobs it seems like.

[00:46:23] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, I was there nine years. But also, the rangers that I had there were also very supportive. I had two different rangers during that time, and both were very supportive on there. And so, in that nine years, I think I was there three and a half years, and I started putting in for ranger jobs, and there was a lot of ones that—to be quite as honest, there was a lot of them that they were—some of them, they wanted people with range experience. It was primarily a range district. Well, I didn't have range experience on there, but also, they were also looking for more diversity as far as the rangers on there.

So, one thing that I really wanted to share is that the very first year I worked in 1971, I was thinking back, and I said, "The only place where you saw women in the Forest Service were receptionists, district clerks, and in personnel." That's all you saw. And by the time I came back to Cloudcroft and when it got later into the late 1980s, there were a whole lot more involved. And even in supervisory and for supervisor positions and everything else, it was a really big change. And it was a good change for the future. It was kind of like an eighteen years that was a major change.

[00:47:50] **James Wall:** And you were there for multiple changes, women going up in the outfit, but also the ologists are coming in in the early 1970s, right when you are, and it takes a couple of years for some of the old timers to warm up to them, and some of them never did.

[00:48:08] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, yes.

[00:48:10] **James Wall:** How did that play out? Obviously, you can't speak for everybody, but from your bird's eye view, the relationships between ologists and the district rangers and the staff officers, did it run the gamut of sometimes warm, sometimes not as much, or was there a progression over the years?

[00:48:31] **Art Wirtz:** Well, I'll give you an example. There's different times when I was at Cloudcroft on there and that you're talking about with pretty much an archaeologist type of thing on there, and they're talking about it and they're going through there and they're saying, "Well, you're going to have to check in with us." And I said, "I work for the ranger. The ranger works for the forest supervisor. We don't work for the supervisor's office. That's his staff." And they say, "No, that's not right." I said, "You don't understand it. Yes, it is. There's a chain of command there. And the district

ranger works for the forest supervisor." And some of ologists didn't understand that and it took some real explaining to get them to understand that you are, the ologist in the supervisor's office was yes, you're providing technical expertise and things for the forest supervisor, but the districts aren't working for you. They're working for the forest supervisor. And once some of them really got it, and it was great, but it wasn't just women, it was men and women. Both of them had that problem at different times on there.

[00:49:46] **James Wall:** Well, I remember when I interviewed a bunch of hydrologists that it was always just kind of took some time to tease out what exactly what you were saying. And it wasn't very apparent to a lot of people, whether it was just a lack of education on it of who did you go to talk to? If you were a hydrologist and you had a problem, did you talk to this supervisor? Did you talk to your boss? It was just kind of a little bit muddled old, but that makes sense. And sort of women coming into the outfit, how were they greeted?

[00:50:23] **Art Wirtz:** Well, one of them that was interesting was when they started showing up on fire crews. And I know there's a couple ones who had fire crews, a twenty-person crew, and they'd have two women on there. And there were guys on there that had been on crews for years and didn't like it at all. But it only took about two years, three years at tops that all of a sudden, they were integrated in. And I think it went pretty well because they were showing that they could do the job too, and that's what they were hired to do. And it didn't matter their gender, it was just that's what they were hired to do, and they were going to do it. So, I was really pleased. I saw it on the Prescott and I saw it on the Gila, both of them, where they got integrated very well into there.

[00:51:13] **James Wall:** It seems like there was a learning process, but it started to pick up steam with the seventies went on. And so, what finally got you to the Mark Twain [National Forest], that was your first District Ranger post, right?

[00:51:32] **Art Wirtz:** Yes. And during that time, that nine years that I was there, I put in for a lot of ranger jobs and I got really close, and I was always in the final ones on there. And so, it came down to it. And since I grew up in the Midwest, I'd put in for ones in Region Nine and put in for those. And I was competing really well in those different ones, but okay, I hadn't got some

of those on there. And so, it happened to be that we had a 'show-me' trip down around Cloudcroft where they had the regional forester was down and a couple people at the Washington office were down.

And essentially, we were doing tours and showing them, and at Cloudcroft, I was showing them—we had a solar, one of the largest solar telescopes in the world and also a stellar telescope. And so, we were showing what we had there and the things that we were doing and related to it. And it happened to be that during a break—we were off to the side—the regional forester comes over and he started talking. I had known him, and we talked for a while, and I shared with him, I said, “Yes, I'm putting in for ranger jobs," but I said, "I haven't got one yet. I'm working on it." He says, "Okay, why don't we talk sometime? Why don't you come to Albuquerque and talk?" And I said, "When?" He says, "You call me." So, I called him one day and he says, "How are you tomorrow?" So, I drove up there and talked to him and we spent a couple hours talking and he says, "Okay. What have you got?" And I told him, I said, "Well, I've got one in Indiana that I put in for, and I got one I put in for on the Mark Twain." He says, "Okay, glad you came up."

And next thing you know, I was notified that I got the one on the Mark Twain. And when I arrived at the Mark Twain, got there and the four supervisors talking about that, they says, "Boy, your regional forester was really impressed and really made a case that you need to be a district ranger here on a tough forest like the Mark Twain." So, he was a mentor when I needed it. It wasn't all the time, but when I needed it, he was there, and it went really well.

