

Interview with Paul I.V. Strong

Interviewed by James E. Fogerty  
Minnesota Historical Society

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in Walker, Minnesota

**JF:** Paul, are you a Midwesterner? You don't sound like you're going to tell me that you are.

**PS:** No, I'll tell you I'm going to sound like I'm from Maine, and I am. I'm from Maine. My accent evaporates after leaving the border and comes back to me after I am across for a few hours. I've been here for four and a half years.

**JF:** And you've gone remarkably midwestern.

**PS:** I'm not sure what to think of that. [Laughter]

**JF:** Good, bad, or indifferent. We'll leave that to future...

**PS:** ...As long as I don't end my sentences with prepositions, I'll be okay. That seems to be a classic for Midwesterners. [Laughter]

**JF:** All right, so you were born in Maine. Did you go to school in Maine?

**PS:** I went to elementary and secondary school there and went to the University of Maine at Orono. For my bachelor's degree, I went to Oklahoma State University. I spent a little hitch out in the Southwest--as we think of it, they call it the Midwest--and went back to Maine again and did a doctoral degree there before I came here.

**JF:** Did you, by any chance, happen to know Sandy Ives?<sup>1</sup>

**PS:** I do know Sandy, but not well. I've heard him give some talks.

**JF:** Paul, your Ph.D. is in...

**PS:** ...My Ph.D. is in wildlife resources.

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an oral historian at the University of Maine at Orono

**JF:** What is wildlife resources?

**PS:** Well, it would be the same as saying wildlife biology or wildlife ecology. By the time you get to the Ph.D., you usually tailor-make your own degree. My emphasis is really in ecology. The program was called wildlife resources. I consider myself an ecologist. Maybe that's the best way to describe it.

**JF:** That's interesting. One of the things that is hard for me--and I suspect of a lot of other people--to get a handle on is how exactly one is trained to work in wildlife management. Is that field, like so many others, broken into a whole series of subfields, and do you have to specialize when you get a Ph.D.?

**PS:** You do, as a matter of fact, and it's even unfair to lump people as ecologists. Ecology is an extremely broad field. You might be a specialist in how biological communities are arranged. Or you might be a specialist in the taxonomy of some specific group of organisms and could still be an ecologist. So it's a rather broad term. I tend to use it because I don't like to be pigeonholed into what most people think a wildlife biologist is--a person interested in propagating some popular game species. I think that my perspective is quite different than that. I may have an unusual perspective for a wildlife biologist. I don't consider myself a traditional wildlife biologist.

**JF:** Within that field, though, did you have to specialize in any particular area?

**PS:** No, you can, but you don't have to. It depends on how you set up your program. I was most interested in--for lack of a better term--ecosystems. I was interested in the way these systems--in a sense, how nature--worked, particularly with animals. And even more specifically, how does what people do to the landscape affect everything else on the landscape. That's a little bit different--not a unique perspective--but a little bit different from most people enrolled in the same program.

**JF:** Looking at the human interest...

**PS:** ...Yes, and looking at it from this very broad ecological perspective. A lot of my peers went on to become university professors and researchers, specializing in one species or one group of species. Very few of them would call themselves ecologists, I would guess.

**JF:** When you graduated, what was the first job?

**PS:** It's the job I got at Northland College.

**JF:** Tell me a little bit about that job. Was it there when you came? Was one created for you?

**PS:** It was a combination. Tom Klein, author of the book Loon Magic, had met me as he was writing Loon Magic on the East Coast. I was up in the middle of the Maine woods getting bitten by mosquitoes and black flies, and he was touring the East talking to knowledgeable people about loons. My advisor left a note on my desk saying that so-and-so was here and was doing a book. "You don't know who he is, but you should meet him and talk to him."

I didn't get back in touch with him. I was home for two or three days and then I went back up into the woods and didn't think about it until later.

I was asked to go to a loon festival in New Hampshire, which was truly a festival of people who are interested in loons in a state that probably has more support for loon preservation than any other. I was asked by a friend of mine whom I have mentioned to you, Jeff Fair, who runs the Loon Preservation Committee for the New Hampshire Audubon Society.

He said, "Sit up on stage with me and another person and answer questions and interact with people at this loon festival."

Being such a good friend I said, "Sure, Jeff. We'll go drink beer afterwards, and we'll use that as an excuse for getting together."

So I went, and Tom Klein was there. We sat around and talked about loons afterwards because I was doing a research project that involved loons as the study animal. We got to talking.

Tom said, "You know, we have this loon preservation program out here at Northland College at the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute. I think the person who is running that might be leaving. Maybe you'd be interested."

And I said, "Maybe."

Almost a year later, that actually came to pass. The position was open. The job description looked very much like me, and I think it was purposely made that way. Although he wasn't saying, "Let's hire Paul Strong," he was using my credentials, in a sense, for setting up that job description.

It was different from the one for the person who had done the job before.

And I ended up winning the competition for that job.

**JF:** Had he remained in contact with you during the intervening time?

**PS:** Yes, not in really close contact, but we talked to each other. I

knew a few months before the job came out that he was thinking about this.

It amuses me, because after I read the job description, I thought, "God, the only thing this doesn't say is--5'10", dark complexion, dark hair, and near-sighted. [Laughter] I thought the job was mine, and it turned out to be mine. It wasn't mine all along, but it was clear that they were looking for someone like me.

**JF:** Was this part of a conscious effort on his part to make the program more structured, do you think?

**PS:** He was trying to change the program a little bit. He had started this Wisconsin project, LoonWatch, in 1978 and had seen it evolve since that time into the mid-'80s. He thought that what this project needed next was someone who was an expert who could lend scientific credibility to the public awareness programs they had started. In a sense, these volunteers, who were a part of the program, needed to be taken to a different level. I think he saw this as one way to do that.

Tom left the Institute very soon after I was hired. At an advisory board meeting, his last one as director of the Institute, he told the board and the staff that he was proud of many things that he had done and sorry that he hadn't done many things he wanted to do. He saw as his last accomplishment the hiring of three people whom he thought would see the program that he started through to the end of the '80s. He hoped that we would be around that long.

One of the three was the current director of the Institute, Mark Peterson, who had been brought on as associate director as Tom began to move away and write his loon book. He actually ran the show in Tom's absence, even though Tom was still director. Another was Denny Olson from Duluth, who, in his various alter egos, really gave the Institute a big shot in the arm and also the Minnesota loon program at its inception. The third person was me. We were the three musketeers that he brought on. It was a conscious effort by him to, in a sense, load those positions with people that he wanted. It's interesting how he did that. There was no associate director position before Mark Peterson. Tom Klein created one, because he knew he was going to need somebody to take over. There was no position for Denny Olson. Klein created one and hired Denny without competition and talked the administration into doing that. And even though there was a position that I filled, he hired a very different person than the one who had been there in the past. I always saw that--I still see that--as a conscious effort on his part to leave a legacy of people that he wanted to be there.

**JF:** How is the Sigurd Olson Institute funded? Is it a program of Northland College?

**PS:** It's a program of the college. It always has been. There's a lot of confusion about that, because at various times, they have drifted apart or been closer together. It was founded under times that were not the best for Northland. Northland was struggling in the early '70s. Bob [Robert] Matteson, a retired government official, thought that what this college needed was an environmental outreach institute, and he founded it. It got a lot of press. All of the important people from Cable, Saint Paul, Madison, Chicago, and other places got involved. The current president was not able to get those people involved before that time to the degree he would have liked. There was a lot of jealousy. Who was more powerful--Bob Matteson, or the president of the college, or chairman of the board of trustees? It was probably Bob Matteson.

So the Institute was founded in that way, and it has raised its own money. One of the restrictions on its operation was that the college couldn't afford to start it. So the Institute had to track donors, had to create an endowment, had to get contracts, and it did that. We now have a limited endowment, a lot of annually renewing donors, some contract work, and some teaching duties at the college. It's not soft money, because we really know that most of it is going to be there if we just do what we're supposed to. It's not hard money though--it could dry up overnight. I call it gelatinous money. [Laughter]

**JF:** Neither hard nor soft.

**PS:** Neither hard nor soft, and I couldn't think of a better term. It's sort of gelatinous; it could go away. But if you do what you're supposed to do, it shouldn't. The LoonWatch program within the Institute, just one of the Institute's ongoing programs, has funded itself primarily through donations. We have had around 1,500 or more donors in recent years who--through giving fifteen, twenty-five, fifty, a hundred, and even a lot more dollars--have supported the program. The LoonWatch relationship to the Institute has been much like the Institute's relationship to the college. The Institute is important for the college. If the college lost it, it'd be a terrible thing.

But the college has wanted it to pay its own way. It is the same with LoonWatch. LoonWatch, in a sense, has transcended expectations. LoonWatch appears to be bigger than the Institute sometimes. And if LoonWatch were to dry out, the Institute would suffer. LoonWatch has had to pull its own weight, as well. I've been very interested that there's been a lack of commitment of sorts.

**JF:** And yet, it has been a success because of somebody's ability to generate commitment in terms of dollars inside the Institute.

**PS:** That's right. If times were to get tough for LoonWatch--if in 1990,

our funding were to fall by fifty percent because donations dropped off--you would not see fifty percent come from another place to restore LoonWatch to the level it was. I can guarantee you that. That's not a negative comment on who runs the programs--that's simply how it works. Even though the Institute would suffer, I think, because of the lack of visibility that it has through the LoonWatch program and the lack of the good that the LoonWatch program does, that's what would happen. It would hold back by fifty percent, and a lot of scrambling would go on to find funds. It's an interesting funding system. I've never liked it totally. I've understood it. I wish that it had been set up a slightly different way.

**JF:** With more institutional commitment?

**PS:** Yes. I think that the LoonWatch program, at least in recent years, has pulled along the Institute, much like the Institute has pulled along the college. And yet the lead programs have always had to pay for themselves, even though they are the most important ones. The pressure has been on with the understanding that if funding levels do fall, you will have to retract. That's kind of an uncomfortable feeling to have.

**JF:** I can see how it would be. Can you talk a little bit about LoonWatch's predecessor organization? When it first was formed, I got something in the mail that said "LoonWatch." I didn't really know what it was, because I had joined something called the "Minnesota Loon Preservation Project."

**PS:** Right, right. In a sense, it's all happened rather smoothly. Wisconsin Project LoonWatch started in 1978 and has continued through to today, although now it's called LoonWatch because it's combined with the Minnesota effort. Minnesota's history is much more--what's the right word here?--I can't even think of the right word. It's gone through different phases. It's been a much rougher road than the Wisconsin project.

**JF:** Who decided to fuse the two of them?

**PS:** The Institute did in the beginning of 1989--about a year ago. In Minnesota, you'd really have to go all the way back to Judy McIntyre, who is the "loon goddess" of the world. [Laughter] Judy knows more about loons than anyone else does and deserves all the respect she gets for that. She was a grad student at the University of Minnesota. She did the first detailed study of loon life, of its history/biology/ecology, as well as how humans relate to loons. Sig Olson's son, Sigurd T. Olson, did the first detailed study of basic loon biology twenty years earlier. But Judy did the one that people really recognize as a benchmark. I wouldn't put Sig down. For what he did in his time was extremely important, and certainly way ahead of what other people were doing with nongame animals.

But anyway, Judy was there in the early '70s, and she got people interested in loons in Minnesota--getting them to send in information about numbers of loons, how many chicks they produced, what kinds of problems loons were having in the state. She had a program which I believe was called Project Loon Watch. She ran that while she was a grad student and collected some data on the things that I mentioned. Judy graduated in 1975 with her Ph.D. and went to New York. She left Project Loon Watch behind, although she continued to work with the Department of Natural Resources in getting a little bit of information on loon populations. In the mid-'70s, when these loon organizations were beginning out East--like the Loon Preservation Committee--a couple of guys from the Twin Cities area got interested and formed the Minnesota Loon Appreciation Project, the predecessor to the one that you mentioned. These two fellows' names are Duane DeBower, from Chaska, and Eivind Hoff, from Shoreview.

Duane is involved with insurance; Eivind was a fund-raiser for one of the hospitals in the Twin Cities area, and quite successful at that, as I understand. They were interested in loons. I think they might have attended a meeting that was held in Minnesota or Wisconsin, the first time in the Midwest, to which Judy McIntyre, Rawson Wood--all these people from out East who were involved--came. They got turned on to it and started this project. They were doing it on a volunteer basis, while they were both working full time at other jobs--in fact, other jobs that must have kept them very busy working more than forty hours a week. They didn't really get as much done as they wanted, except they raised a bunch of money. They saw that they weren't going to be able to take the program where they wanted to go with it; they just didn't have the time to do that. So they sat on that for a while and it became defunct. There was nothing going on for a few years.

