

Interview with David Zentner

**Interviewed by Margaret Robertson
Minnesota Historical Society**

**Interviewed on March 4, 1987
at the Duluth offices of Mr. Zentner**

MR: Have you always lived in Duluth?

DZ: No, I came to Duluth in 1955 as a sophomore at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. I had a year of junior college under my belt and had planned on going to the University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities. I had worked the previous summer for the Forest Service in Oregon as a student aide, and then my folks moved here. When I found out that there was a branch of the University in Duluth, I decided to stay here. I did not want to live in the Twin Cities--I wanted to live in the lake country, and I've been here ever since.

MR: What was your degree in?

DZ: Business administration with a minor in science and a minor in sociology. With no skill whatsoever, I became a life insurance salesman. [Laughs] But seriously, I wanted to stay in northeastern Minnesota, and I wanted to work for myself instead of working for someone else. I had thought about law school, but I decided that I wasn't a good enough and a serious enough student to survive. I think that was a good decision for me. I liked the concept of working with people and being my own boss--of being self-motivating. Although I've never been known for creativity nor for wisdom, at nineteen when I was working for the Forest Service, a combination of things caused me to realize that although I wanted to work in natural resources, I didn't want to work for a governmental agency. Nor did I see myself wanting to go to work in a large corporation, where your future could be impaired by moving and shaking and taking positions.

It's really a stroke of luck that there is a business called the life insurance business. There's a lot of people around here probably who probably wouldn't do business with me because of what they perceive me to be. But there's enough people who basically say, thank heavens, "If he's competent professionally, I really don't care that much about his philosophy on natural resources or environmental issues." So it's been nice to be able to speak out and to have that flexibility. The distaff side of it is that if you work for a large corporation, and they decide, for example, that it is good to be active in Kiwanis or United Way or the Izaak Walton League, they give you some corporate time to do it. I'm a sole proprietor, and when I don't work, I don't get paid. In my case, it is not as if a corporation is saying, "Hey, we're going to loan this executive from NSP to the United Way Drive or to the University's three hundred million dollar drive, because it's a good cause and therefore part of our corporate responsibility." But nothing's perfect.

MR: So, after you started your business, when did you become involved in the Izaak Walton League?

DZ: Right away. I had been exposed as a kid in Iowa to the Ikes. There was a place in my town in Clinton, Iowa, where I could go and get a smell of the north woods by watching a movie or looking at a stuffed animal or fish or feeding pheasants. Of course, that's not exactly thought of as good sound wildlife management practice today, but it was a place where that environment and that atmosphere existed. I never forgot it. I saw a notice that there was an effort to reactivate the Duluth Ikes, so I went to the reorganizational meeting. That was right after I was through at UMD. I probably was twenty-three or twenty-four.

MR: What was the membership like in Duluth?

DZ: Well, it was a dead chapter that we reactivated. We struggled to get fifteen or twenty people; we probably now have a hundred people. In many ways it's a better chapter today than it was then. We have more youth. We're more diversified. We have more women active, and we have women on our board. The Izaak Walton League that I knew in the sixties had the boys over here and the girls over there. There's still some of that in the Izaak Walton League because it's basically been pretty conservative--kind of an old man's group. The men would shoot, trap, hunt, fish, and work on conservation issues. The women were a social group. When the guys decided it was time to have a banquet then, the women set the table. That's really the way it was. That's been a hard one to crack for the League, but it's changing. Today in Duluth, we have good middle-aged, family participation. We rely, for a lot of things, on women.

We're diversified in Duluth to a point. That's one of the basic weaknesses of the Izaak Walton League, but also its appealing strength. I've never wanted solely to be active with a group that was just interested in clean water or a group that was just interested in bass. I like the broad agenda and sound policies of the Izaak Walton League. It's very democratic in structure--the chapters, state divisions, and the national organization function very much like we do politically as a country. The execution of that agenda, however, is very difficult to prioritize, to keep people interested, but that's not unique to the League. Hell, every citizen's organization has its ebbs and flows.

MR: Has it been hard to attract people to the Izaak Walton League because of its image as a stodgy group of people?

DZ: Nationally, the answer has been yes. In the seventies, when the conservationists became much more active and saw the need to become involved in the political system, a lot of Ikes were uncomfortable with that. They were very comfortable with the so-called old line: clean air, clean water, wildlife management, working with the Conservation Department, working with the local game warden. They did have some legislative contact state and nationally, but not in the assertive way that the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, Audubon, Environmental Defense Fund, and other groups did. So some of the men and women who wanted to be more aggressive didn't see the Ikes as fitting what they wanted to be a part of. At the same time, some of the Ikes, with that broad interest, were saying, "Fishing and hunting are the natural extension of caring for

the planet, therefore we shouldn't occupy ourselves solely with what we're going to plant in Lake Superior, or how long the rabbit season should be, or what the duck season should be. We should work on getting adequate funding for the DNR for fish and wildlife management, on creating a framework of legislation for clean air, water, etc."

That's correct, but what happened is a lot of the members who were essentially fishing and hunting people said, "Gee, the Izaak Walton League isn't interested in my fishing and hunting anymore." So we lost from both ends, and of course, we lost membership simply from the aging process. So that was the national and state picture. The membership increased in the sixties when Ray Haik was litigating against the federal government on the St Clair mining case.

In Duluth, we haven't had trouble attracting membership. The reason that there's a hundred members here rather than, say, three hundred is simply that Duluth Ikes would much rather work on issues than do membership work. And I count myself among the guilty. Sometimes we don't work on anything, but when we do work, we'd rather work on issues than on social organization and membership. We don't have a lot of "Type A" personalities, forever out pumping membership. When we do ask for membership, it's not difficult to get. Whether we're talking about that bay out there or the lake or the Boundary Waters or forest management policies or Voyageurs Park or the timber wolf, this Izaak Walton League chapter has been actively, and I hope articulately, working on all of those issues. It's not a hard thing to sell here.

MR: Has there been a lot of resistance or alienation to conservation policies in Duluth? You mentioned that this sometimes has made your career difficult.