And what was unique about it too was that the Mark Twain was in the middle of a deal. It was a pilot program put on by the chief that said, "Okay, Mark Twain, we're going to designate you as a pilot forest. We want you to try things to be more efficient, identify things that are difficult, identify things that don't work well, identify these—then come up with possible solutions, try them out. And if they don't work, you just do away with them. If they do work, we'd like to have you document how they work and everything else."

And one of them was the forest supervisor had set up the place that I went to on the Eleven Point District on there, he said, "Okay, we are going to have the staff of that district make the selection of the ranger." And so,

they put it together. And so there was five of the staff on the district that went through all of the applications and everything else, and went through there. And what's nice to hear is that—they shared with me later on—mine came out nice and high, the highest of all of them. And the forest supervisor said, "Yes, okay, that's the one. I've also got, I've heard from the regional forester that that's what we need to do." So that's how I came to the Mark Twain.

And when I got to the Mark Twain, one of my staff officers wildlife staff was a woman. One of my bosses, the deputy forest supervisor was a woman. And so, it changed a lot in just that time.

[00:55:15] **James Wall:** You must've been familiar with Larry Payne at that point. Was he on Region Nine? And he had told me about this program, I guess you will, that they kind of said blank check, like throw spaghetti against the wall and see what sticks.

[00:55:33] **Art Wirtz:** That came up. That's the term that was used on there. And they said, "If you can dream it and you can put it on paper, go ahead and do it." And I'll give you the example of one of the best things that we had on there. We were dealing with on that district—I had three small towns, nothing bigger than 1200 people on there. And the economy, these are—it's not big industry or anything else, it's pretty low income and whatever else in there. So, the little businesses that we dealt with, hardware stores and little grocery stores and things like that, they were on a real shoestring budget. So, if we purchased things down there, a lot of times you'd wait until the end of the month and they'd give us a bill, then we'd submit it in, and they may get paid in the next month.

So that's two months of them not getting paid right away. So that's one of the things we identified. And we said, "If we could write a check—like a regular checkbook and we could do it—it would be great for these little communities on here." And it was the ideal. So that's how the thing came up, where could write checks is they came out. And when we started doing that, we'd go down to a hardware store, and we would have four or five hundred dollars' worth of things that we had to pick up in there. And then our clerk would come down later in the day and write them a check and pay for it. And they just go, "Oh my gosh, we've never had anything like that before. And they say, "You're our best customer. We get paid better from you." And it was definitely a big success story.

[00:57:08] **James Wall:** Who was the supervisor when you were on the Twain when you started out.

[00:57:12] **Art Wirtz:** Eric Morris.

[00:57:14] **James Wall:** Morris. I think that was one of the questions I asked Larry Payne was of all the—

[00:57:21] **Art Wirtz:** He was the Deputy Regional Forester.

[00:57:23] **James Wall:** —of all the people that could have been chief that didn't become chief, who'd you think was kind of one of the best. And he said Eric was—they were trying like hell to promote him because they thought he was just such a great supervisor.

[00:57:35] **Art Wirtz:** He was.

[00:57:35] **James Wall:** But he didn't want to go. And they were trying like hell to get him out of there to move him up. And he was like, eh. What was it about Eric that you thought so highly of or that people thought so highly of?

[00:57:48] **Art Wirtz:** Eric was very good at understanding—delegating. He also understood how—he had been a ranger and he understood what rangers needed to be effective—and that the SO [Supervisor's Office] shouldn't be in the way and of a lot different things so they can do their job on there. And so when I first got there, I was a new ranger on there, and I had a couple of issues that were coming up and I was talking to him about it and I said, "Yes, we've got this coming up here, identified this and so I think we got some ideas to go through there," and it was kind of laid out. And he comes across and he says, "Well, what do you want me to do?" And I said, "Well, I was just kind of bouncing it off you." And he said, "Do you feel like you have the authority to make the decision on this?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you have the information that you need?" I said, "Yes." And he says, "Do you think you should move ahead?" I said, "Yes." "What the hell are you calling me for? You've been delegated that. You're the ranger. Do it."

Now, there was a guy that was writing a book talking about innovative approaches and he came out and he had heard about this test program

that we had on the Mark Twain, and he got to talking to Eric on there and Eric gave him some things on there and he said, "You need to talk to Art." So, he said, “Okay.” So, he came down to the district and he says, "I need to talk to you. Eric said that." "Okay." So, I told him what I just told you, "What the hell are you calling me for?" And he's writing down some things. He says, "Can I put that quote in my book?" I said, "Yes." He says, "I want to show what real delegation is. It's not artificial and it's not superficial. It's definitely, it's delegated the authority to do your job." And he says, "This fits in and I want to put it in there." And he put it in the book. So, I've got the book at home, I'm looking around trying to find it. I couldn't find it. I got it stuck away somewhere.

[00:59:51] **James Wall:** That seems to be a true line. People talked about a guy named Sonny O'Neal, who was the supervisor on the Wenatchee [Washington] for a long time, southern guy. When I asked what did he do that was so well, same type of answer—that he would let you do your job. He wasn't threatened by his district rangers, didn't have a problem with them doing their own thing. Did you take that lesson into when you became a staff officer and other places, that question line that he employed, would you throw that, employ that with your employees?