The Institute, meanwhile, was doing Wisconsin Project LoonWatch, and Denny Olson--I think it really was his idea--thought maybe we should get involved with this in Minnesota. After all, Minnesota probably has more loons than any other state in the Lower Forty-Eight. Minnesota's problems with loons are certainly somewhat similar to those of Wisconsin. The loon is also the state bird. There were lots of good reasons. It was expected that people would be even more excited there than Wisconsin. Duane and Eivind were on the Institute advisory board. In fact, I probably ought to mention that. It really was Duane and Eivind's idea, I guess. They were pushing us to do that. I think through Denny, the idea came to the attention of the Institute staff and we looked it over. They were going to give us what was left of the money that they had raised, about \$15,000, to help offset part of the operating costs for the first couple of years. And we did it. In 1986, we began the Minnesota Loon Preservation Project.

**JF:** In Duluth.

**PS:** With an office in Duluth. It's interesting why that turned out to be in Duluth. Why not the Twin Cities? Why not Ely? Why not Walker?

The pieces do all fit together. Denny Olson got hired by Tom Klein. He and Tom were seeing eye-to-eye on a lot of things and shared the same philosophy and visions. Denny didn't have the same rapport with the new director. He didn't have bad rapport, but it wasn't the same. Denny was living in Iron River, Wisconsin, about thirty or so miles from Ashland. He had just gotten married to a woman who was teaching in Cloquet and wanted to live there. They didn't want to live apart, and he didn't want to commute from the Duluth area. He was looking for ways to live in Duluth. It's no coincidence that the office turned out to be in Duluth. I don't believe that Denny would have stayed with it if he had been told, "Well, no, the office will be in Ashland," or, "The office will be in the Twin Cities," or somewhere not close by. A good example of how people affect what happens. He wanted to be in Duluth.

I'm not sure Duluth was the right place to do it; I'm not sure it wasn't.

We justified it in a sense because Denny was going to be there, and we could justify that. A big city is better than a small town, and certainly it was good to be in the heart of loon range in the north. Although I think the true support for loons probably comes out of the Twin Cities, with people who escape to the north. That's something we'll never know. So it ended up being in Duluth.

**JF:** And it really was the creature, then, in that revised form, of the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute, despite the fact that it was headquartered in Minnesota.

**PS:** That's right. It was our first field office, except it was the loon project equivalent of what we had going in Wisconsin--which is housed in the Institute building in Ashland. We could have had a Wisconsin office as a field office somewhere else, and that would have been equivalent of what went on in Duluth. So here Denny was needing to get some donors, needing to get some programs started and to make this thing fly. It didn't work as well as we would have liked. There were a lot of costs involved with having an office away from our headquarters--where we don't have to pay rent and other things. The administrative overhead got to be too much, and the project did not grow nearly as fast as we all hoped. Who knows the reason? Perhaps Denny wasn't the best manager. Maybe he was the best that we could have had and it just wasn't there. We'll never know that. I think a lot of people have their own opinions, probably falling on both sides of that fence. Nonetheless, it didn't take off like we wanted, even though we did some really good things. The memberships just didn't come in. The problem was money.



**JF:** Do you think it was partly that you were 150 miles away from the population center of the state?

**PS:** I think so. It was partly because Denny was seventy miles from what was happening at the Institute, and the communication lines there were not as good. He was by himself. I didn't envy him at all. I didn't want to draw that assignment. It was considered.

**JF:** Sending you to Duluth?

**PS:** Sending me to do that. And I didn't want that assignment. I might have taken it, I might have said no. I don't know; it never came to that. I think it might have done better in the Twin Cities.

**JF:** Certainly in terms of putting up public programs and things to try to interest people, it might have been easier to do because there was...

**PS:** ...More money, more people, perhaps more interest than in Duluth. As we saw the expenses go up on one curve, even though the memberships and income came up, it wasn't nearly at the same rate, so we had to make a decision. The college was running a deficit. The board of trustees were getting very nervous. They didn't like to run deficits, particularly on loon projects that were not considered essential to the rest of the college. Finally, the board of trustees decided, "Hey, you either balance that budget or you get rid of the program or do something. You've got to bring that back in."

Those were hard times to deal with. We were trying to make this thing fly. There was a good reason. I mean, we weren't just trying to have another program for bigger budgets. There was a lot of good work to do. We had to do something. It wasn't fun going through the discussions at that time. We decided that we wanted to try to make a go of the Minnesota Loon Preservation Project. It had taken on a new name: Minnesota LoonWatch. During that time it had gone from the Minnesota Loon Preservation Project--with a difficult acronym to deal with--to Minnesota LoonWatch, which is shorter, neater, and people understand it better. We decided that we would continue Minnesota LoonWatch but that we would fold it back in administratively to Ashland. There were lots of discussions. Would people continue to send money to a Wisconsin address? Would they identify with a program for Minnesota in Wisconsin? We had no way of judging whether that would happen or not. We thought maybe we would be able to tell by how our donations did and how people responded to us just in a general way.

Denny Olson resigned soon thereafter. Those are not two coincidental things. He wasn't fired. He could have come to Ashland and run that

project. He was welcome to do that. I didn't want two projects to run. He decided that it was a good time to leave. We'd have to talk to him to find out his thinking at the time, but my feeling was that he felt not that the Institute staff had betrayed him, but that he hadn't really been given a fair shake. I had the feeling that he hadn't been given enough support, not enough commitment from the college, not enough support from the Institute staff. I think his marriage wasn't doing well, and he decided that maybe this is a good time to get out of the Sigurd Olson Institute. No hard feelings, just, "Let's not do this anymore."

**JF:** Was part of the reason for putting it in Duluth that they thought Minnesotans wouldn't respond to the Wisconsin Project LoonWatch because they wouldn't see that it was doing them any good? People tend to have a lot of self-interest.

**PS:** Well, you know the provincialism of Minnesota-Wisconsin--the rivalry is there. It was our experience in Wisconsin that people were interested in what went on in their own state boundaries. When I tried to interest our members in Wisconsin about what was going on in Minnesota, or Michigan, on the East Coast, or with loons in Alaska or in their wintering grounds, they wanted to know how that related to Wisconsin. That's where their interest was. We can talk about that more. That is an important phenomenon in all of this: what they're interested in, what the scope of their interest is. We should definitely talk about that some more.

**JF:** Where do the threads begin to weave together, if indeed they do?

**PS:** Here we are having lost our coordinator--the person who knows everything about what's going on in that office, who has all the contacts he's worked very hard on. We've lost a staff person, and because Denny raised approximately half of his salary by doing his earth lore programs--his Critter Man, Dr. Death, The Lost Voyageur, and others--we lost some of the income. We couldn't afford to hire a brand-new person either. What are we going to do? We don't want to let this project go. A decision was made at that time that, because the Institute was pushing bioregionalism as a theme and still is, that this may be a convenient time to test that out. Let's erase a state border. Let's get rid of the one between Wisconsin and Minnesota. We have a mature, solid program in Wisconsin with Wisconsin Project LoonWatch; we should have no fears there. Things haven't gone as well as we'd like in Minnesota. Let's just make it LoonWatch. We thought about another name like Minnesota-Wisconsin LoonWatch or Lake Superior LoonWatch or something like that, and just decided to name it LoonWatch. Let's not give any people any reasons to feel provincial, at least in what we do. If they have reasons, they're their own.

So about a year ago, in about November-December 1988, LoonWatch came to be. We published that in our newsletter, sent out personal letters to all our donors letting them know that this is what's happening, why, and what we hoped to accomplish. So LoonWatch has been just that for a little over a year.

**JF:** How did it work?

**PS:** It didn't appear to affect the donor base. How it affected the public's perceptions is still unclear. It seems to be a strong program. Some interesting things happened, though, that helped. For example, Winona Knits, which uses the loon as a corporate symbol, had been dealt with by Denny. Denny really hit it off with Pat Woodworth, the president of Winona Knits, and with Bruce Hittner, a vice president of mediawerks, for which Winona Knits is a major advertising and public relations account. These people were not just interested in improving their public image; they had a true interest in loons. These people became stronger partners of LoonWatch just as this was happening, and they helped us through by continuing to be strong partners both financially and morally.

**JF:** Despite Denny Olson's departure?

**PS:** Despite his departure. We were a little worried about that. I had to go down and meet these guys, let them know I was a good guy, and that we were committed to what we were doing and needed them to remain committed to us. We had quite a meeting. [Chuckles]

In fact, they flew up from Winona. Pat Woodworth is a pilot, and he flew to Ashland. We had quite a powwow one morning. We didn't know what they were going to ask us. I had in the back of my head that maybe they wanted LoonWatch; maybe they thought that they ought to run that. I was way off base. I wasn't paranoid by that; I thought they might just say, "Let's do it our way."

What they really wanted to was pledge some stronger support and give us some ideas on how we might better market what we were doing. I have called Pat Woodworth and Bruce Hittner "the fairy godmothers of LoonWatch." And they are. In recent years, they were the ones who made a lot of things possible, including a very successful Minnesota Loon Festival in Brainerd.

**JF:** Did you have much contact with--I'm just whirling around in my mind thinking of some of the other places to which somebody in your position would be going. You think of the Wooden Bird, Wild Wings--the organizations and companies that use wildlife to market their own products.

**PS:** No one else of the magnitude of Winona Knits has been interested. We have people who are private business owners who are extremely committed to what we do, but they are on a smaller scale in terms of the volume of cash and merchandise that they deal with. So they can't have the broad effect that Winona Knits can with twenty-four stores or whatever they have in the Upper Midwest. These other people were tremendously important to us, but Winona Knits and the range of their influence was strong. It was broad, and it made us stronger. They continue to be a very strong group. That's the first time we've ever had a partnership like that, almost a corporate partnership. Not really. LoonWatch is not the corporate symbol of Winona Knits--loons are. They are corporate sponsors, but they are not necessarily the only ones. It's not a LoonWatch and Winona Knits and no one else kind of thing. They just happen to be the only ones right now.

**JF:** That's interesting--it's not a company that you would necessarily connect with LoonWatch.

**PS:** I think a lot of it had to do with Pat Woodworth. The guy is sincere and genuine and very thoughtful in an environmental sort of way. He's certainly no dummy as a businessman, either. He understands that those things are good for his business. Bruce Hittner, being a public relations and advertising person, understands that as well. But they have proven to me many times over that it has gone beyond that. They have stuck their necks out for things that would not necessarily have made good public relations sense.

**JF:** From a corporate standpoint?

**PS:** From a corporate standpoint. And stuck with us in that, so I read that as very sincere interest.

**JF:** Since the merger with the Minnesota and Wisconsin organizations as LoonWatch, has there been a concerted attempt to market it? I would think there would be some efficiencies. You don't have to print two newsletters and try to recycle the same information twice; everyone can just read it once. Have there been attempts to do that? Have they been successful?

**PS:** We have reduced the overhead substantially. I don't have an accounting number; I don't know if we've caught up with the deficit that we were running. But it's working--or it's starting to work--the way it's supposed to. Now this past summer we did the first-ever statewide estimate of loons in Minnesota, which took an enormous amount of time. We did that in concert with the DNR's [Department of Natural Resources] nongame wildlife program. It was a tremendous commitment in time and money, as well. And we didn't do the things that we might have done last summer had we not done that survey. For example, I would have beat the bushes awfully hard in Minnesota last summer. I would have gone on a

speaking circuit to end all speaking circuits during the summer talking about loons and LoonWatch, getting people interested in the program.

**JF:** Who would be some of your target audiences?

**PS:** Primarily, people who live on or use lake resources. That would be my number one priority.

**JF:** Lake property associations?

**PS:** Lake property associations, sportsmen's groups, conservation clubs, Audubon groups. In a sense, the converted, but I would not have been preaching to them. I would have been trying to light a fire under them to make them more aware and more active. We generally are not trying to sell anything when we go out and talk about loons and LoonWatch. We may be trying to sell a membership, but we're really trying to make people more aware of what's happening. Once they start thinking about that, we're hoping that what we've started with some awareness they will carry through in action. We didn't do that in 1989; it still needs to be done. I'm not going to be the one, obviously, but someone needs to do that.

**JF:** To capitalize on that.

**PS:** I'm going to do some of it. They don't know that yet. I'm going to do it around here for LoonWatch. I'm going to do that for LoonWatch as a private individual. But it needs to be done institutionally. As we discussing over supper, there needs to be a figurehead. That figurehead can be a volunteer, but it really helps when that person is visible. If I go out and say, "Well, I'm just a volunteer--I'm not affecting what goes on back there," I may still be credible, but I'm not a direct link.

**JF:** Well, right. Are people going to connect somebody like that with the organization, and therefore see your presence as the benefit? Obviously, an organization like LoonWatch must have some of the same basic considerations as any other organization raising money. People have a tendency, despite the intensity of their interest, to ask, "What have you done for me lately?"

Newsletters are nice; people do value them. But after a few years, I would think there are certain people whose commitment would keep them members regardless of what. But there's a larger number who are going to be asking, "What have you done for me lately? When have I heard a speaker of yours? When have I been to a program you've staged? When have I been to an event that you've done?" And so there would seem to be a need to tie that person, or that presentation, to LoonWatch as direct benefit for them. All of a sudden, they can say, "It appears as though it's one of their public programs."