DZ: Much more so twenty-five years ago than it is today. It's substantially different from even ten years ago. There's always some fall-out. Duluth typifies a sort of a frontier mentality. It would be much more of a frontier mentality in Ely than in Duluth, and more so in Duluth than in Minneapolis, and so it goes down the line. We're traditional natural resource users, living in this area. We're extractors of ore and users of the big pond out there, and we use our timber resource--our pulp, our paper, and so on. Those areas, whether it's Bozeman, Montana or Duluth, Minnesota, are less cosmopolitan.

It becomes more difficult to take positions on environmental resource issues that some citizens see as threatening their economic futures. People do reach out and let you know how unhappy they are. During the Reserve Mining controversy, I served with the Pollution Control Agency. When I agreed with the company position, I was a local hero to the people in Silver Bay. A week later, when I moved to deny the company's request to go to milepost seven, I had to have State Patrol protection. Anyway, I think people accommodate environmental concerns much better in 1987 than they did even in 1975. It was far grimmer and far more lonely in 1965.

MR: Is that because the economic issues are less threatening to people?

DZ: I think it's a combination of quite a few things. I think first of all, part of it's my own personality. I'm fifty years old now, so I'm less intimidated and have a more mature view than I did when I was twenty-five and my own future was less certain. I know more about the issues and feel much more confident about it, and I'm less bothered about what somebody else thinks, number one. Number two, I think a lot of people in the region have seen that environmental questions don't, in most cases, drag industry out. That if there's a profit to be made, a healthy industry can afford to meet state and federal environmental regulations. If it's a marginal industry, ultimately, it will die regardless of whether you give it breaks or not. I think that's the second issue.

I also think we've become more diversified in the Duluth economy. And I'm not sure of this because I'm not a sociologist, but people here might be a little bit better informed, a little more sophisticated than we were twenty or twenty-five years ago. We are less easily manipulated by U.S. Steel or whomever.

MR: Let's go back to when you first joined the League. What were some of the issues back then that were important to the League back then?

DZ: Wetlands, in the sixties, were a big issue. Unfortunately, here we are in 1987, and we've drained ninety percent of the wetlands that we had when I was twenty-five years old, which is just tragic. That was a big issue. The Memorial Hardwood Forest was in its beginnings, down in the southeast, so that was another significant issue. Timber management practices were a big issue--trying to achieve a balance from our forests between fiber production and recreational wildlife management. Those issues have continued. Some things don't change, they just sort of evolve into slightly different issues. In the sixties, the League, nationally, and Minnesota Ikes as well, were concerned over clean water. The first significant federal water pollution legislation in terms of the amount of money appropriated would have been in the early sixties; about 1960, somewhere in there. We were really at the forefront of that with our national staff. So that was a big one. Oh, shoreline management was a mid-sixties issue of significance. So that would be a few things.

MR: How did some of those issues affect the Duluth area?

DZ: Well, obviously, if we look at water quality, we had so much crap coming from Cloquet. For all practical purposes the St Louis River, recreationally, was zip. You know, we had fish that lived in there? In fact, amazingly, through all of it, there's been a trout population in Jay Cooke Park, if you can believe that. It was strictly catch and release--nobody would eat them. There was walleye fishing, and that was the same way. The walleyes would come in the spring to spawn and then go out. In the short period of time they'd be in the river they would just taste awful, look awful, smell awful. There would be times when there would be a tremendous die-off of fish life in the St. Louis River.

It typified America, where along an ocean or a river or a large lake, we'd build our shipping and our industry. We would pollute it and destroy it for recreational purposes. The blue collar people who did the

day-to-day-work, who didn't have the economic portability to go to Norway or to Canada or to Lake Louise or Yellowstone, would have had a damaged backyard ecologically for recreation. The people who ran the industries had the economic portability to see beautiful things and go to beautiful places and catch fish.

So that was a big issue. Of course, the transformation of the St. Louis estuary isn't complete, but it's just been significant. Certainly the timber industry had an impact with Potlatch--the relationship to the water pollution we talked about. There was a significant air pollution problem in Cloquet which still exists but which has been improved. Of course, the timber management practices were very important. Potlatch, Northwest Paper, or Boise Cascade--whether it was Voyageurs Park or the Boundary Waters or just general management practices, they were active, aggressive, and sometimes just insolent when it came to dealing with the public's growing awareness. People knew they were harvesting public lands, but we never before had bothered to ask what was going on with their lands. Oh, sure there were a few people around, some of them famous, but the public, generically, in any substantial numbers, basically let the western ranchers, mineral people and timber interests tell the Forest Service and the Congress how they were going to develop so-called public lands.

In northern Minnesota, the mineral interests and forest interests basically did the same thing. So, all of a sudden, John Q. Public showed up and said, "Hey, these are my lands." That was very hard not only for the timber people and mineral people to accommodate, but it was damned hard for the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation because they'd been buddy-buddy with the other side for so long. It was hard for both people who were exploiting public lands and people who were supposedly serving the public to understand that John Q. did indeed have an agenda that had an equal partnership in the discussion. So that affected the Duluth Izaak Walton League an awful lot.

Wetlands weren't a big issue in the northeast, except insofar as we were users. Those of us who liked to hunt ducks were interested in that. The Dorset Forest, obviously, wasn't even present in the mind of the average Duluthite. Basically, we were locked into concerns about water pollution efforts in our own backyard and the land management part of the game--public policy that had to do with the public ownership.

MR: You mentioned Silver Bay briefly and that ties right into water quality. Do you want to talk a little bit about the Silver Bay issue and what you remember of that?

DZ: Oh, God, we could be here for days. You know, I'll never forget when I was nineteen years old or twenty years old, the first time I went up the north shore of Lake Superior and got to Silver Bay. I couldn't believe it. I didn't have a sophisticated scientific background, but I couldn't believe that here was this beautiful lake, with sixty thousand longtons, I later learned, of taconite tailings and filings being discharged into it every day. It was the same thing that happened to me when I first saw my first redwood--my mouth was open, and I was absolutely in awe. This was a different kind of an awe.