[01:00:30] **Art Wirtz:** Yes.

[01:00:31] **James Wall:** Do you have the information that you need and all that?

[01:00:34] **Art Wirtz:** Yes. Well, I'll tell you, I used it almost directly later in my career, right at the last couple of years on there, I was detailed to the Coconino [Arizona] in Flagstaff and I was the Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor. And so, I was doing a lot of different things on there and I had some things that we were dealing with district Rangers on there, and I used exactly the same thing. Do you feel like you have the information? Do you have the authority? Do you have this, that you can do it? Well then do it. And I look back and I go, well, I guess it kind carried through on that type of thing on there.

[01:01:09] **James Wall:** Yes, continued on in his legacy. Is Eric still with us?

[01:01:13] **Art Wirtz:** I don't know. He was very unique.

[01:01:18] **James Wall:** That's what I've heard. Yes. You went to the Superior.

[01:01:26] **Art Wirtz:** Let me do thing on the Mark Twain. And this is one that I'm going to share this with you because it's unique and even the Washington office has used this as a very unique approach on different things. When I was on the Mark Twain, one of the things that we had was they were going to do some drilling for lead. Now some of the biggest lead mines in the United States are around St. Louis [Missouri]. And so, I went up there and went through the lead mines underground, about 2000 feet underground, looking at where they were mining for lead. Well, they were looking for other areas and there were some on my district. And so, they started doing that and they were looking and exploring, and they were talking about doing some drilling down to see if they had significant lead deposits and that type of deal.

Well, when we were doing the environmental documentation, we were letting people know about it, particularly these little communities. And there was a big uprising because they were scared to death that they're going to churn up lead and it's going to contaminate all of their wells and everything else in the area. These weren't high economic areas, and it is significant, and these were wonderful people, but they were just scared to death on there. And so, we were getting a lot of flak from that and from different people. And even the Park Service was giving us a bad time about the thing.

But we were hearing about it, and we had some public meetings, and I took a lot of flak on it explaining what we were going to do and how we're going to do it. But my impression was even though we had one public meeting in the little town of Winona [Missouri], and it was at the high school, so there was a lot in the gym, so there was a lot of people there and they were talking about it, and they were really concerned. And I was going, “Okay, I think they have one mindset of what this is going to be. We're just going to dig down and there's going to be all kinds of stuff in their groundwater, but that's not what it is. This thing has a lot of restrictions and a lot of things that they have to do to even drill, just to check to see if there's on there.”

So, the message wasn't getting out through these public meetings on there. So, I was very frustrated as how I'm going to get this across to these people in here. My wife is a schoolteacher. She's taught all the way from kindergarten through college. So, I thought, “Okay, she's an educator.”

And I said, "Okay, I've got to explain aquifers and how they work—it's very complicated and very, very unique. People just don't really understand it." I said, "Do you have any ideas how I can get this across to people on there?" And she said, "Yes. What you need to do is get it across and make something very simple and very visual so that they will absorb it and they will also, in their mind, the visual will lock it in that they know what it is."

So, I got to thinking and I go, “Okay, I got to explain how aquifers work.” So, in that area, there's karst topography, which is essentially a limestone that acid water over the years has made, and it is kind of lots of little holes and lots of little things in, it's kind of like a big sponge. And I go sponge, okay. So, what I did is I said, okay, let me explain that because people understand how a sponge works, maybe this would work.

So, what I did is I started going to different places to explain this to different ones. In one town—in all these little towns, I looked for movers and shakers, and I use that term because it's ones that aren't necessarily like the mayor or something, but they're ones that people listen to and they're also very reasonable. So, in one town, I had a guy that he was on the county board of supervisors. He also owned a small Chevrolet garage on there. So, at different times I would go in the Chevy garage and just sit down and talk to him and share things.

The next town was a little town and to get the information out, they had a barber, one barber in that town and he used to be on the city council, very knowledgeable, very intelligent guy. And so, I would get my hair cut more than normal, and he knew what I was doing. I was sharing ideas with him to get this across. And in the third little town, I'd go to their county commissioner meetings, and they would break at lunch. I'd get there just before lunch, and we'd go to the restaurant and there was a restaurant in town where everybody came and so I could answer questions and things like that.

And so, at some of these little get-togethers, I came up and what I'll do, I'll show you. I wanted to show them what I was doing. And so essentially, I said, "Okay, this is the surface of the ground. This is where you live. You're on top of this. Below that, you have some of this porous area. It is just different material below the surface on there, so you have another layer. The next one is more like a sponge. It's very porous, it has a lot of water in it. And when you drill down your wells, this white one here is where the

water is that you're drilling and you're getting your water out of it. It's in this aquifer right here.

And then below that aquifer, there's another one below that, and some of the water interchanges back and forth between these two aquifers on there. So, some of it's in there may get up into the one where you draw your well water. But then the next thing, as you can see, this is like solid rock right here. It's called aquiclude, and it's a deal that's between the aquifers, no water's going down from there, not at all. It is just a block on there.