**PS:** That's right.

**JF:** Therefore, it's a benefit for those who come to hear you.

**PS:** That's right.

**JF:** So if it's just you, Paul Strong, wildlife biologist with the National Park Service, it may be less effective for LoonWatch.

**PS:** Yes. I wouldn't do it as a Forest Service employee. I'd just be Paul Strong, but...

**JF:** ...But people would know who you were.

**PS:** Sure. I mean, particularly if I did it right in the area, they would know who I am. For a while, I'm not going to be Paul Strong, Forest Service. For a while I'm going to be Paul Strong, LoonWatch. Like it or not, I have a lot of name recognition in this region because I can be considered an authority on loons in a scientifically credible way. I can't do anything about that. It doesn't matter if I work as a garbage collector. That still follows me. And what I'm hoping I can do in the next couple of years is actually capitalize on that, say, "Well, no, I'm not working for LoonWatch anymore. But you people are still thinking LoonWatch when you see me, and I'm going to tell you about loons now that I'm still a member."

**JF:** Yes, beyond this little area in Minnesota, your association with the National Park Service is going to be largely irrelevant because the only way they're going to remember you and know you is through LoonWatch.

**PS:** That's right.

**JF:** A professional view from the loon expert.

**PS:** Anyone works with a single species or concept like that is remembered for that. Like Judy McIntyre. Almost no one knows where Judy McIntyre works, or what she does. What they do know is that Judy knows more about loons than anyone else. And what they know about me is that I'm somewhere below that. But I'm another one of those people who can be recognized, in a sense, as a national authority on loons. And that sticks with you. It's nice when that same person can be the coordinator of a project like LoonWatch. You can imagine how that helps.

**JF:** It's a nice match.

**PS:** Instant credibility. Instant. All of a sudden, LoonWatch has

wonderful credibility. Look who's coordinating it! This is not just a person going out and giving speeches, not a mercenary speaker. This is a person who is signing the letters, writing the letters, and doing all the dirty work, too. Boy, that's a nice thing. And that's why I mentioned having that figurehead is nice, and it's doubly nice when that person's the coordinator. There are a limited number of people who can fill that spot, obviously. I'm not sure the next coordinator of LoonWatch will, but I'm hoping it will work that way. I know someone who might like to do the job because of what she's done, but she hasn't got the name recognition yet.

**JF:** That brings up an interesting question, which is, the job you just left has not evaporated?

**PS:** Oh, no, I would doubt that it's going to evaporate. LoonWatch is too important. There were some discussions that it might take on a more maintenance mode for at least a short period of time. There are some budgetary, staffing, and other things to deal with within the larger organization. We have a couple of women on pregnancy leave, some people who have just come on board, some other programs that demand staffing. It's not that LoonWatch won't be staffed; it just might not be staffed in exactly the same way. You know, you have to consider what's best for LoonWatch, what's best for the Institute, what's best for the college. Maybe those three things are all the same.

**JF:** All the time.

**PS:** All the time, at least. Who knows? I don't know what I hope. If I'm just thinking about LoonWatch, there's a woman in Ohio that I would want to interview for the job. Because she would do very much what I did, which I think would be good.

**JF:** To get some kind of continuity.

**PS:** Yes. Particularly because we have this unfinished business, or unstarted business. She'd be great for that.

**JF:** How did you get involved with loons? Given the degree you talked about and the variety of options it would offer for specializing, loons seems interesting. How did this happen? Did you fall into it? Did it fall on top of you?

**JF:** Oh, it fell on top of me. I don't know if I believe in fate or not. And since I've been involved with Native American people, I might believe in fate more than I used to. I asked an elder of the Bad River tribe if I could have a totem if I were not an Indian. He thought about it for a while, and then he said he thought maybe I could, that totems weren't just

for Indians, that white people could have them, too. They might not know them when they see them, or might not get the same thing out of them, but he thought so. I told him that I thought that the loon might be my totem.

But because I really didn't understand what a totem was, I wasn't sure. I was trying to ask him if it were possible that the loon was my totem. I didn't want the loon to be my totem. I mean, if I could actually pick a creature, I would have picked a different one. Ravens would probably be my totem. Nonetheless, this loon business kept following me around, and I related several things that have happened to me that made me think this was the case.

One of the things was that when I was a kid I grew up on a lake with loons in Maine. We got close to them; it was a game. I can remember on warm summer nights, from the house near the lake, listening to loons serenading me to sleep. I can't remember a lot of other things, like dogs barking, other birds singing. I can remember that vividly.

I went away to college and was smitten with a woman who lived very close to where I grew up--I went to high school with her but she went to a different college. I would have done almost anything to cross paths with her. When I was a senior in college getting ready to leave for Oklahoma--I already knew I was going to go to grad school out there--her mother, whom I knew fairly well, asked me to come and give a program to some kids about loons. I hadn't done any work with them. I didn't know anything about them, so I had to go to the Maine State Library to find something out about loons. And I found very little, because nothing popular was written about them. I ended up looking in an encyclopedia and then just a book about birds in general--which didn't have a lot of information. And so here was another time I was involved with these loons. How did that happen?

I went to Oklahoma, and I lived in west Texas for awhile, where I saw loons occasionally during migration. When I got back to Oklahoma State, my advisor left for Maine. I didn't want to do a Ph.D. I was tired of school; I had been in too long. He got in touch with me and asked me if I wanted to do a project on something that I wasn't very interested in. Then his boss wrote me a letter saying, "John tells me that you might be interested in doing a Ph.D.," which was a lie. "We have a project. One of them is on loons. You might be interested."

I wasn't that interested. I wanted to work with predators. I was a student of territoriality, and I wanted to work with coyotes, bobcats, and foxes--those kinds of things. I took a chance that if I went to Maine, maybe I'd work on one of those. So I went there, and I got loons.

In fact, I've written an article about this--maybe you've seen it--on how loons had followed me. I wrote it for the North American Loon Fund Newsletter. Because loons have followed me around. Then there was the



chance meeting with Tom Klein and falling into the loon project out here.

So it's a long story. It made me think about how did I ever end up with this? I can relate it to some of those events, or at least I see a thread that seems to link some of those things. It's almost as if it was meant to be. If I had studied bobcats, or foxes, or coyotes, I would not be recognized as a national authority on them like I am with loons, for a variety of reasons--for one, a lot more people have studied them. Isn't that strange how I didn't want to be a national authority on anything? You know, I kind of fell into that. I had no idea that by studying loons and being involved with them for eight years, that I would be recognized as such. It wasn't my wish; it kind of happened.

So I wonder if maybe the loon is my totem. I also have dreams, and I think it's just from hearing loon calls and seeing too many of my own slides and giving too many talks. [Laughter] I actually have little mini-nightmares--not loons tormenting me or anything--where I can't get them out of my head. It almost drives me crazy. They are in my dreams sometimes. Why am I not dreaming about bald eagles, or whatever? It's obvious--loons have pervaded my life for eight years.

**JF:** And yet you always wonder--and it can happen so easily--how did I fall into this? You do one thing, and somebody asks you to do another one. You do that, and all of a sudden you find that you're immersed in something which you don't dislike, but perhaps it's never what you wanted to do. This happens to people in business all the time--they're trapped by something that they never really thought they wanted to do, yet they felt that to give it up so far down the road would be a major professional and commercial decision. But I'm not hearing that from you. Although I hear you fell into it, sort of.

**PS:** Yes. Well, you know, I just had to make a decision here. I was cleaning out my office in Ashland, deciding which things I would keep and which things I would toss before coming to a different job which, no doubt, would take me into loon things a bit. But it's not going to be the focus, like it has been. I found that I couldn't let go of this wealth of material that I have on loons. I can't give that up. It would be a silly thing to do professionally, and I'm not sure I could do it personally. If I just gave it to someone else, they wouldn't be what I am. They would have to go through all the experiences that I've had, and I can't do a Vulcan mind melt on these people and say, "Take this all." [Laughter] It doesn't happen that way. I have enjoyed it, but like you say, I kind of fell into it.

I tell people that at the beginning of my talks. I do a much-abbreviated version--or I have recently since I've thought about this, of how this happened--and other people have similar stories. People have fallen in

love with loons, have become major supporters and do much more on their own than we could ever ask them to do as volunteers--they are enchanted by loons and they cannot figure out why. They don't fight it. They're captivated, and they write to me about this, sometimes very eloquently and movingly, about how they just have to do it. It's almost a crusade for them.

**JF:** And you sort of relate to it because you...

**PS:** ...No, I don't, I'm not in it quite the same way. You see, I came in professionally. They came to it emotionally. We should talk about that a little bit too, you know, who these people are and what they feel like. I feel a little different than they do. The loons touch me; there's no question about it. Every time I hear loon calls, like most of these other people, it does make the hair on my neck stand up. It means something. But I came a different route to get there, and I look at loons a little bit differently than other people do because I have a scientist's background.

**JF:** Although interestingly enough, you certainly can understand it because, unlike a scientist who might have grown up in southern California and decided in school, "Oh, loons are interesting," you did grow up with them.

**PS:** That's right. I experienced all that. I have those memories from my boyhood.

**JF:** Before we cease talking about the organizations themselves, let's talk about the North American Loon Fund itself--the degree to which it serves, or does not, as an umbrella organization with the others. What is its relationship with the regional and state organizations?

**PS:** Well, most states now have a private loon preservation organization. Some of them...

**JF:** ...States with loon populations?

**PS:** States with loon populations. Maine has one through the Maine Audubon Society. New Hampshire has one through the New Hampshire Audubon Society. Vermont has one through the Vermont Institute of Natural Science. New York has one through Audubon. Michigan's is through the Audubon Society. Montana is a completely independent one. Washington has a completely independent one. And then, of course, Wisconsin and Minnesota are associated with the college, probably the strangest of the relationships.

The North American Loon Fund (NALF) was set up in the early 1980s to do

something that the state organizations couldn't and to help the state organizations get going. At that time, I would say that the Wisconsin and New Hampshire ones were the only really strong programs. Maine's was intermediate. Michigan's didn't exist. Montana, Washington didn't exist, and New York's was intermediate. Vermont's was intermediate, as well.

The NALF was founded by a gentlemen named Rawson Wood, who was in the jewelry-setting business. In fact, I believe he had a patent on a weapon that used a machine process similar to setting stones. He was a fairly wealthy man. He was retired, living in New Hampshire, and enraptured by loons. He was on New Hampshire Audubon board of directors and thought that, "Gee, these loons are almost gone here in New Hampshire." When he started looking into it and talking with some of his game warden friends and others, he thought, "We really need to do something about this."

Now Judy [McIntyre] should be recognized for what she is--a scientific authority who has done much to preserve loons. But Rawson Wood is the person who has done more by far than anyone to help the loon preservation cause. He's been recognized for that, thank goodness. Maybe not enough.

He doesn't know a lot about loons as a scientist. He knows a lot because he has hung around scientists, but he doesn't think like a scientist--he thinks like a businessman, which is what he was his whole life.

He got this North American Loon Fund started. Instead of going out and rattling a tin cup and asking people for money, he thought that a great way to run things would be to sell a product that people wanted and to use the proceeds of that for the good of the loon. Nobody makes a profit; the loons get it. I think that was attractive to the buyers. They started out by selling the Voices of the Loon record album, which was...

**JF:** ...My introduction to the whole thing.

**PS:** It was almost everyone's. It was an unprecedented success in nature recording. I haven't seen figures, but I would judge that there probably isn't another one that has had that degree of success. Maybe there have been more sales, maybe more money made by something else, but in terms of getting people turned on to a cause, without question I can't even think of one that would come close.

He invested that money shrewdly, turned it over into CD [certificate of deposit] accounts, and was very careful with the expenditures. Then they started spending that money on research projects, over \$100,000 in ten years of supporting research. This began in 1980 or '81--I'm thinking of seeing the annual reports--it might have been '81. There has been ten years of research, conferences, publications, and donations to these projects to help them get started, but they have never been the federal government of loon organizations. The Loon Fund has been--I don't even

want to say an umbrella--a support system with a national impact, an international scope--Canada included--which is what they remain today.

People are a bit confused sometimes. I'm even confused about exactly what their role is, but that's really what it is. To help versus compete. By not trying to get individual donors, they have avoided competition financially. Programmatically, they have avoided competition by providing services that most state organizations can't. Like funding research, holding national conferences, putting out publications, and so on. Up until recently, none of the state organizations have been able to do that.

**JF:** And yet, state organizations have a chance to make things more accessible to people, and therefore, more relevant to the people.

**PS:** I see the missions as quite different. Loon Fund versus LoonWatch--we don't compete at all. LoonWatch's objective is to help preserve loons in Minnesota and Wisconsin by using volunteers. North American Loon Fund's objectives are to fund research that will provide information to help us do that, to hold conferences that will keep people's interest up, to give scientists a forum to get this information debated and published, to hold meetings at which people can get together and talk about how they're doing business. I think support is the right way to think about that.