So that was the beginning. Then I learned that there had been people who had protested the dumping. Mainly it was the United Northern Sportsmen's group in West Duluth which had protested when hearings were held in, I believe, 1946 or 1947. Again, the engineering community was saying that these filings will nicely go out and lie on the bottom and not hurt anybody--they're inert. Some very unsophisticated West Duluthian shook the model aquarium that depicted the high velocity discharge culvert and apparently raised numerous eyebrows. Chester Wilson, then Commissioner of Conservation, was in charge, and his attitude was basically, "What are you doing?" But that's what happens in Lake Superior when you have a northeaster, and that very unsophisticated picture of how the lake would act in a full gale would turn out to be very prophetic. So drawing from that beginning, we had a national convention here in 1972 which voted that Reserve should cease discharging into Lake Superior and deposit the taconite tailings on land.

I also remember 1974, when I was appointed to the Pollution Control Agency and ultimately had to decide what kind of a permit to issue and at what site and under what conditions. I saw the very irresponsible policies of absentee owners Armco and Republic, on the one hand, but I also saw people like the recent and former presidents of Reserve, who were very responsible. They cared about Minnesota and the jobs here and the socioeconomic implications of that closing. I also saw the people up there, who felt that they were being held hostage between the companies and the environmentalists, who wondered why it was always the eleventh hour before other people became involved. These people could only sit as bystanders and watch the agencies involved. The whole combination of politics, sociology, economics--it's a classic. And then who would have realized that when we finally thought we had it resolved, that Reserve would be out of business, and now we would have to be concerned with who is going to pay for the mess that's up at milepost seven?

That's just a little bit of what I remember--there is much, more more to be shared. All of this touched on thousands of lives. I can remember the things that came in the mailbag from people, fairly or unfairly, who were scared to death in that little town up there. You really had to feel for them. I'll tell you one thing it did for me--it gave me a great deal of humility as to how tough it is to be a judicial person and be thrust into a decision-making role. Admittedly, none of us are born without or live without biases, but you try to be fair within the limits of the biases that you have. You try to apply intelligence. You do your homework. You read, and you really try to be wise, and you find out there's no point where it says, "Look, you've done your work, turn to page 35, the answer's there, and everybody will love you." You realize what a a tough responsibility it is for the men and women who sit on the bench, deciding the lives of people and companies. So I walked away with a lot of humility and hopefully, a lot of personal growth as to how tough those decisions are.

MR: So after this whole Silver Bay fracas, how did you get involved in the BWCA? I mean, a person easily could conclude you'd be pretty--

DZ: Gun-shy?

MR: Burned-out, perhaps.

DZ: Well, it wasn't that hard. I've been in Boundary Waters fights almost since I came to Duluth. I guess I missed President Truman's airspace ban, but I was involved in the fight in the sixties on the Selke Committee. If you were going to be in the Izaak Walton League and you loved and cared about the Boundary Waters, you just simply had to be involved. It wasn't a matter of quitting and saying, "You know, I'm burned-out. I want to work on my job or I want to raise my children. Let somebody else do it."

It wasn't possible not to be involved, not when 1978 came along and Jim Oberstar said, "Hey guys, I've got a hell of a deal for you. We're going to take five hundred thousand acres out of the wilderness and we're going to make it a National Recreation Area and we're going to have a mineral protection zone and we're going to have more intensive development in a little smaller wilderness area. What do you think of it? You're going to end up with a larger federal ownership." Jimmy pretty much sprung it on the environmental community by saying, "Hey, I'm going to have a news conference. We're going to get together in Duluth." By the way, Jim and I are good friends, even though we battled on that one. We get along just fine, and I think a lot of him and I believe he of me, too.

But at that time I was national president of the Izaak Walton League, and I can remember in an editorial in the Minneapolis Star and Tribune--although the name was different then--which said, "Of all the environmental groups, only the Izaak Walton League and their national president, Dave Zentner, have said that they don't think that this is a good idea. We agree with them. It's not a good idea." The reason I felt that way at that time, in 1978, was that I told Jim that it would not wash to take that half million acres out of wilderness. In terms of our future needs, we could not afford it. There's such a small percent of the country that is in wilderness. It is only lake country in wilderness, and it was our most heavily used wilderness. Really, what we needed to do in the Boundary Waters was to manage to protect what we had, so we didn't love it to death. We also had to deal with better management of non-wilderness. Well, apparently Jim felt he'd made a commitment--he had to follow through. So about that time some of the people in the Sierra Club came and said, "Hey, we think that you guys in the Izaak Walton League are probably right. This is a bad idea." So we formed a coalition, and we sat down and said, "If Jim is going to have his legislation to accomplish what he sees his constituency needing and wanting, then why don't we use this as an opportunity to put our perfect legislative bill in the hopper?"

At that time, no one in the environmental movement was actively contriving to make any legislative changes. The environmental community, during the post-Selke committee period in the sixties, basically was content to work with the Forest Service interpretation. Most of the battles over logging, the Shipstead-Newton-Nolan Act, set-backs and those types of things were fought on administrative turf as opposed to legislative turf. So

obviously, we got Don Fraser to introduce legislation. At one time, Al Quie had thought about it when we looked for an author. But, in any event, Fraser introduced the legislation, and we went to war over it. And, again, it was an unfortunate war in many ways. We won in terms of maintaining and even enlarging the integrity of the Boundary Waters. We won in terms of having more acres for paddling only.

But we also had some of the social fall-out, the social losses, and the scars. I can remember debating Al Hall, who died recently. Al and I were always friendly to one another, even when we were on opposite sides of an issue. We were at Ely High School, and my car with my Izaak Walton League bumper sticker was vandalized while it was parked there. John Waters had a warehouse burned down in Ely. Again, I believe in wilderness more so at fifty than I did at twenty-five. But you also learn that even though I did what I had to do, believed in it and would do it again, there's a lot of good people on the other side of the question. So, you have those scars.

Some of those scars are starting to heal now, but it takes a long time, especially with some of the Ely area people, who had such a difficult time economically. They feel we're a bunch of urban elitists who have no right to interfere, even though they've never understood that the phrase "federal acres" means owned by all the people in the fifty states. It's not a playground for the local people. It's been hard for them to understand that. Anyway, we got into it, and we went at it hard, and we won on most of the issues.

MR: I'm interested in your saying that, prior to 1978, you were content to let the administrative process take its course. I talked to Bud Heinselman, and he was saying that because there were so many administrative battles at that time, with or without Oberstar, it had gotten to the point that there had to be a legislative solution.