The next one you've got; you have some more of the different layers going down through there where water moves through it. More sponges. It goes all the way down to some of the really low part in here. And essentially what we're looking at is clear at the bottom of this last one is where there are deposits of lead that they need to drill down through. So essentially, they're going to drill down through all these layers, and every time they go through a layer, they make sure that it is sealed. This whole thing has a casing around it, so you're not going to be transferring water between one aqua to another and they're going to drill clear down here you're getting your well water at probably two hundred feet. They're going down 2200 feet down to see where the lead is clear at the bottom on there.

And what they're going to do to get lead out at 2200 feet, there has to be a significant amount of lead. They're going to be looking out there, and if they don't get significant amount, it's too expensive for them. They'll come up, they will seal everything up all the way through, and then they will leave. And even to make sure when they drill on the top, they're going to be drilling on the top. All their drilling rigs will have material around it so that you can't, their water and the dirt that comes up from it does not go out and doesn't get down into there. And so that's essentially what it is we've got in here and this is how the aquifers work down below there, and this is how they're going to drill that.

Well, after I did that and used that, within the next couple weeks, the Washington office was talking to Eric Morris and saying, "What's going on?" He says, "We're not getting the same complaints and all kinds of things coming through. Has something been done different?" And so, Eric said, "Would you come in and tell me what's going on?" And I went in and talked to Eric, the Forest Supervisor. I took the sponges. I explained to

Eric how we did this so that we could get it, keep it simple and keep it visual. Went through that. And I said, there are people that understand that. I said, "Some of these people maybe only have an eighth-grade education, but he says they're still very intelligent people. And once you put it out to them that they know how to go from there." And Eric said, "Okay, can you bring the sponges into the supervisor's office tomorrow?" I go, "Yes. Why?" He says, "I'm going into the Washington Office. I'm going to take the sponges to the chief to show them what was helping for people to understand it."

And after all of this, it worked great, and we eventually did some drilling and there wasn't enough lead to justify it. But one of the things, I went to that one community later on that we went to the restaurant, and I was in there with the county commissioners, and I could hear at the next table, one of the guys talking to another one and he's explaining aquifers and how they work to another guy. And he was doing an excellent job. And he was talking about how he says, "You know how sponges hold water?" And he was explaining how this goes and how this worked and what they were drilling and what they didn't find and everything else. And that was the best part of it is in that small little town, that guy now was the expert and people were going through there. And all it took was something that was very simple and very visual.

[01:11:04] **James Wall:** And a talented wife and educator to steer you to that path.

[01:11:10] **Art Wirtz:** And also, I can jump ahead a little bit though. The last few years that I was working, we would have—the Washington office was tied in with the State Department and there were countries all over the world that would tie in with the State Department and they would send people over to understand how we manage national forests in a forested environment, in the desert environment, in places where we have dams and all this type of deal. So, they would come around, they would do a tour.

Well, the first time they did a tour was, I don't know, probably like 2003 or something like that, that they came out. And I did one of these little talks with it, and I talked about what I had done in Missouri with this explaining this type of thing and how important it was to understand these little communities and how you get people that really can get the message out for you. And so, I talked it on there, and so every year they come out with that same program, and I was doing the same one, and they would tell me,

they said, "Okay, can you do it?" I said, "Yes, I can do it." He says, okay, "What are you going to do?" I told them. He says, "Well, make sure you bring the sponges and do that one, because they said that when they do the evaluation at the end, a lot of people had said that really helped them understand that." And the other thing is understanding how you identify little movers and shakers in every little community that'll help you get the word out on there.

I've done it even after I retired. During the pandemic, they didn't do it, but they're going to do it again starting April. So next month I'm going to do another one again with that tied in with the international programs.

[01:12:50] **James Wall:** Wow, well done. We missed 1987. You had an interesting detail. You got detailed to Wyoming during the Yellowstone fires.

[01:13:03] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, I did. Essentially what it was, I'd done so much fire information on there that they were putting together a team that would rotate in back there and trying to get the information out there. So, I went back there, and I spent a few weeks on there. And what was the problem was that it was confusing as to why you're not just putting the fire out. Why aren't you doing this? Why aren't you doing that? And they even had things like, why don't you just get one of those foam units like they have at the airports and foam the whole Yellowstone to put the fire out. It's those kinds of things on there.

And so essentially, I was on the team back there and I got assigned the one that I said, "Okay, we've heard from Voice of America in Europe," which is, it's actually the old Radio Free Europe radio broadcast in Europe. It's Voice of America. And heard from them, heard from Japan, heard from Australia, and they were all concerned because they all knew how wonderful Yellowstone was. And their impression was it's just going to all burn up and it's not going to be anything anymore.

So that was part of my job. I called up and talked to them and because at that time the Park Service didn't have a lot of fire people since that time. They've added good fire expertise and they have a lot of fire expertise. But when I was going to do that, they said, "Do you have any problem if we have one of ours from Department of Agriculture Forest Service and talk for you?" And they said, "No problem." So, I talked to Europe, I talked to Japan, I talked to Australia and explained what it was doing. And so, they

were getting the right information and so they understood that here's the situation we got and not all the animals are going to burn up and not everything is going to go away, and this type of thing.