**JF:** With no real coordinative functions to do?

**PS:** No, no, all these state organizations operate differently. We all have slightly different objectives. That's been good. There's been no heavy hand there. They have no weight to push, anyway. There are no strings attached, money or otherwise.

They have been truly charitable in that respect. They ask nothing back from the state organization. That's a good example of how charitable it's been. Maybe they asked for twenty-five dollars for an institutional membership to the NALF, which is, in a sense, asking, "Be with us."

**JF:** These organizations appear to be very, very recent--creatures of the last decade, not even the 1970s. What about relations with some of the big powerhouse environmental organizations? You've mentioned that some of them are chapters or committees of the Audubon societies. What about the Izaak Walton League or Sierra Club? Have you noticed much cross-membership that you can trace?

**PS:** Well, we haven't attempted to document, or at least quantify, that. I've noticed from giving these talks that the interested people and the donors come from Audubon societies and Sierra clubs. If I was to give you an accounting of all the groups that I've talked to, what we might call

environmental groups would make up a large proportion of those. And those were not ones that I asked to give a talk to--they invited me out of the blue. Sometimes for entertainment, sometimes because they knew that people in their organization would be interested, and this was a specialty thing.

Their missions are much broader.--"we want to do something to conserve wildlife," or whatever. Then they might say, "Let's focus for at least one night on preserving loons," which is pretty easy to get people fired up about because of the popularity of the animal.

**JF:** Have a lot of your speaking engagements come from some of the organizations I mentioned--Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Izaak Walton League? Some of them are very different organizations that have, for instance politically wildly different objectives that are actually in conflict with one another.

**PS:** I've given two kinds of talks: reactive and proactive ones. The reactive ones are given when I'm asked if I can come and speak. If I can, because it's convenient, not too far--although I've gone great distances--I will do that. Those are not the ones I prefer to get. I prefer to give the proactive talk to a group of people whom I'd like to give a message to. As I say, sometimes I've thought that some of those talks were entertainment. And they were. I've learned how to give extremely entertaining talks, even though they've done good. Maybe those people should be talked to about loons. But I don't put them up on a very high priority list. It's not bad to give the talks at all. I'd say it does some good. But I'd rather be talking to kids, lake property owners, and others. So I think there is some overlap. There is not a lot of coordination, or networking, that way.

I'd say most, if not all, of the loon projects have operated independently of other environmental organizations. I'm not sure I know why. Maybe because of the very narrow focus. How much time, for example, is it really worth to the Sierra Club, or an Izaak Walton League chapter, to get involved with networking on one species, which is not even an endangered species? It can't be that high on their priority list compared to other things.

**JF:** Let's talk about that. You mentioned this when we talked briefly on the phone the other day. and I was fascinated. Let's talk about loons in terms of the preservation efforts. Are they endangered? You're just saying now that they're not.

**PS:** Well, from an official status, the common loon, is not a federally endangered species anywhere. It is on state threatened species lists on New Hampshire and Michigan and is on the state endangered list in Vermont. It has extremely low populations, lower than in those states I've mentioned, in Massachusetts, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, and North Dakota.

But it has not been listed officially, because it takes a while, and sometimes species that should be listed aren't. Which is just sort of political stuff, or at least bureaucratic.

So these birds are plentiful in most areas. Their range has shrunk dramatically in the northern Lower Forty-Eight in the last century. Because they have such a limited distribution across this northern tier of the United States, people who are provincial in terms of their own country view them as quite rare beasts. And they certainly appear to be. The Lower Forty-Eight population of common loons is less than 20,000. It may seem like a large number when you talk about ten or so California condors or something else in very small numbers, but 20,000 is a pretty darn small population, considering that Wisconsin and Minnesota each have around a million deer--just for perspective.

So they're not endangered. But you know what? Most people think they are. When you go out to give a talk and you say right up front that loons are not endangered, people don't believe you. It also really fascinates me how people hear words and what they think. Endangered to me means something much different than it does if we walk down the hall and find somebody and ask them what endangered means. I know what endangered means officially, and loons are not officially endangered. But most people think that endangered actually means in danger of something.

**JF:** And usually extinction.

**PS:** As an official sort of thing, but most people think they're just kind of in danger in the world because of what's happening. They just feel that loons are being harmed. That's all they need to know.

**JF:** Well, there are the highly publicized incidents like that huge kill off in the Gulf of Mexico.

**PS:** Right, in 1983.

**JF:** There was enormous publicity that probably reinforced that attitude.

**PS:** You bet. And every time a loon gets killed and something nasty happens to it with mercury contamination or drowning in a fishing line or anything else, that receives a lot of publicity. The loon preservation projects were in the beginning not clear enough with people, were not precise enough in what they were saying. Think about how people perceive the words that you say. If you say loons are in trouble, that's as good as saying loons are endangered. People don't make a distinction like that. Their minds are not trained to be precise in an ecological sense. Most people aren't, through no fault of their own. That's just the way it is.

So we've been saying that loons have been having some problems. And what that means to most people is that loons are endangered or threatened by something. Threatened is an official status. But I can also say that loons are threatened by powerboats. It means two very different things, but most people don't equate them.

**JF:** You've been in a position of having to raise support for loons. People tend, I assume, to respond most quickly and most effectively to something that they perceive is threatened.

**PS:** You bet.

**JF:** Therefore, if the message really gets out when you're trying to promote the preservation of any species which is having problems, however slight or great those problems may be, the threat must be real. You're competing with a million other causes--with poverty, with homelessness--you're competing in terms of raising dollars and public consciousness and the desire of volunteers to do something. You're competing with soup lines and bad education and timberwolves--and I don't mean a basketball team--but a million things like that. To me as an outsider, it would seem tactically foolish to try to make people feel warm and fuzzy about loons in the sense that "Oh, well, they're really all right." There must be a little bit of calculation in there.

**PS:** Well, I think that there probably is a lot calculation that goes on. But, you know, I'm glad you brought this up because as a scientist, which is really my background, I have found it very hard to be an effective fund-raiser. I want the funds to come in an honorable way. I want people to understand what I understand. I would support it, so I want them to follow my logic.

I may have gone farther than I would have liked to. In fact, I'm sure I have because I can remember feeling badly about it. I can lose my scientific integrity and credibility by stretching the truth. That's a dangerous thing for a scientist to do, no matter how noble the cause, because my credibility could be washed up forever as far as the scientific community goes. And for that matter, the public community. It might be okay for a fund-raiser to stretch the truth because that's what they do--they're a fund-raisers. People expect that. They don't expect that out of a scientist.

**JF:** And maybe a scientist then becomes less valuable to the cause he or she is trying to champion if they use their credibility.

**PS:** You bet they would be. I mean, I would be valueless. So what I am trying to be is absolutely straight with people. I have not overplayed the fact that loons aren't endangered, but I've never held that back,

either. I have encouraged people to use what I call the "preventive medicine" approach to this. If we don't do something to help these creatures, then we are going to come back to you someday and tell you that loons are endangered. That's what I have tried to appeal to. I'm not sure everybody's done it the same way, but that's what I've had to do to make it tolerable for me.

I think that Tom Klein, who wasn't a scientist, who is a pretty good fund-raiser, probably didn't approach it the same way. I've heard him give talks about loons. I have never heard him say things that weren't true, but he approaches it quite differently than I do. He preaches "loon religion," and I preach something else.

**JF:** Then maybe you need a "loon evangelist," too, who can preach religion.

**PS:** Sure, and let's face it. We would have trouble doing this with another species that has a similar ecological status to the loon. People already love loons; they're just looking for reasons to support them.

**JF:** Why?

**PS:** That is the eternal question that I can't answer that will follow me to my grave. I don't think anyone can. And if they can, don't believe it. [Chuckles] Don't believe it. I've had this discussion with too many people. I don't know why people love loons. I have my hunches, but they don't quite make sense, not completely. There's something else there. Obviously, the loon's call is one of the most enchanting and haunting sounds that come from any beast. I can't think of another animal that has a call, besides the howl of the timberwolf, which actually strikes a chord of fear in some people.

The loon's call is almost melancholy. It reaches out to you. It sounds pretty pitiful, but in a majestic kind of way, if you can understand that. [Chuckles] It grabs you, and I think it's that call. Let's face it, the hoot is nothing to get excited about. The tremolo--that quavering laugh--although it's exciting, it is actually irritating after listening to it too long. The yodel is an exciting call to listen to, but it has a bunch of notes in it that aren't pleasing to the ear. It's a beautiful call, but the individual notes are not that. But that long, drawn out wail in the middle of the night is the call that people remember. I think that's one reason.

The other thing is that loons have a certain dignity. They've got the right colors, stark black and white. They carry themselves nicely. They look rather erect and dignified. They don't get flustered easily. They move so gracefully in water. So I think it also has to do with presence.



Another thing is that they are the big bird in the water on our lakes. They own the lakes--they really do from an ecological sense. They are not afraid of anything else out there. And because there often is only a pair for a lake, you can identify with them. This is where I'm getting on really thin ice because I'm not a sociologist or a psychologist--but I think this is where it happens. Because loons, generally on small lakes, go one pair to a lake and spend summers there just like many cottagers do, because they come there to raise their families much like many cottagers do, because they show a great deal of fidelity to the lake and their mates year after year, and are extremely predictable, people identify with them. They're almost--they have some human attributes that we like. They have an extreme defense of nest and young--all these honorable, wonderful things from a human standpoint.

They have some attributes, if we want to use that metaphor, that are not honorable. But we don't think about those. We don't really want to know that loons sometimes kill other baby loons, not their own. Or that loons fight and kill each other, or kill baby ducklings for no apparent reason at all. We don't want to know that. I think it's that identification. That's my feeling.

**JF:** Do you think that another factor, which would certainly go along with some of those you listed, is that they're not "cute" in the American understanding. People think raccoons are cute. But loons are not friendly. They're not trying to get to know you. They're sort of aloof.

**PS:** That's right, they're aloof. They are aloof. And I really think they're dignified.

**JF:** And there's a little mystery to them. They're not following your canoe.

**PS:** That's right. They're not taking handouts at the dock. They're independent. I think they have all of these things that our society has come to value, if only in a hero worship kind of way. Even if you aren't that way yourself, you would like to be that way or think that you are part of the time--all these wonderful things.

**JF:** These are attributes people can relate to consciously or subconsciously. I think what you're saying, and I would certainly agree, is that it's mostly a subconsciously association. People say, "I like loons because these of these traits."

**PS:** Right.

**JF:** Looking back, it seems to me that the explosion of loon memorabilia

is really recent, a product of the 1980s. Probably partly brought about by some of the organizations you've been discussing, but also forces beyond that. What in your view made them explode out of the pack, as it were? There are a lot of species people feel good about--what made loons all of a sudden such an incredible marketing device?

**PS:** I think that people who sell products watch these things pretty closely. What happened with loons is that they weren't a fad. Boy, that's really a good thing to go into if your a marketer. It's not a fad. People genuinely are interested in these things. And they're thirsty for products that carry the loon symbol or tell you something about loons or give you a picture of them. I think that's why the explosion happened in the last five years.

Now up to that point, when I first got to Northland College, the president of the college told me that he thought loons might be a fad. And I said, "I think you're wrong." I had already seen what I thought were signs that they weren't. I am convinced now, after meeting so many people who are members and volunteers, that loons are not a fad. There are people who for fifteen years have been protecting the loons on their lakes every Fourth of July, every Memorial Day weekend, all summer long. They go out of their way to do that. That's not a fad.

This ties into why people like loons. I've been told by many, many people that they feel enraptured--that's not the right word. They feel that the loon has grabbed them in some way that they don't control. They're absolutely crazy about these birds. They will do things that they ordinarily would never do. They'll go out in a rowboat with a bull horn and say, "Hey you! There's a loon nest on that island! Please don't go near there!" What an embarrassing thing to do for a lot of people. They go beyond the limits--some people will go beyond the limits for loons. They will proudly display loons on any piece of clothing. They were doing this five and ten years ago, even though people were laughing at them, because of the connotation "crazy as a loon," "clumsy as a loon." To be a loon was not a good thing, and to be a loon lover was not much better.

Now the tables have been turned. Now loons are looked on as noble, dignified creatures. You don't hear this "crazy as a loon" expression or see as many takeoffs on their clumsiness.

**JF:** That's a fascinating point which I never really thought of--that is, that loons haven't simply been something that emerged, that hadn't been tapped before in a commercial sense or recognized. They've actually had to overcome their name which had connotations that are unfavorable in our society.

**PS:** Hey, six or seven years ago, trying to sell something about loons

would have been hard. Merchants didn't want that. Now loons are chic.

**JF:** Even as a state bird. I can remember that fifteen years ago, it was sort of "land of loons."

**PS:** Yes, and think of Gaviidae Commons in Minneapolis. Here is BCED Development, one of the biggest marketing firms around, using the loon. It's even using its Latin name for "family of loons," Gaviidae, which most people in Minneapolis don't know how to pronounce.