DZ: Well, if it did nobody, including Bud, was suggesting it.

MR: Hindsight is twenty-twenty.

DZ: Yes. Bud's so knowledgeable and I respect him so much, but if there was somebody out there advocating it, I was entirely unaware of it. Because to a person, as far as I know, Oberstar's bill caught us off balance, like Reagan was caught off balance at Reykjavik. He just absolutely was not ready to go to Reykjavik and have Gorbachev and the Russians do what they did. He just kind of said, "habahabaha", and basically that's the way it was when Jim came up with this legislation. Now, Bud's a very perceptive person, and it could well have been that maybe within a short time it would have happened.

MR: But you feel it was more a reaction to what Oberstar proposed?

DZ: Oh, absolutely. No question about it. You know, I don't know that there was an original thinker among all of us. There were numerous challenges, but I would insist on maintaining that to address those issues, we were going via the administrative process; nobody was thinking

of legislation. It was a reaction. We were not pro-active.

MR: I've talked to multiple-use proponents in Ely and they're still pretty bitter about what happened. Do you think the Boundary Waters is a scapegoat for the economic problems that Ely and that area are having?

DZ: Yes, there's no doubt about it. But again, I think there's some truth in it. First of all, there's some validity to what they say, but nothing's all one way. When you look at the problems in Ely, they're dominated basically by the decline of mining. If we could just get them to go to Cass Lake or to Park Rapids, or to Bemidji. Are those areas booming? Are there any prohibitions on flying in, building resorts, building roads, logging? No. But there's a depression in that economy out there as well. Take the Ely area and add to it the mining woes and you've got ninety-five percent of the equation--not the battle over the Boundary Waters. In fact, in a lot of ways it's been demonstrated over and over again that in lieu of the property taxes that were paid, all the services that are provided by the federal government are a better deal for the folk of Ely than what they really dreamed of. Again, go to Canada, go to Ontario, where there isn't a prohibition. Do they have a wealthy economy? No, they have the same sets of problems. If only Ely would not be blinded by that parochial thing.

The other thing that sometimes makes me a wee bit angry at my friends in Ely, and I do have some friends in Ely, is that they want a double standard. They want to use the place as they see fit, but at the same time have Uncle Sam pay for roads, plant the fish, plant the trees. They want the people from Indiana to come to this wonderful wilderness but then they don't want the people from Indiana to be able to talk to Congress about how the wilderness should be managed. "Come up and leave your money but keep your mouth shut" is basically the game that they like to play.

Also, they like Uncle Sam to buy them out--up to and including that horrible rip-off of the American taxpayer by the jury that awarded Vic Davis of International Falls his money for the land near Voyageurs Park. I can't tell you how many phone calls I've had in the last twenty years from people who had resorts or land in or around the Boundary Waters who were perfectly comfortable coming to the Izaak Walton League and saying, "I have this resort. I'd like to sell it. I'm really interested in conservation and I don't want this to fall into some private exploiter's hands, but I want one million dollars for it. I understand you have an Izaak Walton League Endowment and that you'd be glad to pay me that much for it." At that point in time when that phone call was made, a \$150,000 might be a reasonable price on a going concern basis for that resort. I had to explain to those people that we don't have millions and millions of dollars but that we do have an endowment and that we do work with the Forest Service. But we only buy places the Forest Service will ultimately buy back from us, subject to Congressional appropriations. While it may be worth a hundred and fifty, they may eventually get three hundred thousand, and I'm willing to participate in that overpayment based on the long term value to the taxpayer, to the public.

What I'm trying to say is that we have a habit sometimes in northern

Minnesota of whining, whining, whining and taking, taking, taking which is a part of all of this without looking at the bigger picture. One the other hand, again, it isn't all one way. There have been people hurt by it, but basically the majority of the problem is used as a crutch for what is really going on in the economies of rural areas and small towns and areas dependent on natural resources. Regardless of where they are located, they are characterized by mercurial peaks and valleys in employment and heavier than usual welfare payments. It isn't that the people who live in the rural areas are any better or any worse than the people that live in downtown Minneapolis. It just happens to be the way our economy is.

MR: Do you think the Boundary Waters now is settled in any sense, or do you think there are going to be continuing battles? For example, there is the debate over the Forest Service's management plan for the Superior National Forest.

DZ: No, there will always be some of that, but I think ninety percent of the menu is set. Yes, we have several environmental organizations who are unhappy with the management plan. Our Izaak Walton League chapter and other Ikes chapters around the state provided input on the Superior and the Chippewa National Forest Management plans. But now these are rather minor skirmishes, and we haven't participated with these other groups because we do not share their sense of the magnitude of three or four mechanical portages, the lease-back arrangements, the other issues. That's not to say that they aren't important to the Sierra Club and the Friends of the Wilderness, and so on. I guess the Ikes, again, have said, "Hey, we've got most of what we wanted. We would rather go through a period of healing with people rather than reopen old wounds." I can't speak for the other organizations. They are all good, intelligent people, and they're doing their agenda. But I would repeat, I think that ninety percent of the menu is set. There'll always be some activity, but I think we're really into an era already, even if we don't know it, of helping the private sector supply and interpret the wilderness to their clientele and of helping the managing agencies improve their regulations.

MR: The Izaak Walton League traditionally has been considered more centrist, as compared to groups like the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club, for example, is very concerned about the truck portages.

DZ: The state division was asked to join that lawsuit, and my opinion was that we ought not join it. I am not that concerned about those truck portages. There's an awful lot of issues where the Ikes and the Sierra Club would have identical positions. There are some areas where we might be more conservative than they, and others where that might not be the case. Evidently, the Minnesota division considered and rejected the idea of joining those lawsuits, so I guess we are somewhere in the center on that issue.

MR: What about adding to the Boundary Waters? I've talked to people from the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness who say, "Absolutely, it's getting to the point now where it's being overused and that in future years that trend is going to continue. We must add to the Boundary Waters

or we're going to be right back where we started." I know you can't speak for the division itself, but what do you think about that?

DZ: Well, my personal opinion, and that's all it is is a personal opinion, Margaret, is that there's not much expansion opportunity for quality canoeing, if we're talking about quality canoeing. There might be some expansion opportunity for cross-country skiing, for hiking, for that type of interpretation. I think that we could be consistent with the existing management team without having to get involved into a wilderness sort of zoning. I'd really have difficulty visualizing quality canoe experiences outside the current boundaries.