[01:14:53] **James Wall:** Well, that's really interesting. Was there a different communication style you had to employ for different media, Japanese media versus other types?

[01:15:05] **Art Wirtz:** Yes, because Voice of America, I was talking to people that were speaking English on there and when Australia was the same thing, speaking English, but when I did Japan, I had to go through different ones on there and they had to get somebody that was an English speaking person that had a natural resource background that actually would talk to me, and then they would actually relay it to a non-English speaking person in there. So that was a little bit more complicated on there. But yes, it was the same thing. The biggest problem we had is that when you're talking to Europe, we talk about, okay, it's burning. This is a million acres of right now, and you got to convert it to hectares because that's what they're used to going on there.

[01:15:51] **James Wall:** So, you finally left Twain, you went to Superior [Minnesota] for a couple years.

[01:15:59] **Art Wirtz:** I went to Superior, and I had, again, a woman who was a forest supervisor. She was dynamite. She was really good on there. I actually went there because the prior ranger had some problems and was removed. That's about all I'd want to say about that. And so essentially when I got there, it was kind of like, "Okay, the reason we want you here is because a lot of it is not good communication with the community," as far as the small college that was there and the community leaders and everybody else. And also, with all the outfitter guides that they had for the boundary waters, and they said, "So we want you to really work on that." So that's why I worked on a lot of those things.

And the first time I had the meeting with the outfitter guides, there were the meeting that came in the office and there were twelve outfitter guides that were there. And after two and a half years, we had meetings all the way through there by the end of two and a half years after I'd been there, the last one, we had to go to the auditorium at the International Bear Center because there were one hundred and forty outfitter-guide people

that were there and wanted to talk and go over things. So, we got the communication lines open on that.

And one of the big problems that we had there was Boundary Waters [Minnesota] draws a lot of people. Boundary Waters is very unique. Boundary Waters has so many unique features in it, but there's so many people that think, "Okay, I can make a buck on this. I can do this. If I could just do this thing, I could make a lot of money." And they expect us to go, "Oh, great, if you could make money." And to explain to them, it's being managed as a wilderness under the Wilderness Act, and there's a lot of things that can't be done, should not be done, and some of the things that you've got proposed are absolutely contrary to what we've got in there. And so that was very difficult on there.

And I got another one. This is one of my favorite stories to tell. We had a bunch of outfitters that wanted to run snowmobiles in the Boundary Waters, which would be fun. There's no getting around it. It would be fun because all these lakes, you go down through there and you're running snowmobiles over lakes. Well, no, you don't run snowmobiles in the wilderness on there. But we had dog teams. There was a lot of dog teams that ran through there, and a lot of outfitters had dog teams and were very effective on there, getting people into the area so they could fish and see the area and everything else.

I was at a public meeting one time. We go through there and these outfitters that wanted to put snowmobiles in there were really giving me a whole bunch of stuff about that. "It's not right that you can get—the ones on the dog sleds can be in there, but we can't do in there." And they said, "You just look at it at the end of the winter before the thing melts on there, you look at all the lines that go across the lake, and that's just all dog poop on there all the way through there, those lines in there. That's polluting the lakes on there. You shouldn't be allowed those in there. And look at our snowmobiles. They don't do any of that type of deal. They might be noisy, but they don't do any of that type of deal."

So, I got to thinking about that and I go, okay, I wonder how polluting that is. So, I tied in with a university professor at University of Minnesota that had knowledge of different pollution sources and in particular fecal matter and this type of deal. And we talked for a long time, and he had a lot of documentation. I got it and the next time I met with these people, I said,

okay, I had met with him, and we talked about that. And I said, "Okay, all these lakes, name a lake that's got all these stripes across these brown stripes on there. Here's the deal, and this is the facts. When it melts in the spring, all of that fecal matter of the dogs that goes down into the lake, makes less pollution on that lake, actual pollution, than a moose out there defecating one time." And I said, "This is tied in with the University of Minnesota on there." And it pretty much stopped everything because there's moose all over in there. And so, the moose are doing all of this on there. They wouldn't ever do anything against a moose, but they now understood that the fecal matter of the dogs were not significant on there. And so, it was a success story as far as dealing with some of the folks on that type of thing.

[01:20:46] **James Wall:** Interesting. But hearing them out but taking the time to get your evidence and come back.

[01:20:55] **Art Wirtz:** What was funny though is when I left that district up there, we had a get together and they were talking about it they said, "We're losing the ranger that has the greatest knowledge of dog poop of any ranger we've ever had." And that's probably true.

[01:21:10] **James Wall:** Well, that's a fine distinction to have. Put that on your resume. So, let's see. So, then we get to the Tonto [Arizona], which you were on for a while, looks like. So, the latter part on the Mesa Ranger District.

[01:21:31] **Art Wirtz:** From 1996 to 2011.

[01:21:35] **James Wall:** So, well weather-wise, coming from some brutal winters to a much warmer climate. So that must've been nice. But you're coming back again. Your story of your career seems to be going out, coming back to places. What was that like coming back to the Tonto as a staff officer?