**JF:** Gaviidae.

**PS:** Yes. Gaviidae Commons. But look, they've got this avant garde design that they use for loons, rather trendy.

**JF:** Oh yes. I know that symbol.

**PS:** Right. And then they have the bronze sculpture. I mean that art...

**JF:** ...It sits by itself.

**PS:** Yes. Yes. I mean these people have recognized that loons are cool, they're chic, they're "where it's at," whatever the word you want to use. And I find some satisfaction in that. I hope the people who have been involved with loon preservation, and are not in the marketing of it, feel good about that. Because they have persisted with this, and they knew they were right. And now other people are finding that out.

**JF:** That raises an interesting question. Of course, people's perceptions are very different. Is everyone delighted? Are there people who think, "Oh, my God. Today coffee mugs, tomorrow underwear. Where is this going to end? Isn't this awful?"

**PS:** Absolutely, absolutely. God, there are people who just are horrified by what's happening. I don't know how I feel about it. I like the recognition--not for me--I like the recognition for the species. It's too bad it has to happen that way, but I'm a realist. That's what drives our world. And I'd like to do things in the honorable way for all the right reasons, but the world doesn't work that way. Not that many things get done for all the right reasons. If people end up being aware of loons, thinking they're neat birds, maybe changing their behavior--which is the ultimate objective of LoonWatch, to make people change their behavior--then I don't care. As long as they don't dishonor the bird, I don't care.

Selling products that have the silhouette or a rendition of the bird on it, that's okay. They may be using the loon for their own profit. That's

okay. I would like to see them put money back into loons, because they're making money.

In fact, one of our big donors in Wisconsin runs a bookstore in Boulder Junction. She has gone around to businesses in her town that sell loon things. She is the person in Wisconsin; she's the best volunteer in Wisconsin. Linda Bein is her name, and she runs The Book Worm. She has gone to the people in Boulder Junction and all around northeastern Wisconsin--people who have a lot of loon paraphernalia in their shops--and said, "I think you ought to give money to the loon project." She plays on their conscience and says, "Look, you weren't making any money off loons before. And now the loon project has made people so aware of these things and craving products with loons on them that you're getting benefits. So why don't you give some money back to them? Be a true philanthropist."

**JF:** That's interesting, because one of my next questions for you was whether any of the loon organizations has done even an informal survey of some of the big-selling products?

**PS:** I don't think anyone's done a structured survey. I've done informal things on my own. I know who some of the big sellers are and what they're selling. I think there's an interesting classification of products. There are products that just about anyone will buy, and they'll buy them because they have loons on them, because they like to have almost anything that has loons on it. And then there's another series of products that are almost intellectual--sophisticated in a different way. The first group would include some things like coffee mugs, postcards, T-shirts, earrings, things that are in a sense nonessential. They don't tell you anything about loons. They allow you to display loons. Then there are products for the sophisticated loon enthusiast--books, records, photographs that display different behaviors...

**JF:** ...Videos.

**PS:** Videos--those kinds of products do very well. Tom Klein's Loon Magic book has sold, I think, over 60,000 copies. I can't even begin to tell you how many of those loon tapes and records the North American Loon Fund has sold. They didn't get money to fund loon research by selling lots of T-shirts. Now, they did sell T-shirts and mugs and things like that, but the biggest selling item they've ever had is the recording.

I think that shows this is not a fad. If it were just a fad, you'd wear loons on your socks, loons on anything. They'd have loons on toilet paper. There are people who are making a little money by selling that, but these other products tell us that it's not just kind of a cheap fad. There are lots of people who just can't quench their appetite for quality loon products. Some of the carvings would fit in that category.

**JF:** I was going to say, do you know Grant Goltz by any chance?

**PS:** No, I guess not.

**JF:** He's a remarkably good carver of wildlife figures, including loons.

**PS:** Yes, there are lots of people. I think I've answered twenty-five or thirty letters in the years I was at LoonWatch for people who wanted nice pictures--but had been unable to find such photographs--of loons from different angles.

**JF:** You should meet Goltz, because he lives right around here.

**PS:** Oh really? I'll probably run into him.

**JF:** Well, obviously what you're saying, and what the market is apparently showing, is that this is not a one-time thing. You know, I go out, I buy a loon carving, and that's it. Now I've got a loon; I can put it on the table. At least the people who are repeat buyers are buying a book. And they're not just buying Tom Klein's book, they're also buying Judy McIntyre's book; they're buying somebody else's book.

**PS:** Joan Dunning's book. Yes.

**JF:** Almost any book that's on the market. "Loons. Oh, I don't have this book, I'll buy it."

**PS:** That's right. I have had people tell me that they have so many portraits or photographs or carvings of loons that they can't keep them all on display in their houses. But they have to have them. They are wild about this, but in a controlled kind of way. They really care about the loons.

Gee, it's the volunteers--that has been the most rewarding thing for me and the thing that I am going to remember later on in my life about this.

It's not going out to give the talks. It's all of the people that I've met, talked with on the telephone, corresponded with, and who have helped do surveys of loons. It's people who have written me heartfelt letters about how much it means to them to have a program like LoonWatch around to channel their energies and which helps them feel good about what they're doing, that will talk back to them when they have questions, that will respond to them when they relate something neat that happened to them. That's what it's about. That's really what the whole program is about.

We could save loons in a much more efficient way than we're doing. Although that is the point, it's not the whole point. I'm a firm believer

that the only way to save loons in the long run--if it can be done, and I'm talking about the extreme long run--is if people want to do it. If we use regulations alone, it's not going to work.

That's going to do it in some species that we're working with. Not all species are suitable for the method I'm talking about, but loons fit it like a glove. Let's face it, if you care about something you will go far beyond what you will do if something is only protected by law. If they really care about it, that's what people do. I found that out. I wasn't aware of that when I started working with loons. People care very much. What we've tried to do at LoonWatch is foster that appreciation, that sense of value, and that change in behavior that goes along. Denny Olson has a wonderful little quote he uses, and I wish I could remember it exactly. It's something like, "People may be interested in something. When they get to know it better, that interest often turns to affection or commitment. And when they get to know it even better, then that commitment often turns to change in behavior." There's a beautiful little way of saying that.

**JF:** There's a certain evolutionary quality to it.

**PS:** Yes, and that's a philosophy that I've used. I know that some of my counterparts in other states have used the same one--Jeff Fair in New Hampshire, for example. We both believe that the way to do this is through the people who care. I'm gone from LoonWatch. I'm not the coordinator anymore. LoonWatch will not last forever. Those people will not last forever, either, but they will pass that concern onto their children, to their friends. It's the grassroots, the true grassroots approach, I think. And I'm hoping that I'm right. That's a little bit about our philosophy, why we run LoonWatch and other organizations the way that we do.

**JF:** Well, when you're trying to raise support for something you believe in, surely you have to tread the line you're talking about. In your case, which is different that most people because you're an expert on it--a scientist--you want to tap that public interest not only to support your own work, but to expand public support of what you really believe to be ecologically necessary, while not wanting to prostitute yourself by running around with a loon T-shirt and selling mugs on the corner.

**PS:** Well, I've done some silly things when it's for the right reasons. I don't worry about it too much.

**JF:** But I can see your point about not wanting to mislead people by over-marketing something in such a way that, while a professional fund-raiser may be able to do it and be separated from that, you can undermine the good of the organization in the long run by misusing your

credibility. Anyone who supports them can misuse his credibility from a scientific point of view.

**PS:** Yes.

**JF:** I've got some more questions for you. The bedrock of this whole movement is public concern about a species of wildlife, specifically loons. You made the comment in the last few minutes that they're in trouble, but not endangered. In more scientific terms, endangered means they're not in imminent danger of extinction. When I hear endangered attached to a species, I think it could become extinct. It might not be around anymore. And that worries me about things that I care about. Rattlesnakes could become extinct, and I don't think it would bother me terribly. I don't worry about them going under, but there are people who would. What is the actual status of loons now in the United States and Canada?

**PS:** There are about a half million breeding pairs of common loons in North America. That's probably a conservative estimate. The Canadian provinces are vast, remote, uncharted to some degree, with loons all over the place. That is the core of loon range, north of here and Canada. We are on the periphery. There are, as I mentioned, perhaps less than 20,000 in the Lower Forty-Eight, maybe 10,000 in Alaska. And that's it. They're a North American species, occasionally are found in the British Isles, in Greenland, but not in the Soviet Union. They are a northern, or western hemisphere bird. So that's it. That's what we've got.

Their populations have been decreasing in number. Their range has been decreasing in size. And a number of things are happening to them that make us a little bit worried. Again, not about imminent danger of extinction, but of losing them from the Lower Forty-Eight, or perhaps reducing their stronghold to an enclave of very remote lakes in Canada. And these things include acid deposition, acid rain, contamination by persistent toxic chemicals, such as mercury and PCBs.

Mercury is the big worry for loons because they live in aquatic systems, and they sit on the food chain in those systems near the top. Mercury happens to move through aquatic systems more easily than it does through territorial ones. A growing human population, a growing demand for the same kinds of places that loons use for raising their young--these northern lakes--and the fact that it's a migratory bird, all make it something to worry about. If you lose one piece of that puzzle in their life cycle, then it all falls down. And not really knowing too much about anything but their summering grounds, it's a little worrisome to me.

I see them as a sensitive species because of those reasons. They do have some tolerance to human disturbance, as we all know, or otherwise there

wouldn't probably be any loons in Minnesota. There are very few lakes that don't get some degree of human use. They can survive with people. But they have a limit to their tolerance and because they sit up at the top of the food chain, it makes them more susceptible and more sensitive to these changes in the system.

Many times when those species become in trouble, it all happens very quickly. You see collapses instead of a slow, gradual decline. Now I think we're seeing a slow, gradual decline of loons, and my hope is that it doesn't accelerate. Maybe we can stabilize where we are. I'd be lying if I didn't say that I think we're going to lose a heck of a lot more loons, that their numbers are going to be decreased in the range. I think they are. I don't think they're going to become extinct in the twentieth century, maybe not for quite some time, but I think we're going to lose some ground. We're not gaining ground, certainly.

**JF:** I was going to ask you about that. On the historical scale, is there any way to determine--you talk about 500,000 breeding pairs. Is that good, bad or indifferent? Were there once a million?

**PS:** I don't know.

**JF:** Does anyone know?

**PS:** Again, I don't know. The thing that sometimes we don't think about, but we should in terms of the range of creatures and the numbers, is that during the last 10,000 years there have been incredible changes on the landscape because of the Ice Age. And it goes back even farther than that. In the last 20,000 years, we had sheets of ice covering us. Well, there were no loons in Minnesota then. They were living in a Minnesota-like environment somewhere south of us. So what we're seeing with range change could be related to long-term changes that are going on.

But it's clear that due to that same factor, we are also losing loons from areas where we shouldn't be losing them. I suspect loon populations have fluctuated based on the amount of habitat that was available to them, other changes in the climate, and how the globe functioned. When you look at it recently, and in perspective, we've lost ground. How many loons might there have been? Who knows? There probably were at least double the number that are now present in Wisconsin and Minnesota. What we have in each of those two states is probably no more than half of what once existed. We still have around 12,000 loons here, and they occupy an awful lot of the state. We need a lot more. Whether it's twice as many, three times as many, only fifty percent more, is a little irrelevant. The fact is we're losing ground.

**JF:** So, across the scale, there are some places--maybe you could name



some of those--where they've recovered, or at least stabilized, while in other places they're continuing to lose ground. The net effect is a slight loss.

**PS:** Yes, I think we still have to think about it as a slight loss. I don't want to think in just raw numbers of loons, either. I want to think about condition. How many of these birds are carrying persistent loads of mercury? Loons are long-lived birds, and they're not likely to show a rapid decrease in their population due to some change; they're not very sensitive, short term. Long term, they have great sensitivity to these changes because they simply can't tolerate really big changes in the system. In the short term, for example, if loons don't produce any young for five years, we probably wouldn't notice a change in the number of adult loons, because adult loons have a ninety-five or ninety-nine percent survival rate. So you wouldn't detect that kind of change.

Places where we've lost ground primarily have been in the Midwest and in New England. However, in certain parts of New England, we're gaining ground. We've lost ground in southern Maine, which is becoming developed at an incredible pace. We've gained ground in parts of New Hampshire where they've actually artificially fostered loon populations, even in heavily developed landscapes, through just incredible efforts at habitat preservation and reproductive enhancement. We've lost ground in Vermont and lost ground in New York. Loons have actually recolonized some remote reservoirs that are used in Massachusetts for metropolitan and municipal water supplies. That's because you can't put powerboats out there and pollute that water for the homes. So they've spilled over, probably from New Hampshire--maybe birds that were offspring of those that are surviving in New Hampshire.

**JF:** So maybe a shift rather than a gain?

**PS:** Yes, who knows? In absolute numbers, it's minimal. We're talking about five or ten pairs. We don't know very much about loons in the West. We know where some of them are, but we have no historical perspective to say, "Well, ten years ago..."--like we do in the East and the Midwest. We lack that. We have to think about it as a net loss.