Another reason that I personally would be reluctant, is that we said in 1978, "Give us this, and we'll be happy." I know I can't make a commitment for other people, but we did, as an issue of faith, ask the Congress, the president, and the people to give us this wilderness gem within those boundaries. We made a deal, so personally, I would be reluctant--a deal is a deal.

Thirdly, we couldn't go very far in any direction without running into some developed lakes. I can't imagine with the deficit in the budget and the pressures on the federal and state economy where we would be able to come up with the dollars for acquisition of private interests. So, for those reasons I don't think it's possible. There might be some additions, but they would be very modest.

MR: This leads into another area--do you think of the Voyageurs as an answer to people who complained about the lack of multiple-use opportunities of Boundary Waters?

DZ: Sure. But again, there are some people who say that lack of multiple-use opportunities means you have to travel three miles from your house. My God, if you live in Ely, you've got Burntside Lake. That's a big, big body of water. Imagine somebody in Indianapolis being able to go a half mile to a place like Burntside Lake--someplace which looks like that, smells like that, feels like that. There's also all those lakes just to the north of Ely like Snowbank. You know, there's an unbelievable amount of recreation, but everything's relative, I guess.

Sure, you can get houseboats into Voyageurs. You can fly in. You can stay at resorts. You can snowmobile in the winter. I forget my statistics but there is about one and two hundred thousand surface water acres for mechanized use. It might even be a quarter of a million acres. No, that may be a little high there, but anyway, there's a lot of water out there, to be real sloppy. Goodness, all kinds of opportunities.

MR: How did you get involved in supporting the creation of the Voyageurs? Obviously, the Izaak Walton League took a firm stand on it.

DZ: Well, I was just too dumb not to get involved in it. "It seemed like a good idea at the time," the guy said as he was on his way to jail. My early recollections of that were of being influenced by attending Izaak Walton League meetings and of listening to the discussion over Voyageurs.

First, I was really interested in the multiple-use plan and the involvement of both the county and the state. I listened to the debate, and I was persuaded that there was nothing as genuine as a national park.

I was impressed by Judge Edwin Chapman and by the former governor, Elmer Andersen. There was that resorter--a great guy who just recently passed away from International Falls. He took quite a bit of personal heat up there for supporting the park, and many others. It was an evolutionary process because again, I was living close enough, I was listening to Boise Cascade beat the hell of us, saying that there weren't going to be enough logs and that we were going to put all these loggers out of work.

You know, the irony of that--just to digress for a minute--is here we are, we went through all of those protestations. We were going to run short of softwoods. It was a terrible thing we were doing, a selfish thing we were doing. You referred to the Superior National Forest Management Plan, and the litigation by environmental groups, and if you look at the timber management aspect of that plan, what have we got? What's the big problem?

Here we are in 1987, with a surplus of softwoods and having to manage for the future shortage of hardwoods. Now, whether that will ever occur or not, I don't know either.

Anyway, the thing that probably kicked me over more than anything else in the fight for Voyageurs was a meeting I attended in Norfolk, Virginia. I used the opportunity to go with my wife to Cape Hattaras, where we launched a little vessel and thereupon got seasick deep sea-fishing. At Cape Hattaras, just as we did last week in the Orlando area, we saw a "tinsel town", ticky-tacky development. All of a sudden I looked out the bus window, and there was a sign that said, "Cape Hattaras National Seashore". There were natural plants, a natural environment, and a contrast that blew my mind. I said, "My God. Go home and try to accomplish Voyageurs National Park"--because it is true that only an agency like that can accomplish that.

I felt that way even though the Park Service frustrates me. I've got a problem with the Park Service right now in Wisconsin over a matter concerning the wild and scenic rivers legislation. They can be awesome in their rigidity. Given all of that, in balance, the creation of a national park here in Minnesota took great vision. We've developed northern Minnesota, with the exception of the Boundary Waters, all the way up to the Falls. We've developed Leech Lake and Mille Lacs and the caverns. You name it--they're putrifying. They're getting torn up every summer day by a million things. So I really got with the program when I looked at Cape Hattaras and made the connection to what we were doing. And again, like the people of Ely, I was guilty, I think, of being too near to be really convinced of the value of that project. Getting away and looking at something else was a great catalyst.

MR: What was the feeling of the League initially? Was there some disagreement over the issue?

DZ: Yes, I think if we'd have had a vote when we began, we'd have lost seventy to thirty. I'd have loved a vote because we came around and really changed some attitudes. You know damn it, we did the job. I can

remember going up to Eveleth and talking to the Lions Club and they had a "you jerk, Zentner" kind of attitude. But later, if there had been a vote, I think the least we'd have done in the north would have been sixty/forty victory, fifty-five/forty-five victory, a fifty/fifty standoff. It was amazing. This was even though we had horrible Harold LeVander, who stumbled all over the place during the congressional subcommittee hearings. In spite of that strong pressure from some of the Republican stronghold in northern Minnesota, they sensed that the people, including the majority up north, wanted it. So we ended up with a popular kind of thing.

MR: Do you think that in the enthusiasm to get a national park and the desire to show that Minnesota was unified in support of that proposal, that the benefits to International Falls and to that area were overpromised?

DZ: I don't think intentionally. I think in reality there may be some of that in the execution. I don't think we did anything intentionally, and I don't say that defensively. At least I hope I'm not, because I hope I'm balancing and trying to give you an honest answer. I think basically the statistics and the input we had on use and economic impact were really the best information available at the time of the debate and the discussion and the vote. Since then, with the lack of progress on acquisition and development, the reality has been below what we anticipated. Benefits have been less, but I don't think all that much less if we look at them and if we put the multiplier effect on it. So, I don't think we overpromised knowingly, but I think the results have been below what we'd anticipated.

MR: I spoke with Fred Witzig, who says that people should not judge Voyageurs by the way it is today, but what it will look like twenty years from now. Although the Park Service has moved slowly for a number of reasons, the park is going to be a much greater asset in the future.