[01:21:54] **Art Wirtz:** What really is unique about it is particularly this district is one of the heaviest used recreation districts in the nation. It's so close to a major population center and so easy for people just jump in their car and drive out and they're on the forest in no time on there. So, you're dealing with that. And so, when I was on the Eleven Point, I was dealing with three little towns. When I was in Minnesota out of Ely— Ely is a small little town, like 3000 people. It's nothing really big either. So, you understand

who you talk to to get the word out. How do you do it when you're adjacent to 3.4 million people, how do you get the message out? How do you get any type of things that are changes or whatever else out there? It's completely different.

And so, it's like a different learning curve to try this, try that, try whatever. And what worked really well was we tied in really close with the media and getting to the point wherever anything came up, we'd call up and say, "Okay, hey, do you want to know about this?" And I know that we had some recreational shooting issues that people were just shooting up a storm and not having backing and backstop when they were shooting. And so yes, I called up a guy that I knew with one of their TV stations on there and I said, "I got a story." He says, "Well, what is it?" I said, "Well, I'll take you out. I guarantee that you'll see a story there, but I'd like to have you discover it." So, I went out there and we went out and we got on a hill, and we looked over and we watched people recreation shooting and all of the different things.

And he says, "This is a story. This is something that you don't know if you're going to be walking over the hill and somebody's going to shoot you from recreational shooting. And these people aren't even unloading their guns when their family's going down to move targets. It was just on and off." And he built the story and went through the whole thing. And that was a good way to get it because the newspaper then picked it up and I could share it with the newspapers also. And they went through there and it was very, very effective.

And I know you have or will interview Jim Payne, and Jim and I worked a lot on those type of things trying to get tied in with different people on there, but also in tying in with the sheriff's department to get a message out. A lot of times when we were having problems, the sheriff's department was just only when people came to them. Well, when we were having problems that was shared with the sheriff's department, we'd say, "Okay, would you like us to take it to the news media and to people out there and then let it come from there and then let them come back to you?" And they said, "Oh, that'd be great." So that's what we did. We tied in well with them. It was very, very effective that way.

[01:24:51] **James Wall:** Getting the media on your side so that when you really need something, they'll pick up your phone call.

[01:24:59] **Art Wirtz:** Let me tell you something else. When we go to public meetings, there's a lot of different public meetings around and I would go to public meetings off the forest. I'm going to public meetings in cities like Tempe [Arizona] and Apache Junction [Arizona] and all kinds of different things. And I'd go to those meeting, be in uniform and they say, "Why are you here? This is not National Forest." I said, "Where do these people that live here, where do they recreate?" "I don't know, in parks?" "Well, could be city parks. You think they come up on the forest?" "Yes." I said, "Okay, don't you think I could share with you some of the things that we've got, some of the issues that we got so that you can deal with that as you develop some of these new subdivisions and everything else like that?" They go, "Oh yes."

And then I started getting invited to more and more of those kinds of meetings. They said, "Yes, would you come and sit in there and give the perspective of what these people are going to live here, they're moving in and where they're going to recreate and everything else." Because we even had subdivisions that were butting-up against the wilderness and their realtor had told them that, "Oh yes, no problem. Just put a gate in yours and you got a gate that leads right into the national forest wilderness." No, you can't do that. You're putting in a new trail that's not approved in the wilderness and that's not. You don't do it from every house has their own little special thing out there. So, we had to deal with a lot of that type of deal.

And also, how do you monitor when you're having these big groups in public meetings, how do you monitor if your message is getting across and if they're hearing it and they want to share it with others and they believe it on there? Well, it's hard to monitor and actually get that type of deal. But there is one thing that came up to, and this relates back to I was telling you about psychology and sociology.

People, when they're going to explain something, let's say that there's something in the medical field, they'll say, "Well, my doctor says this." And they go and they tell them about that they have an ownership of that physician that I agree with him. And so, I'm going on—my doctor. When it has a legal issue, said, "Well, my attorney said this," it's an ownership on there. And when I started hearing, when I go into these, I'm listening to different groups and when I started hearing and say, "Oh, wait a minute,

my ranger said this," it's an ownership. And essentially what it is, is they are then saying, that's the truth. This is what we've got. And now let me tell you the truth on there because where I've heard it from is a good source.

And so used that quite a bit as far as listening for that. And even some of my staff I talk about, you listen to when they start hearing about that and when they start saying it that way, when there's an ownership of people in the federal government, that's almost unheard of to have somebody that really has that type of approach with the federal government.

[01:27:59] **James Wall:** Paying attention to language and things like that. Well, the rest of the Mesa, so at that point you might be seeing the light at the end of the career tunnel or thinking about legacy and retiring, but when did you begin to plan for that? Or did it just happen?

[01:28:20] **Art Wirtz:** I had talked to a whole bunch of rangers that had retired that I had a lot of respect for and things like that. And I said, "God, when do you know when to retire?" They said, "You'll know. You'll get the feeling on there, you'll know. And if you don't have that feeling, stay in. Just keep, stay in and do what you enjoy doing and what you think should be done and go from there." And so, it got that way that I turned fifty-five and then I go, "No, I'm not ready. And so, I turned fifty-seven, no." So, I went to, I was sixty-one and went out, and that's when I thought, “Okay, this is about right.”