**JF:** And a continuing erosion?

**PS:** A continuing erosion, yes. I think we've slowed the erosion down, here in the Midwest at least, with this awareness. For example, our loon population in Wisconsin probably doubled in the last fifteen years, based on the best population data that we have. So we not only stopped that erosion, but we appear to have made some short-term gains.

**JF:** Would you say those are borrowed loons, or are those loons that are

now being able to reproduce because of less encroachment?

**PS:** Probably not borrowed. Probably a direct effect of the good awareness. The loons are, no doubt, doing their part. Maybe they're adapting better to human presence on the landscape. But some of it has to do with the fact that it's not "cool" anymore to go out and mess around with loons, and people are thinking about loons when they build cottages or go boating. It's mutual help by both species. I don't think we can expect a doubling of loons in the next fifteen years in Wisconsin. I think we were at a very low level fifteen years ago, and we had a quick rebound to a place closer to where we should be.

**JF:** What about the problems that must concern people like you because you're in the business of being concerned about it? I mean, there's two ends to this. It's fine for an organization like LoonWatch, which has done a good job and is helping protect the summer rebreeding grounds. What about the winters?

**PS:** There's loon death.

**JF:** What about that? I mean, if they don't come back because they died during the winter, then it doesn't matter what you do to protect the lake shore and to build floating islands, and all the rest of it.

**PS:** If the loon preservation effort has failed anywhere, it's failed in being concerned--and doing something about the concern--about migration and wintering. Loons are in Minnesota only about five months out of the year. So in a sense, they're ours only about half the time or less. Gee, what's going on at other times?

When we see these big die-offs like we did in 1983, we don't even know whose loons those are. We don't even know where our Minnesota loons go. We have some general ideas from a few band returns, but just a little bit.

We're not doing anything here now. It's really hard--and this I think will be interesting--it's really hard to get people excited about that. Why? Some people have said it's because the loons change colors. That may be. They are drab-looking birds. They lose their elegance. They don't call on the wintering grounds. I'm not sure it's the loon's fault.

Think about the wintering grounds on the ocean. There's no way for people to identify with the loons there like they do in the summer.

Now, if that was winter cottage country and loons wintered on lakes like they summer on them up here, there would probably be a pretty good chance that people could get into that. Especially if they knew what loons were like up here, and especially because some people who summer up here, winter down there. They might just kind of carry it through. They'd be just like the loons. In fact, that might strengthen it.

**JF:** Because people migrated, too.

**PS:** Yes, I mean, they might just really identify with it then. But here are these loons all scattered out on the coast and people not having the chance to relate, to interact with them. I think those factors have been part of the failure. In a sense the failure is neglect; we haven't really tried that hard either. Right now we're living on borrowed time--denying neglect. I don't how long we can expect that to continue.

**JF:** You're indicating that the preservation efforts are hinging totally on an attempt to shore-up the ability of loons to breed and survive on the summer breeding grounds, with virtually no attention at all to what happens in the other seven months of the year.

**PS:** You know, from an ecological standpoint, that's silly. Because although breeding is obviously necessary for the survival of the populations because of the way loons have evolved with very low reproductive rates--and even more than that, a very low rate of recruitment of young loons into adult breeding populations--failures, or lower reproductive success, is not nearly as critical as increased mortality of adults. We can stand low recruitment, but what we can't stand is increased adult mortality. Thank goodness that doesn't seem to be what the problem is right now, although it looks like it's getting a little worse. We're fearful of these big die-offs in the wintertime.

**JF:** Is anything being done? Do you see any movement in the scientific community or in the loon preservation community to address the...

**PS:** ...Talk, just talk. There was a man named Lawrence Alexander who was with the University of Florida. He was doing pioneering research on the wintering ecology of loons. He was our champion down there, although he was not going to get loon preservation organizations started or anything. But he at least was making what he found out known to both the scientific and the general community.

Lawrence Alexander died of pharyngeal cancer in 1989. We haven't got anyone down there now. He was a young man, a friend of mine. I was very sorry to lose him as a personal friend, but, gee, it was a real blow to what was going on down there with loons. They haven't got anyone else. There is nothing happening. It's a big void. It's something that I'm not very happy to report to people.

**JF:** But it's there, nonetheless.

**PS:** But it's true. That's what's happening.

**JF:** This is a brief question that relates to something that you talked about earlier--the self-supporting nature of a lot of loon research being funded by the North American Loon Fund and other organizations like that. There are no big federal research contracts out for loons. Is this true or not?

**PS:** There have been some federal and state dollars spent. Like here in Minnesota this year with the survey, which is not really research, but at least expenditure of funds for loon preservation or monitoring or research. For the most part, coming from private sources, the Loon Fund has funded a majority of that. It would be a discredit to say that the federal government and the states haven't provided any funds. The project I did on loon research was funded with federal dollars through a state-administered program for wildlife research. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has spent a substantial amount of money on loon research and management. Minnesota and Michigan have probably been the two states that have had their state wildlife agency or Department of Natural Resources make a real commitment to research and monitoring, and also to some loon preservation things--things outside of their normal operating arena. Which is good. Wisconsin has not, for unknown reasons.

**JF:** What about the Canadians? You talked about the enormous concentration of North American loons in Canada. Admittedly, northern Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan, and northern Alberta are hardly easy places to get to. Is there much work up there?

**PS:** No, no. There have been some research projects in Canada. There is a loon preservation organization of sorts in southern Ontario--Muskoka, Haliburton, and that area. The Canadians--their population is limited so much to that southern fringe of their country--that what they're seeing now is just loons disappearing from those populated areas, but they know that they're abundant in other places.

I would say that outside of the scientific community and a few conservation groups, there's not any great concern. You know, they're just so abundant. I think some people are concerned about the long-term effects of contaminants and acid deposition and how that changes things, but it is not a big concern. And I think rightly so. If I were in Canada, it would be hard to identify with that like it is here. It's the same in Alaska.

**JF:** One thing that interests me about some of this is the difficulty we found in other parts of the environmental issues oral history project to come to terms with acid rain. Because time and time again, what we were told by people on all sides of this issue was that it's almost too soon to talk about it. That even people in the scientific community were still wrestling with questions like: Where does it come from? Exactly how is

it deposited? There's a lot of research going on, but not the sort where you can say, "Okay, here are five root causes. Let's eliminate these." It's too difficult to do that.

The public and even some of the legislative communities seem to feel powerless. It's not that no one wanted to do anything, but the issue was so cosmic--or is presented as being so cosmic--that what do you do? You're told that even cleaning the air from a power plant isn't going to do you any good, because all your acid rain is coming from the Ohio Valley. I mean, my God, how are you going to do anything about that or what is blowing over from the Soviet Union, or wherever?

People also have had a hard time focusing on it because people tend to react--and I think you made this point well--to specifics. If the loon can be a symbol of the wilderness, maybe people will support conservation. They're really doing it because, "I want loons to live, therefore I see it in my best interest to support conservation." Even the fact that it's also supporting horned toads is an absolute. If they were all extinct, I could care less. And the people who are supporting horned toads could care less about loons. What about the use of the loon, and the very real problems that they have with mercury contamination, with acid rain? Has any thought been given to tying the two together in at least some way so that loon preservation and acid rain and its effect on them make them a marketing tool for conservation efforts far beyond what they are now?

**PS:** I think many of us have justified the expenditure of time, money, and effort on loons through the idea that they will be the first step to some broader awareness and preservation efforts, including things like acid rain, mercury contamination, and other things, for that matter. I'm not satisfied at all that that's working. That's disappointing to me, but understandable. I've found that for many of the people who care about loons--many, certainly not all of them,--care about loons, period. Not that they don't care about anything else, but the loons transcend everything. It's almost like their children, and they'd do anything to save their children--break laws, cause pollution, do whatever. A lot of them seem to feel that way about loons. I'm not sure I understand why, but I do understand that it's happening. It's been a little frustrating.

Let me give you a real-life example. Bald eagles have been recovering in the Upper Midwest. We are de-listing them from "endangered" to "threatened" status. Bald eagles eat loon chicks. Bald eagles test adult loons for weakness, rarely killing them. But that's how predators work, just test, test, test, find a vulnerable one, catch it, and eat it. In the last five years, we have had a greater instance of bald eagles eating loon chicks. People see that, and that's not nice if you love loons. I've had telephone calls and letters wanting me to just be concerned, and in other cases, to do something about it. "We need to stop pumping money into bald eagle programs. Not only have we recovered the population, but

we've brought it too far back because they're now eating loons."

I find this very intriguing. This is a still federally threatened species doing, in a very normal kind of way, what's it's done for thousands of years, living off a species that is not listed. I tell people that. I say, "Hey, it's fascinating. You're seeing predation. Predation is part of nature. Loons don't live under glass. You're seeing an endangered species make a comeback. You're seeing the interaction of species."

That's what I hope people would learn through this. I'm disappointed that a lot of people don't feel that way. Some do, but a lot of them don't.

"I don't care, I want my loons. I want all my loon chicks to survive."

And I explain to them, "Well, if all our loon chicks survive, we're going to be up to our armpits in loons in a couple of years. They'll be so many of them, we won't know what to do with them all."

They say, "Yeah, we know, but we just can't stand the thought of loons dying."

We have failed in our education because of that, or that shows us that we have failed. Because we failed to put loons in the perspective of the rest of the fabric of nature. I honestly believe that. We haven't failed in our efforts to help preserve loons. I think we've done some good things, but we have not done well in tying them into the rest of the system.

Had I continued on at LoonWatch, and I think LoonWatch will continue this, I had actually started to try to make that change. Instead of just "loon," all of our materials were going to say "loons, lakes, and people" on them. We're still going to be LoonWatch, but in an innocuous-seeming kind of way, I was going to start to get people thinking about the complexity and interconnectedness of things. Sometimes I was going to be very up-front about it. That's what needs to be done if this is going to work in the long run, because in a sense we've created a few monsters. And that might not be a good thing. People have some blinders on and need to have their horizons expanded.

**JF:** I can see the challenge for you, though, because it's a delicate balance. It seems delicate to me just sitting here listening to you. If all the chicks survive, we're up to our armpits in them. I can see where that might be. And yet there's a net die-off, a net reduction, a slow, gentle erosion, and you can see the difficulty in trying to reach the balance. As we were talking earlier, to keep the concern for loons can be productive in the sense that it may be a very tangible way to get people worried about acid rain--which they can't relate to in a personal sense because you can't see it, can't feel it.

**PS:** You can't see the effects of it most of the time. It happens too slowly.

**JF:** A lake can be dead, as people have pointed out, and be quite beautiful.

**PS:** Yes, yes, exactly. And it takes a long time to become dead. It dies for a long time.

**JF:** So it's a delicate balance. As an educator, it must worry you. I mean, what if you go too far the other way so people say, "Oh well, loons, they're all right--don't worry"?

**PS:** That troubles me a little. I mean, just dealing with Paul Strong's psyche on that is hard enough. I've gotten myself down a little path of logic that lead me to, "What the hell?" And I've gone down other paths of logic that brought me different results. It's easy to go both ways on that. I think it is helping. Because of loons, people certainly now know about acid rain--where they might not have. And they know about persistent toxic contaminants and some other things like the effects of shoreline recreation and development. They understand some of these things, and I think maybe their behavior has even changed as a result of that.

But it's still loons. That's what they're thinking about--acid deposition in loons. They're not thinking about acid deposition in aquatic ecosystems. How do you love a bog? That's a joke--the answer is, "Very gently." But how do you do that? And it is scary.

I have been trying. It's frustrating. I've been trying to get people to, in a sense, accept nature. I've been trying to get people to accept these nasty things about loons I was telling you about earlier. It's hard; I don't know why. Let me tell you about this. They don't want to think about loons killing loon chicks. Oooh! I've seen some men and women almost visibly shudder. They close their eyes and they view it in their mind's eye, and, oh, they don't want to think about it. But it's my philosophy that if we accept these things for anything but what they really are, than ultimately we fail. We tend to be--you know the way we think nowadays--we want to be able to box things up in nice, neat little packages that have all the things we'd like them to have.

I'll tell you what a loon does the first time you pick one up. It shits all over you. It's not a very nice thing, but that's what loons do. You pick one up, it's probably going to bop you in the head with its beak. You know, these are not gentle creatures, and we've got to get the whole picture, I think, to make it work. Environmental educators wring their

hands about this all the time.

**JF:** How much is too much...

**PS:** ....How far away from reality do you go? Do you give them the whole story? Maybe they won't bite if you give them the whole story to begin with. Give them the part they like first, and then try to wean them from that into reality. I'm not sure there's a formula that you can use, and we certainly don't know which ones work.

**JF:** It poses some interesting questions, though, about exactly how those things are used and exactly what you tell people. You can do only so much education at a loon festival, or through a newsletter, and a lot is necessary. But how much does one define one's public and say, "This is the biggest block of people, maybe eighty percent, and they are not going to assimilate or wish to assimilate more than this amount of knowledge." And indeed to be effective supporters, to be contributors, to be volunteers, they don't really need to know more. A certain other percentage will wish to know less and then there are going to be those who really want to know more, to become amateur scientists.