DZ: Oh, I'm absolutely convinced of it. Will Rogers was right, they aren't making any more of it. Our grandchildren and their grandchildren will have it to enjoy, if we haven't totally destroyed the planet by then. Fred's right on.

We made one major mistake in my generation in that we didn't acquire more public lands than we did. I wouldn't apologize a minute for being of the mentality of "get the land, see me tomorrow about developing and managing it. Just get me the stuff before it's gone." A good deal of our Voyageurs National Park campaign was that kind of mentality. I'll tell you, public ownership is a wonderful thing for all of its problems. Hell, I know that's dumb, but I'm so convinced of that. You try to find endangered wildlife on private lands. You try to find scenic beauty and historical sites, and by in large, it just isn't there.

There are some good things happening, like the Upper Mississippi River Headwaters Board and the Jackson Hole Trust. There are men and women working on a combination of legal contrivances and trust bequests. What we have, especially in areas like Jackson Hole, is high public ownership

and great political resistance to further public ownership. That is the same situation in Cook County. This means we probably are going to be using new tools in the future. Anyway, without rambling further and further, Fred is right. I agree with him.

MR: What do you mean by using new tools? New management plans?

DZ: Not so much management plans, but new techniques. For example, Jackson County, Wyoming has ninety percent public ownership--federal, state, county--like Cook County, Minnesota. Jackson Hole is flourishing.

That development threatens wintering elk and the agricultural way of life of the landowners. Most of those people don't want to give up their lands to the federal government, and Jackson County doesn't want to lose those taxes. So they've set up a bunch of easements and a trust, as if you were Larry Rockefeller. How do you like that? You have the Jackson Hole Land Trust pay you for an easement. In exchange for which, you will never have a gravel pit, or a McDonald's, or a Best Western on your ranch.

It will always be a ranch. We accomplish the preservation of the landscape and the prevention of unfavorable development. You are given some remuneration at that time for giving up a use which at least in our economic code is considered a higher use--the Best Western, the McDonald's, or the highway. The elk win. The ranchers win. We get some money to them, yet the rancher still decides who walks on his or her land and he or she still pays taxes.

There's a lot of interesting things happening, evolving. Those are the tools I'm talking about, where because of economic or political constraints, we may be working more with those kinds of compacts in the future. We've learned a lot about that, thanks to the people at Jackson Hole. That's a fascinating story.

MR: Yes, that's a technique of the future--conservation and scenic easements. The Nature Conservancy uses more of them now.

DZ: Right, The Nature Conservancy was an acquisition outfit originally, but now they are working with scenic easements. I think there has been a proselytization of that Nature Conservancy effort.

MR: That's interesting because the scenic easements is not something that's been applied up north. It's really been used in the southern part of the state.

DZ: Yes. Well, the difference has been acquisition has been cheaper up north. The difference has been those of us who are environmentalists have said, "We don't trust you locally." We had a lot of reasons for not being trusting, like the Indians have had a lot of reasons for not trusting us.

You know, "I don't trust you up there in Headwaters Board to protect the upper Mississippi River." "Well, give us a chance." "Well, if you don't, we will..." I guess it's better than nothing. By God, so far they haven't done a bad job. Although I still have a little bit of a Missouri attitude about it, because they haven't had any real tough decisions, any real development pressures. We won't really know until the day comes when somebody drives up in a big, old Cadillac and says, "Love you, baby."

Here's what I want to do." Then we'll really find out. At this point in time, however, what's been done, they've done pretty well. So I'm still somewhat of a doubting Thomas, but I've got to admit that I was at least partly wrong in regards to the sincerity and the ability of those people to work together.

MR: You mentioned the Izaak Walton League Endowment Fund which has been very important in northeastern Minnesota, particularly. I'm not really aware of present League endowment activities. Are they ongoing?

DZ: Oh, sure. It's going on. By endowment standards, it's pitifully small. I just had a report--I think there might be a million bucks in it right now. What they've done with the roll-over is fund the principal and continue with acquisitions.

MR: So there still are areas which the endowment fund is interested in acquiring?

DZ: Oh yes, it's doing some wonderful things. I don't know of any current activity in the Boundary Waters, but for example, there is a proposal by the Cass County Izaak Walton League chapter to get some substantial help from the endowment for their Deep Portage Preserve, if you're familiar with that. There's a wonderful project going on out in Oregon. Again, there is the need to have a win, win situation, instead of playing hardball politics and ending up with winners and losers as we did in the Boundary Waters.

Managing our western lands, even though I live in Duluth, Minnesota, is of great interest to me. The abuse of those lands by what I referred to earlier--the mineral, cattle and timber industries--has always amazed me.

How could that be? How could those few people manipulate the Congress to the detriment of the owners, the American people? It's taken me a long time to understand the way western agriculture works--these animal grazing units, I think they call them AUMs or something, are directly related to a rancher's ability to collateralize that family ranch to stay alive. So on the one hand, you have high-handed people like Dave Zentner who are outraged at grazing policies, at the destruction of habitat that should be equally available to antelope, elk, white tail, mule deer and so on. But there also has been a lack of understanding of those ranching families out west, who are at least as good people as Dave Zentner is.

We put together a project in Oregon of trying to combine the interests of the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service and of truly listening to ranchers to work out a better management schematics. We had a pilot project that's just every bit as fascinating and as much fun as the Jackson Hole Land Trust, funded by the the endowment. We've got some wonderful people working on it who've spent a lifetime as public servants in the Forest Service, who were in the Portland Oregon chapter. Anyway, your question reminded me of that project and my thoughts about it--how important it is and how much good it can do. So that's an example of what the endowment is doing.

I'm no longer that active in it nationally, although the Izaak Walton

League has an odd thing which I unsuccessfully tried to eliminate when I was national chairman of the board. Past national presidents are national directors for the rest of their lives.

MR: At age fifty, you're looking at thirty, forty odd years.

DZ: I hope so. The reason that I objected to it wasn't that, however. It's just that most of those people quit coming to meetings. We carry them on the roster, and they don't do a damn thing. Why have them listed? I think you deserve to be a national director only if you justify it by execution. Anyway, that's another story for another day.

MR: Once again, the League is getting away from strictly acquisition to new management tools.