And so that's when I went out and since that time, my son is a biology teacher, biology, and ecology in high school in the area on there. And he said, would you come and talk some ecology stuff? So I've put together some ecology programs and I go to high schools and talk to them and share about it. And then I've got—I'm going to high schools talking about careers in natural resource management. And so, I go to a lot of different teachers and things and explain that. And I have a lot of PowerPoint presentations.

What's funny is my son says, "Yes, when I lecture for an hour, I probably have maybe oh, seventeen to twenty-five slides that I showed to talk in an hour. And when the students ask, well, how many are you going to show? Well, my dad will probably show probably ninety to a hundred slides in an hour," because I do it as a conversational thing and more of what you've got. And so, you would understand this, and I'm not going to put up a

bunch of charts and graphs. I will show examples of good forest management and bad forest management and problems and flooding and all kinds of things like that. Fire damage and wildlife damage and this type of deal. So that's what I show. So that's what I've been doing. So, I enjoy doing that type of thing. And that's really rewarding and it's missing the job. I do miss the job. I enjoyed every bit of it. It was a good forty years with the Forest Service. And so yes, I really enjoyed it.

[01:30:51] **James Wall:** Sounds like it. You can feel the enthusiasm coming through your voice. Well, are you ready for the lightning round of questions?

[01:31:00] **Art Wirtz:** The final, well, let me give you one quick other thing. To do a lot of the jobs on there, there's a lot of things that I had to do to learn how to do, to be able to experience what people coming to the forest were experienced. As I told you earlier, I'm a pretty darn good motorcycle rider now out in there because I did so much of that. I'm pretty darn good with a snowmobile. I'm a pretty good skier, cross country skier and downhill skier. I'm a good musher. I can run dog teams. All those different things on there that had to learn—horsemen, I'm a good horseman. I had to learn all those different things. And so, it really made, it's kind of a nice career. And I also share that with students that may have interest in natural resource management and trying to understand that to get to certain places, you may have to use different techniques to get there.

[01:32:01] **James Wall:** Jack of all trades now. Well, that's a good segue. I always ask sort of the similar questions of people. I like to compare answers, see what the general themes are. But what was your favorite time in your career when you were having the most fun?

[01:32:19] **Art Wirtz:** When I was on the Mark Twain and we were doing the pilot and trying to identify things in the federal government, particularly Forest Service, that weren't contributing to good forest management, they were just administrative things that should not be there. And being able to identify them, put them into a one page, we had to do that in a one page, explain what the problem was and then what we thought should be doing and getting it to come. And somebody picks up and goes, that's a great idea, let's try it. And we would try it. And they worked. And it's just—it's so rewarding to have that type of thing when it comes back and you're looking at it.

And during that time also, they had me go—I went to Idaho. I went to California. I went to Wisconsin; went to a lot of different places to explain what we were doing. I was trying to figure out, do things do differently. And I said, "I want you to share with me things that just frustrate you because of administrative things that if they could be done away with or modified." And I got a bunch of things coming back and most of those, we were able to come up with some solutions. So, it was so rewarding to do that.

[01:33:35] **James Wall:** The first district ranger job, it's almost always the favorite time for people. Let's see, favorite mentor, favorite boss, somebody that, and there could be more than one, but somebody who really shaped your career, put you on the right path.

[01:33:54] **Art Wirtz:** Jerry Elson was the one that when I was at Cloudcroft, when I was very first time working and started giving me ideas what to go once, I get graduated, and then following my career and helping me on the next ones. And then also Lee Pogue, who was the ranger at Prescott when I was up there telling me that I need to try to get converted from a technician into a professional and going from there and more than just getting into professional, telling me that he saw that I had the potential to be a district ranger and he gave me a lot of things that way. And so just a couple of really great guys.

[01:34:42] **James Wall:** How do you think the Forest Service changed you?

[01:34:45] **Art Wirtz:** I think I am more aware of my personal skills than I ever would have without the Forest Service. And part of that was before I got my first ranger job, I got put into a program that was for potential rangers and it was—I think it was eight weeks long in Albuquerque. And they would bring in all kinds of specialists and everything else. And they even evaluated personalities. They evaluated your social style, how you dealt with things, what your weaknesses are, what your strengths are, how to minimize your weaknesses, how to maximize your strengths, and that type of deal.

And not only did that help me, I've done that to people, my staff or my districts, and I can evaluate what their personality style is and how to get the most out of them because it makes them the most productive and most understanding and so sharing with that. It's even come to the point where I've done it for my family. I tell them what your strengths are, and

weaknesses are, and it's things like we travel a lot now and planning a trip is not my strength. It is my wife's. She does all the planning, everything else like that. Actually, a lot of the other stuff is my strengths on there. So, between the two of us, it compliments everything, and we get to see everything we want to see.

[01:36:22] **James Wall:** So, the lessons you learned in the Forest Service bleed over into everyday life?

[01:36:25] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, absolutely.

[01:36:25] **James Wall:** That's how you know that you got some good value out of it. yes. Well, last one's always, "What does the Forest Service mean to you? Why is it important in your life? Why is it important now? And when you think of the Forest Service, what do you feel?