**PS:** Oh, I try to put that in the whole perspective of what we need to do to get to where we want to go with this planet we're racing around on here. That's a bigger question, and we don't need to go off too far in that direction, but we have to put this whole loon preservation thing in perspective. When do people react to things that aren't good for them? When it hits them right on the wallet or the pocketbook, that's when they react. What I hope we're doing with some people is getting them to react before that happens. Maybe it will save the rest of us from feeling that badly down the road. Is it cost-efficient? No one's ever studied that. Is it effective? No one's ever studied that. It seems like the right thing to do, and so we go on--not blindly--but thinking we're doing the right thing. But that's a big question.

**JF:** The bald eagle story that you tell is fascinating to me because you're showing two preservation efforts that collide. It reminds a little bit of the timber wolf, the fate of which has exercised people, at least in the Twin Cities, for years. There are great legislative attempts to safeguard them to the point where you have persistent complaints that they've bred all out of proportion. Some people say they're far from being endangered; they're now dangers in themselves. Or you look at the deer population, which has just exploded to the point where DNR is now trying to educate people how starving deer aren't pretty either, and the population has to be controlled.

**PS:** Yes. The timber wolves are very similar to loons. There aren't nearly as many of them in the world as there are loons, but they have a



similar kind of distribution, with strongholds in Canada and Alaska, a little bit spilling over into the lake states here. But it is an example of a species that we can't engender a great deal of public support for. A--you can't see them; B--most of them you can't interact with because they just don't do well around humans, and C--they carry a whole bunch of negative baggage with them.

**JF:** There's a danger factor there, which you talk about-- the timber wolves' howl in the night.

**PS:** Yes. Even though we have no recorded documentation of a healthy timber wolf ever attacking a human being in North America, there still is that lurking fear like many people have for snakes or poisonous insects or large predators. There are things that we probably have a good evolutionary reason to be afraid of, because at some point in time they may have been dangerous to us. Loons don't pose that kind of problem. It's safe to love loons.

This has puzzled me a little. It's made me wonder about this whole phenomenon: Is one of the reasons that we like loons so much partly because by liking loons we don't negatively affect anything else that's pretty important to us? We now know we can have cottages on lakes with loons, so we're not going to stop that. Believe you me, if we told all the people who loved loons that the best thing for loons is all move away from lakes, we would be at a crossroads and I'm not sure where it would take us, but I think it would lead to a lot of people not liking loons as much. However, fishing--I mean, all this recreation--that's all okay.

**JF:** Well, that leads very nicely into what I'd like to talk about next, and that is to find out a little bit more about the New Hampshire legislation. I understand from a report that I heard briefly last year in Saint Paul that they banned jet skis on all, or at least some, lakes in New Hampshire. Is this correct?

**PS:** Legislation was introduced to ban jet skis on the large lakes. I think it had some size restrictions on lakes. It was hotly debated. Hotly debated. My understanding is that the legislation passed.

**JF:** Oh, yes, I believe it did.

**PS:** I'd have to look in some files to get the details of that.

**JF:** That was my understanding.

**PS:** The Loon Preservation Committee was one of the major lobbyists for that cause. Many other people were. I don't know what I would have done in the same situation if I had been the head of that committee. Jet skis

may have been responsible for the death of some loons and loon chicks, or the washout of nests, or other bad things. It doesn't appear to be a significant number of them; it's not the primary cause of loon problems. It's the kind of a battle that you have to think about--what you can gain and lose by going into it. And obviously, they decided they could gain more than they could lose. Those are dangerous things. The way I handled LoonWatch is I tried not to make it loon versus other things. It's clear that to have loons, you can't have some other things--at least in some places and some times. There are always tradeoffs. I didn't want to go all the way, although I think you can go all the way on something like acid rain, for instance. But when you start talking about what people can and can't do with their free time, with their money, on their private property or on public lands, then you really are pushing it.

**JF:** And yet here's an example which I was interested in because it was the only such report I heard there. These local organizations were going to the legislative arena and championing a hotly debated thing issue where the governor--and most governors try to stay out of things like this--had to take sides. He took their side, fortunately. Here are people venturing into a legislative arena in a very different sort of way and all of a sudden becoming participants.

**PS:** But we've done that. I've been involved a little bit with that. It was maybe not as hotly debated. I'll give you a couple of examples. A couple of years ago, Minnesota had up for review some regulations of the DNR for harvesting leeches to be used in bait stores on lakes bordered by state parks. Denny Olson found out about this and found out how leechers got leeches and realized that that had potentially detrimental effects on nesting loons. Their traps are put all along the shoreline of the lake and around the peripheral islands, just out in the water a little bit, and they have to be checked every day. So you were having continual disturbance to shoreline areas that loons were going to be nesting on. Even though we didn't have any evidence to document that it was harming loons, it's one of the things that you almost don't need evidence for. It's just not good, not only for loons, but for the lake shores where the action goes on between dry land and water. That's where the otters and mink and raccoons come, where the birds and ducks are, and so on. That issue was brought up, and I think it took legislative action, or at least an executive order from the DNR, to change those rules.

**JF:** And what was changed?

**PS:** The change was that I don't believe leeching can occur on state park lakes anymore. Which is a small number, but nonetheless, something important. Every little bit helps. Not as dangerous or as controversial as the jet-ski thing. We are often asked to get involved with those things. "Can you ban motorboats in Minnesota?" kind of letters. "I wish

you could..." We have provided some data and some testimony to legislative committees in Wisconsin on the effects of recreation and shoreline development on loons. There is a state law in Wisconsin that lakes under fifty acres have horsepower limitations on boats. There are no weight zones on some lakes. They were trying to expand that from fifty to one hundred acres and wanted to know how many more loons that would help protect.

**JF:** Who did these inquiries come from?

**PS:** Legislators. This was being brought up in their committee. We have handed out model ordinances that people can take to their town boards if they want to restrict recreation for the benefit of loons. Local politics, not statewide. But nonetheless, we don't lobby that. We might get asked to go in and testify about what effect recreation can have on loons. We don't say, "You must do this," or "You must not." We try to lay out what can happen if they do or don't. It's sort of a thoughtful advocacy.

**JF:** That's a nice way to put it. It must give you some pause, and I think you said something about it long ago that indicated that indeed it did. The thing that fascinated me about New Hampshire is--it's hard to say--loons have this warm, fuzzy image. People feel good about them, even people who've never seen one feel good about them. They symbolize the wild out of all the things you've mentioned earlier. All of a sudden, if you're restricting people's rights to do this or that because of its effect on loons, loons become to some people--maybe a minority--a symbol not just of the wilderness, but of restrictions. "Oh, my goodness. One more thing I can't do, and it's because of these damn birds."

We've all seen the public reaction to the delay of some dam-building project because of toads or salamanders or something--a general public indifference. Now those animals don't have the charisma that loons have, but you wonder what happens when suddenly Grandpa and Grandma Jones, who have nice, fuzzy feelings about loons, find that their grandchildren are being told that they can't use jet skis. Grandpa and Grandma Jones suddenly think, "Oh, my God, we've owned this cabin for fifty years, and I can't do this and I can't do that, and it's all because of these dumb birds." How do you deal with that sort of thing? It must give you pause.

**PS:** It does. I don't have any good answers. When does the importance of loons transcend the importance of other things? Where do they fit in in the value system? For some people, they're at the top. Like I said, they treat them like their kids. For some people, they don't care at all. And there's a lot of us in between. In a world where resources are shrinking and human populations are expanding and the demand for resources is increasing, cuts of the pie are getting smaller and smaller. And

increasing restrictions are being implemented apparently for our own good. It becomes hard to justify having extra loons. How many is enough?

In the wildlife conservation field, for example, we're constantly trying to justify having a minimum number. And when you have excesses, it's okay to do things as long as you haven't gone past the minimum. Is that the way loons are going to be handled? How many do we want? I'd like to ask more fundamental questions like, "How many do we want? How do we want them distributed? How would we like to see them?" instead of dealing with these bare minimums as we often have to.

Some people think that loons ought to be restored to every lake in Minnesota that once had loons. That's not practical, or realistic, or possible. But then the harder question is, "How many losses are we willing to take, and where?" Where is the bottom line? Do we just allow these incremental losses that overall are not significant, but cumulatively keep pushing us to that bare minimum? And when we get to the bare minimum, are we going to find out that we didn't measure accurately the first time and that we actually went past the breaking point? That's a more fundamental question than just loons, but it underlies a whole philosophy of wildlife preservation, including loons.

**JF:** It's relevant, though, because what you're saying in effect is, "Do you make the conscious decision that a couple of loon deaths a year because of jet skis really aren't that important and it's not worth the battle?"

**PS:** Yes. I mean, we have to make those kind of decisions. Unfortunately, we're only beginning now to ask that kind of question. I see a problem among our public, among our interest groups, who want to see things--no pun intended--in black and white. Our point has to be constantly reinforced through education, media, and other things, to think. That's where I mention this danger of not thinking. We don't ask the right questions most of the time, nor look for the right kinds of answers. People who would like to see North America return to a presettlement landscape are incredibly naïve, but there's a lot of people who feel that way, or think that at least parts of it should be. The fact of the matter is that we can't do it. We could spend all the money we have and not recreate that. Things have changed. Perhaps the questions we should be asking are, "What exactly is it that we want things to look like and how do we get there? And how do we reserve some options for the future for changes that we can't predict?"

**JF:** Given the realities of the twentieth century.

**PS:** Given the realities, yes. And we haven't really asked those questions in loon preservation yet. It's been a little too simply and too

narrowly focused. It's, "Do good things for loons, so we can have more of them," or "Stop declines of loons." We haven't asked, "How far?" What are we willing to give up to have loons? What should we be willing to give up to have loons? Should you and I go out and jump off the ravine, because if we do that we'll help loons?" No.

**JF:** Will anybody care?

**PS:** Yes. Will anybody care? Will it actually help? You know, we could ask a question like, "The last loon and the last human are around. If the human eats the loon, it survives." That goes too far, but it deals with those harder questions. What's more important to you? Would you, to save your own child, run over a loon in a boat if it took that? Damn straight, I would. No question. I'd have remorse, but I'd do it. You have to figure out what value all these things have, and not just for loons, obviously. But that's what we're talking about. I'm trying to articulate some of the perspective, or lack of perspective, we have on all this. The eagle example is a good place to start, but it gets bigger and more jumbled. And it makes you crazy. It makes me crazy. I can't deal with all the data in my head. I can't process it all to figure out what we need to do.

**JF:** I think one of the most important points you just made, which affects a whole lot of issues, "Is what is realistic?" You can't restore, in the twentieth century, landscape the way it was in the 1890s, much less the 1490s.

**PS:** Now the climate's different.

**JF:** Yes, everything's different. What can you do with your average member of the public who says over and over again, "Don't bother me with the details; just give me the bottom line"? What they want to be told is Senator So-and-So is good; Senator So-and-So is bad. I mean, we see this all the time. People being caught up on relatively superficial things, as we were talking about at dinner. There are going to be some people who are important supporters, who simply want to know, and are going to continue to want to know, what are the basic facts about loons. They're going up, they're going down, don't do this, do this. Is one ever going to get past that? Part of it goes to your earlier question about how you get people to think in terms of the good things of the context? Particularly things that are not easily put into context because the context is so very complex. That's maybe the best place to keep asking about it because it hinges on so much more. On the educatability of everybody from school children to adults in their eighties.

**PS:** I see it as fundamental. Do we have a group of people in society who want to think? Sadly, the answer for the majority is no. They want other

people to make decisions for them. Yet, and now--I'm not going to go too far off base with this, but it does tie in--in a democracy, the only way the democracy works well is when people are willing to think.

**JF:** For themselves.

**PS:** For themselves. For themselves. Democracy relies on that principle. I've been told by some people, who are considered radicals, that a democracy is not the best form for the current set of conditions that exist in the United States today. And yet there are things that go along with democracy that none of us want to give up: freedom of speech; independence; freedom to pursue life, liberty and happiness. The pioneer spirit still exists. We don't want to give up all of those freedoms, nor should we. But we can't abdicate responsibility for thinking, leaving decisions to other people.

I think that does tie in to loon preservation. I've told people over and over that I can't save the loons; I can't do it, I'm just one person. It doesn't matter if I'm the czar, I can't do it. It's up to you. But you have to be willing to accept that it's not a simple process.

It's hard to figure out what exactly to do and to weigh all the things that are going on. People shrink from that; it's too hard. I don't know if it's because they were trained not to think, or if it just makes them crazy and it's a survival posture that they take. But if they want to cast votes and they want to have a say, then they're going to have to figure out how it works. And I'm not sure that most of our people are willing to do that, and for the rest of us, quite frankly, we may not have what it takes to do that. We may be lacking. We might be able to ask questions, but maybe we missed something in our education that is fundamental to being able to resolve these things as well.