DZ: Right, better management partnerships, making us work together. It sounds like a sop, but caring about each other more. Not freezing into those patterns of "You're a bastard because of what you stand for." "You're a lousy rancher." I'm not saying that's the way I felt about ranchers, but I was outraged by what I saw. I was outraged by the condition of the land. I'd read all the articles that would reinforce my outrage. Now I'm tempted to walk up to that rancher and say, "Hey, I'm Dave Zentner. I'm an environmentalist. I'm not a bad guy. What's going on with you?" That's what we're starting to do by necessity, I guess.

MR: I have one note here that I do want to ask you about. I saw a letter that you wrote to Rita Shemesh in 1969, in which you say that including Crane Lake would be a fatal mistake to Voyageurs. Did you feel that way because politically that might be like cutting your own throat?

DZ: No. What bugged me about that acquisition was all the property up there. It was a classic example where it wasn't that critical to the viability of the project, but it would be one more symbol of the national government laying it on the local person. We could still have a viable park project because we had more acquisition in that area--more property, more ownership, more cabins, more homes. That was why I was concerned. I was probably motivated by some people locally, I think. You know, there was a friend of mine who basically was not that concerned about the Voyageurs National Park issue until they walked in and said, "We're going to include this, and we're going to take your land for it." That's the thing that I had in my mind at the time I wrote Rita. It was an area that would stress us, not the politics of Congress, but the politics of living, the politics that would be faced by the first park superintendent, which were tougher than hell. That's the kind of politics that I was talking about.

MR: The Izaak Walton League, it seems to me, has often had professional people join it--park rangers, Forest Service people--who perhaps had to carry out a policy at work that they didn't necessarily favor, but who could go to the Izaak Walton League meeting and talk about it. What has been the Izaak Walton League's relationship with the administrative and the Forest Service management? Obviously, it depends somewhat on the issues.

DZ: Twenty-five years ago most of the groups, the "old line" groups including the Ikes, the National Wildlife Federation, etc. had close relationships with the managing agencies. You went to an Izaak Walton League meeting in 1950 or 1960, and you probably found the local fish manager and game warden there. If it were in the north country, there might be a couple of Forest Service people there. One of the sad things that's happened to us--us being environmental community in general, and the Ikes in particular--is that we began to become more activist in the sixties and especially the seventies because of the legal posturing, the court syndrome. There were a lot of the professional people who felt that they were misunderstood. There were a lot of professional people who were advised by their employers, "Stay away from the Sierra Club and Izaak Walton League because we may be in court with those SOB's tomorrow."

So it's changed that whole relationship. It's changed it to the point where you don't see many conservation professionals. We've got some people at the national level who work for the Forest Service, but by in large, you don't see the professional employees either at our meetings or in our membership that you did at one time. I think basically it's a loss. It's unfortunate if their careers are all threatened by the membership cards which they, as private individuals, seek out. We lose because very often I think we wouldn't go to courtrooms, we wouldn't go to administrative hearings, if we had the opportunity to say, "Hey, Margaret, you work in Voyageurs Park. What the hell is going on there?", and talk it out. Everything today has to be formal--we have to have this master plan, we have to have this wonderful things called "public input opportunities".

I can recall about two falls ago being at a workshop in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Paul Hanson had set up a meeting for a group of people from Alaska to look at canvasbacks. People from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service volunteered their time that Saturday afternoon, which was really nice of them. By in large, they were younger people, well educated professionals who didn't know who the hell the Izaak Walton League was. They were completely out of touch with the very outfit which had much to do with the establishment of the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge. They did their jobs and probably well, but they didn't have much of a sense of the group that in part had made their careers possible. We have really lost that in the past couple of decades. I would like to see that change, but it doesn't look like it will.

MR: To turn to a different subject, the Izaak Walton League has been very active on the Upper Mississippi. What are some of the League's goals for the Mississippi?

DZ: Well, the Upper Miss, from St. Louis to Minneapolis, if that's what we'll call the Upper Miss, is incredibly important to the Izaak Walton League. It's important to the middle of the country. We've destroyed the wetlands on both sides of the Mississippi from St. Louis to Minneapolis for all practical purposes. So, that makes the wetlands which remain important primarily for staging and migratory purposes, but also for nesting purposes. They're more important than they've ever been. The

fishery resource is tremendously important, including some animals that don't occur in a lot of other habitats. Recreationally, the impact of the river is unbelievable. The threats from sedimentation, more powerful tows, winter navigation, locating industry along the river, are tremendous.

Let me give you an example from the recent history of the League, which reminds me of what happened to our native American friends. Fritz Mondale said to me, "Zentner, you're going to be happy with me. I'm going to vote for every lock down there, but we're going to put together a management plan for that river." Well, that's a lot of words, Fritz, but what we've got is a dam being built while they promised mitigation. It's like we told the Indians, "Move over here and you can stay here as long as the grass grows and the buffaloes roam." That's what they've done to the environmentalists in the Upper Mississippi. They promised mitigation if we would quit being such jerks in preventing this one little project for the barge industry. But what happens is that the barge industry gets their thing, and we get ripped off and we don't get mitigation. Or we get totally inadequate mitigation or we get a study that's voluminous but about as effective as a Piper Cub trying to stop the Russian air force.

So in summary, the Upper Mississippi is extremely important--emotionally, symbolically, and actually. To the Izaak Walton League it's a very high priority. Paul Hanson, Margaret, has done a tremendous job on the Upper Mississippi. He's just been great since we've had him here. He's really kept his eye on that ball. I don't think there's any debate--particularly in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, where we have had regional meetings on the subject. Have you spent much time on the Mississippi?

MR: Not too much, no.

DZ: That's real roots country for me, even though I'm a jackpine savage and love the lake country. It's real roots. I had a Huck Finn kind of existence from the time I was about twelve or thirteen until I was about eighteen or nineteen. I had a lot of personal growth. It's a wonderful place. But, again, like so much of our planet, it's just getting the hell beat out of it--by industrial development along the river and by poor land management practices, primarily through agricultural herbicides, pesticides, barging, towing, and dredge spoil disposal.

MR: Do you see any progress in the attitudes of the agricultural community? You hear a lot more about agricultural run-off now, but is anybody doing anything about it?

DZ: Well, in it's own little way, the agricultural act of 1975 with its conservation reserves was a start. The greatest benefit for land management may be the crippled condition of the agricultural community, more than education.