[01:36:43] **Art Wirtz:** Positive, a very positive feel for it. That there's a lot of things that we're doing now that were building over the years as far as how to do different things. Things that we've done long enough years, it's fairly simple now. When we first started them, it was very difficult. Particularly things like when computers came in, it was really—that was in about the early 1980s is when we first started getting them. And it was a tool that we didn't have people that really knew how to use the tool to most effectively and actually the tool hadn't been sharpened yet enough that it fit with us. But it came in and it built with it at different times of how we go.

Example on there is we got Data General in there in the 1983, which is things like that. But when I had fire when I was at Cloudcroft, we needed to be able to access weather stations on the White Sands Missile Range [New Mexico] and also McGregor Missile Range [New Mexico]. They're all kind of in there and even Holloman Air Force Base [New Mexico]. And DG, it couldn't do that. So, I started searching around and found out that they said if we had a regular PC, separate, not the DG, if we had a regular PC, that the military would let us access in there to see what those were.

So, it got to the point where I got authorization. I was the only one that had a regular PC owned by the government, so I could go into those. And then I went out to talk to the general at White Sands Missile Range, which is an experience in itself to meet them. I met the base commander at Holloman Air Force Base. I met the base commander at McGregor Range,

all of those and talking about the things going through there and established rapport with those. And so, when we were having a fire, I could call up all those weather stations and feed them weather information as they were burning things through there.

And also, this is—I like to tell this story. The general at White Sands Missile Range, we talked for a long time, not just about things like that, we just kind of talked about different things and he said, "Oh man, since I've taken over this job, he says, I can't do all the trout fishing that I used to like do." And I said, "Oh, you like to trout fish?" He says, "Yes. There's nothing around to do that." And I said, "I have a secretary that she has private land at Mayhill that has a trout stream that runs through there. She doesn't allow people on there. Do you want me to see if I can get you access on there to do some trout fishing?" He goes, "Yes." And she welcomed it. She welcomed that on there. And he would go up there and go trout fishing on there. And essentially it was separate from it, but it really firmed up two people working together and also recognizing some things that each one needed to do and tying back and forth. So, it was a good relationship on there.

[01:40:07] **James Wall:** And did you want to tell the story of your grandson's name?

[01:40:12] **Art Wirtz:** Oh, my grandson's name. First forest I ever worked on was the Lincoln. My grandson is ten months old. His first name is Lincoln. That first year I worked for the Forest Service, I was learning how to work on a fire, and one of the tools that I worked with was a McLeod. I thought that would make a really neat name. So, I named my son, his middle name is McLeod, and he named his son, my grandson, McLeod. So, my ten-month-old grandson is named Lincoln McLeod.

[01:40:45] **James Wall:** Wow. Maybe one day he'll be a forester.

[01:40:49] **Art Wirtz:** He could be.

[01:40:51] **James Wall:** With a name like that. I'd expect it.

[01:40:52] **Art Wirtz:** My other grandson, who is seven, who lives here in the valley on there, when they talk about what he does a lot of times for Halloween costumes, he dresses up as a forest ranger or a firefighter, and he wears t-shirts that say Future Wildland Firefighter.

[01:41:11] **James Wall:** Well done. Well, this has been great. I thank you for sitting down with me. Is there any other story that we haven't hit that you want to hit?

[01:41:19] **Art Wirtz:** I think, no, I think we covered all the things that, oh, one other one. When I was at the Boundary Waters in Minnesota on there. We do coordination with the state. We do that all the time. We do coordination with local governments and everything else like that. But we had a large fire that ended up burning into Canada, and so had to go to a unified command on there. And so, under unified command, we had a few thousand firefighters on our side, and they had a few hundred firefighters on the Ontario side on there. And so, under unified command, we were coordinating back and forth, and I was talking with them, and then I jumped into the helicopter. We went over and landed, and we got to see how they did a fire camp, which was completely different than we did it. And they came over and saw our fire camp and how much different they did and everything else like that. So, it was appreciating how everybody did that.

But then also we were getting information from some of the communities, particularly Thunder Bay in Canada. It's a large community up there that the newspaper and radio stations wanted more information about the fires that were burning on there because it was such a big fire on there. And the provincial restrictions were greater than the American's side; that they had to submit things to the province, and they would do it as fast as they could. But they would get back and say, "Okay, you can talk about this, and you can talk about that." But it was kind of cumbersome and everything else. Ours on the United States, us that are trained Type 1 Information Officers, we have the authority, we can talk to them. We're not getting screened and everything else like that. We know what we can share and what we can't and go from there.

And so, I ended up talking to Thunder Bay and explaining all this stuff on there, and the information officers we had in Canada said, "Yes, keep doing it. He says, that's great. We can't get it through fast enough, and you guys can do that." Well, then the provincial ones asked them, they said, "You guys aren't supposed to be sharing that stuff until you get it approved with us." "Well, we didn't. It was those Yankees over there and they were sharing it with them." And I said, "It's the first time I've ever been called a

Yankee." But they came back and said, "Just keep doing it. It works great on there." They really appreciated that under unified command. And so yes, I got an award from them for communication and leadership, communication and team building from them. So that was interesting.

[End of Interview]