To me, the greatest failure in this country in terms of the environment has been environmental education. When I was a kid, we called it conservation education and we said, correctly, if we could just teach our

children, then when they were adults they could do a better job of decision-making. The problem is at K-12. There is a problem at the collegiate level--even at Northland College, where I am trustee, and which considers itself an environmentally sensitive college. Whenever we get into a budgetary pinch, the first thing that gets thrown out by the board of education is K-12 environmental ed. Most teachers don't understand it and don't know how to teach it. They're more interested in the three R's and of course, today we understand that there's a real justification for re-emphasis there.

So, more than education, the terrible problem of farmers economically and the commodity price depression, for the short term, will be the best conservation agent we may have. That's more by accident, by quirk in the society, than it is on purpose, which is a sad commentary. I'm jaded enough so that I'll take the results any way I can get them. If we can protect some lands, even for a decade or so, under set-aside programs, under RIM, I'll take it. I won't be a purist and say, "Well, you're not doing this because you've seen the light." I'll take it any way I can get it.

I really think, in this country right now, we're so into ourselves. We're so into profit. What the hell was it I just read in Newsweek or Time? There was a guy, a yuppie, who had hit the boom in Houston and now was caught up by that slump. But Houston wasn't all bad because he had paid for two Porsches and a condo. Well, you know, I like money and I work hard to make money and enjoy it and express my lifestyle, but there's got to be more to it by the time they cremate us or bury us than that. That article, I thought, expressed an awful lot of the mentality of upscale twenty-five to forty year olds today. I see it in my own children. Not that they're bad kids, they're wonderful kids, but there's a tremendous concentration on themselves. I digress, but that does not bode well for the land ethic. That does not bode well for lifestyles which try to be in tune with what the planet can afford. It bodes well for the successors to Walter Elias Disney, who want to develop where I was a week ago.

MR: That's something that struck me too, is that you wonder who is going to replace some of the older people in the Izaak Walton League, who have devoted literally years of their lives to it.

DZ: Well, first of all, that's a good question. I don't necessarily have the answer, although the Ikes are showing a revitalization that's really encouraging. The other fact is that the Ikes are a wonderful organization, my favorite organization. For all my life, I hope to be part of the Ikes. But for whatever reason, if we begin to dinosaur, then other organizations will evolve and take our place. They already have in some sense, and they are doing a good job as well.

MR: But do you see a future where there will be people like Bud Heinselman who would spend four years of his life and several thousand dollars sitting in Washington lobbying?

DZ: I'm not sure that I know the answer to that, but the funny part of it is along with the kooks like Bud and Zentner and all the rest of us,

there's always been people emotionally affected by the natural resources.

For example, Keith Russell, whom I met last year in Iceland, is a past president of Ducks Unlimited. I'm a member of DU, but I look at DU as sort of a rich man's club. DU's done wonderful work; God, they've done tremendous work. But it has also been a place for bankers, insurance men like me, and industrial leaders to cure their conscience a little bit by staying out of the politics of the environmental movement while contributing to wetlands conservation so they can shoot more ducks. In the process, they have done a hell of a lot of good. Keith Russell, who's wonderful, a jet-setter, a well-to-do person, did a little book called The Fishing Gentleman. He had sixty-nine people plus himself write down their favorite fishing story. Not about how-to, not about environmental protection, not about aquatic biology, but their stream-side experiences.

I was struck last night by one of the stories by a doctor from Ohio who talks about sitting on a train. I did, too, at the age of nineteen, from Clinton, Iowa to Ontario, Oregon, about the same age as this doctor was when he went to West Yellowstone. He talked about looking at every river the train crossed from Ohio to West Yellowstone, thinking, "Well, if there aren't trout in that stream, at least there's some blue gills and some bass." Now, what does that have to do with going to Washington and spending thousands of dollars of your personal fortune like Bud did? It seems that emotional thread, whether it's to protect Atlantic salmon, the Boundary Waters, seals or whatever, has produced those kinds of heroes throughout this country's history. So that's very encouraging. What's discouraging is that we are all outnumbered by reproduction and by people who don't care that much. We're losing great gobs of land, and we've got tremendous amounts of pollution. If you don't think about the future of the planet, we're really in big trouble.

I think on the specific issues we'll probably always have Don Quixotes tilting at windmills. The question is: Can the Don Quixotes convert enough of the population to have a sustainable life on the planet? That's really what the Ikes have always been about. That's what the Friends of the Earth are about. But really, we've been losing on all fronts. We really have. We've had periods of time when we've shot forward. Water qualities improved, certain air contaminant standards have improved, but if you look at the broad, long-term picture, and you look at the recent reports on the atmospheric greenhouse effect of carbon emissions and acid rain, we have had a very superficial effect. I've seen us change as a nation substantially. We made love with the environment for awhile in the sixties and the seventies, and now we've sort of said, "Well, let the EPA take care of it."

MR: Speaking of conversion and the Upper Mississippi, do you think the Corps of Engineers has seen the light? Have they been converted?

DZ: No. A little bit. Some of their employees are very converted but the agency is not.

MR: Is that another windmill?

DZ: That's another windmill, yes. I hate to make those generalizations

because as quickly as you do, you're unfair. No, the Corps isn't converted. The agenda isn't that much different. I don't think there's any doubt that some long-term employees of the Corps have been converted.

I'd love to take the Corps and make them a CCC to work in urban areas, because they have a tremendous amount of engineering expertise. If you could get them out of ruining the rural environment and get them into some urban areas, I think the country could find a good way to apply them. I don't think we've got that kind of imagination in the White House and I'm not sure we're about to elect it, but that's another story.

MR: What about the Weaver Bottoms project? Isn't that a sign of the new Corps?

DZ: Looks good. Yes, that looks good. I'm really excited about it. That could be a several part cooperative effort by the state, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Corps of Engineers. That might be an opportunity to really turn some things around. When push comes to shove, however, the Corps' real agenda, like most bureaucracy, is growth. Their growth isn't on Weaver Bottoms. Their growth is on barges and dams and cleaning and constructing.

MR: So, unless their mission is changed, they're not going to change?

DZ: That's right. That's right.

MR: Thank you, Mr Zentner.