**JF:** What you're getting at directly is the provision of that information, because people can't make decisions without information. How do they get it? Where do they get it? In what form do they get it?

**PS:** And how do they learn to process it?

**JF:** How do they learn to process it? Exactly.

**PS:** How do they learn to ask questions and resolve conflicts and weigh cost and benefits, and do that in the context of a zillion other things that are different and of different importance? This is a lot more fun than talking about loons laying two eggs for me, because it gets to the meat of the issue here. As I said, loon preservation, any conservation, is a sociological phenomenon. It doesn't have "diddley-squat" to do with biology, for that matter. It has to do with what people want. The bottom

line is what people want. Right now, we have a bunch of people who want loons. That may change more or less, in some way. How do we decide? How do we keep our options open?

**JF:** How do you know what your options are?

**PS:** Yes. How do we know it's right, or otherwise?

**JF:** I would like to sum up with a comment you made earlier because it was interesting. You mentioned that if you had a goal, it would be for organizations like LoonWatch and, indeed, the North American Loon Fund, to become irrelevant because they've succeeded. Perhaps they have to use the maintenance mode to keep things stable, but they didn't need to be as active because they had succeeded largely with their mission. Do you think that's likely to happen? And if so, what kind of time scale that would be?

**PS:** I think it's extremely unlikely. If it happens, it will happen because my bull-headed friend, Jeff Fair, will make sure it happens in New Hampshire, and some other folks will follow. I brought that up at LoonWatch. I asked at some of our advisory council meetings and staff meetings what our ultimate goal was and when we'd know when we'd arrived there. When could we all pack our bags and move on to different things? And I was told that, gee, LoonWatch wasn't set up to end. And that, gee, we had all these donors. We didn't want to lose them. And we had jobs.

"Do you want to lose your job, Paul? How about your secretary? Do you want to tell your secretary that her job is going to end because we've achieved our mission?"

Well, no, I don't want to tell her that. But I also don't want to keep doing something that no longer needs to be done. That's my New England puritanical background, probably, shining through. It doesn't please me to continue with either certain little projects within LoonWatch, or maybe the whole thing, if it's not necessary. LoonWatch has not had a real good evaluation system, nor have most environmentally-oriented organizations. Monitoring evaluation is usually nonexistent. You just figure you're doing good things, and you keep doing them. If they're not good, then your support dries up and you try something else. I have a fear of the business profit-oriented approach to conservation that is practiced by many of these organizations like Audubon societies, or LoonWatch, or the Sigurd Olson Institute. We lose LoonWatch, we lose a lot of P.R.

**JF:** It's partly income centered.

**PS:** Yes, and we lose some image. People know more about LoonWatch than they know anything else about the Institute. When they say Sigurd Olson

Institute--it's LoonWatch! It would be bad financially to lose it.

**JF:** So you don't think that the end of the need for these organizations is anywhere in sight or likely, despite the fact that it would be nice to...

**PS:** ...Well, the need for the end may be in sight for some of them, but I don't think it's going to happen because of other administrative, bureaucratic considerations. In an ideal situation, we wouldn't have them. We wouldn't need them, because our planet would not be in the trouble that it is. Ideally, these organizations would be run completely by volunteers and personal commitment. It doesn't work. Very few are run that way. Some of them are. Oftentimes, they don't work well because if you're not being paid, it's hard to keep up that commitment.

It's hard for me to evaluate how committed I am to loon preservation. I will know better in the next year than I've known for the past five. I was being paid to do that every day. When I went out and gave talks, I was being paid to do that. That's what I did for a job. I believed in what I was doing, but I never had a chance to find out how much of that I'd do if I wasn't being paid. Not all of the loon preservation projects have paid staff. Some do, the bigger ones like New Hampshire and Maine.

**JF:** From what I gathered, the one over in Washington state, for instance, is very much a volunteer group.

**PS:** Yes. And the Michigan people don't get paid. Well, they have a couple of people who do, but they don't make a full-time job of it. It would be a nice thing if we didn't have to pay people to do that. But you know, in all candor, some of these things have been looked at as a way to increase your budget, get some recognition for your organization.

**JF:** Program enhancement.

**PS:** Program enhancement. It happens. The people who run the organizations recognize and justify it saying, "Well, it's a dog-eat-dog world. That's what I'm paid to do." A lot of common folks don't like the idea of paid environmentalists. Sometimes I agree with them. It prostitutes it a little bit.

**JF:** I remember the wonderful bumper sticker I once saw on the Iron Range, around Ely--not quite on the Range--on the car of someone I knew professionally and thought a lot of--and still do. It said, "Sierra, Go Home And Take Ike With You."<sup>2</sup> Suddenly I was not amused, because I

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referring to the Sierra Club and the Izaak Walton League



realized this person who was a thorough-going professional--one of the nicest people you'd ever want to meet and highly committed to what she was doing in local educational systems, a great supporter of some of the work we were doing up there--nonetheless had a viewpoint that would make discussing the environment and conservation with her difficult, if only because she was not likely to share some of my views. And yet I think it's important to document that viewpoint, because people are making decisions and doing things on the basis of those beliefs, on all sides of the issue.

**PS:** We haven't talked too much about values and emotions, but that's the bottom line to all of this. Humans are irrational creatures who oftentimes react in an emotional versus intellectual way. We're not all Mr. Spocks; in fact, none of us are. We're all a party to, and controlled somewhat, by our emotions. And over time those emotions can become values, and values are developed in different ways as well. But I really see this as a value-laden situation.

You mentioned that some people might not care about the destruction and elimination of certain species. That's their value system coming into play. Other people can't stand the thought of loons dying. That's their value system coming into play. I can't stand the thought of living in a society where people don't think. That's my value system coming into play. Are we going to be able to preserve--or whatever you want to call it, let's just say preserve--part of nature with that plurality of values?

**JF:** Well, yes, and that's a very real thing--one of the things you must see, as a scientist, on a much different plane than the rest of us. I think that people are dimly becoming aware--more than dimly perhaps--all across the world of the interrelatedness of the environment. You can't clean up West Germany and not worry about Chernobyl sitting 300 miles to your east.

**PS:** Yes, we have found out just how small the globe is in the last twenty years.

**JF:** You can't have Chinese factories without pollution controls and and at the same time, everybody else is going to be fine and caribou aren't going to die in Siberia.

**PS:** What we've done, from a scientist's point of view, is reached the human-caring capacity of the era in all likelihood. It's hard to measure it, hard to know. We only have one experiment so you don't get to duplicate this again and see where it really is. We're not going to get repetitions on this. Demographers and ecologists tell us that we're probably at 5.2 billion people, or more, caring capacity. That has a

quality clause with it. We might be able to support more people, but we'd all have to take a tremendous drop in quality of life.

The globe is small now. Now we're trying to figure out if we can preserve loons and preserve ourselves at the same time. Some people have said--I've said it at times--that loons are essential to human survival. I don't say that from an ecologist's point of view; I say it from a spiritual point of view. They may be. We could live in a world without loons, I think. I'm not sure the removal of loons would cause the collapse of ecosystems. It might--we've seen examples of things like that before where we thought that one species wasn't terribly important and its removal or diminution has caused great problems. But in all likelihood, loons are not terribly important to the survival of humans. If we're going to save them, we're going to have to come up with other reasons and feel very strongly about those. That's why I say we have to ask these questions, "Where do we want them? How many do we want?"

**JF:** It seems to me, though, that you're talking about the loon as perhaps as a barometer. Maybe in itself it's not important, not as important as some people would like to think of it. But its appearance, its success in continuing, is a barometer of environmental success, because its disappearance would mean that certain things had gotten very bad. Although its disappearance as a single event didn't mean much, the factors that brought that about were affecting a whole chain of other things that really did make a difference.

**PS:** That's right. A lot of people use that example, particularly for the large, fuzzy, warm things--grizzly bears, tigers...

**JF:** ...Elephants.

**PS:** Elephants, whooping cranes, California condors. That's right. They're not sensitive barometers, and we've been fooled by that, or some people have. The loons are doing okay, so everything's all right. But I've already mentioned to you that that's not the case because they're long-lived and they can deal with the short-term changes. They're not sensitive. So the presence of loons doesn't tell us that things are okay. The absence of loons, however, does tell us that something is drastically wrong. They're only important at one end from an evaluation point of view.

But what are we going to do? You and I can't figure it out here. And I'm not sure that society can, in general. It makes some people want to throw up their hands and say, "Well, what will happen, will happen," and in a sense, abdicate responsibility for their actions by doing that. I can't buy into that for my own set of values, but some people do that and say, "Well, I'm just going to maximize my pleasure and my wealth, because it's

all going to hell in a handbasket, anyway."

**JF:** Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

**PS:** Yes. You know, live fast, die young, leave a nice-looking corpse--that whole set of attitudes.

**JF:** It really brings you up short, though, and it really is a concern. Maybe one of the things about the loon and the timber wolf, for instance, that makes it possible for people to relate to it a little more is that a little bit of its salvation does appear to be in your hands if you live in the United States and Canada. It's hard. I mean, what do you do about rain forests in Brazil? We can legislate anything we want to, but we literally can't stop the Brazilians from chopping down trees.

I remember being in India a few years ago. It would be really hard to talk to Indians about--they're not concerned about acid rain and they sure as hell wouldn't be concerned about loons. I mean, they've got millions of starving people. The country's beautiful, and I enjoyed it, but if you look at the level of human misery in some places, then you realize--and I think you touched on this--it's a little difficult in some places where you've got that situation to sell the preservation of something as esoteric, as some people would say, as a species of wildlife. It's hard to do.

**PS:** Well, I can see this conversation going down another road that would touch on some important points. I've mentioned this--that conservation is a sociological phenomenon. It's not only that. It's a sociological phenomenon that's a result of people living a better-than-average lifestyle. It's not a worldwide phenomenon. It only becomes important to people who live lower than average lifestyles when, by practicing it, it can improve their quality of life.

This gets into the whole range of topics that deal with what place humans have in nature. It does follow from what we're talking about. We're getting more fundamental all the way through this. But I was telling somebody today that I found out that I must think like some traditional Navajos do. I didn't realize this until I read some books about the way that they think. Navajos apparently believe that the world is harmonious, and when something doesn't make sense to them, it causes them not only mental, but physical stress. They try to reason it out until they finally figure out, "Oh, yes, things really are in harmony because these pieces do fit together."

I tend to think about things that way. I try to put it in logic. Where do I go from this step to this step to this step? The only place I've been able to get to in a really fundamental, basic, kind of way is that

we're humans and what we care most about is ourselves. We shouldn't feel bad about that; it's only normal. We'd be quite odd if we didn't. In fact, there's no way that natural selection could have operated on us so that we would think any other way. We need to accept that and not be so worried about the fact that we're not altruistic towards other species. We can accept what we consider to be our own weaknesses, but I just consider to be normalcy.

Then we can move on to the other questions, like the fact that human survival is the most important thing. You would get a lot of environmentalists who would say, "No, it's not." But my own belief is, it is the most important thing. I'm a human, how can I think otherwise? Now what we have to figure out is, okay, can we get the human condition to a point where we can accept where we're at? What can we drag along with us that we want and need?

Unfortunately, we're tinkering with this land mechanism, as Aldo Leopold called it, without understanding how all the parts fit together. We're not the best species to be in this position. Our life spans are a little too short, we don't understand nature well enough, and we have this high degree of emotion and irrationality that makes it difficult to make the right decisions sometimes.

**JF:** I think that's true. The problem is that it's so influenced by quite human value systems that have arisen over the years which have nothing to do even with the well-being of mankind as a whole. Someone's ability to make profits by doing "X" may in fact wipe out a whole human population over here. And yet that doesn't bother people, in some cases, who are doing this over here. That's just sort of the price of doing business.

**PS:** That's right. It goes beyond, really, the human condition that it's supporting. It's really my condition that's important, and I would be a very strange duck to think otherwise. I can see lots of logical reasons why anyone should think that way. We consider selfishness to be a bad trait, but...

**JF:** ...We practice it daily.

**PS:** Yes, yes. Sure. I think we have to accept that and move on. Again, not abdicate responsibility for our selfishness to someone or something else. Accept that, but then try to live within some ethical, moral, and value-laden restraints that we can put on ourselves. That, to me, is fundamental. Then you can start asking questions like, "What do we need to live? What do we want with us in the future? What tradeoffs are we willing to make? Am I willing to live a lower quality of life from a financial and perhaps comfort standpoint and have loons?" For some people, yes. For other people, no.

**JF:** Here is another thing I would love to do sometime. I was talking with some people a year ago who suggested yet another oral history project which I would be fascinated with, and that is the people who sought alternative lifestyles--broadly defined as some people who tried to move back to the earth, however they could define that. A good number of people in northeast Minnesota, for instance, were going to grow their own gardens and build a wood house and burn wood and live that lifestyle. Very few of them are left. Many didn't last more than a year because that ideal landscape was inhabited, as someone said, by ice in the winter and mosquitoes in the summer, and that wasn't quite what they had seen in pictures in the nature books. This person was being purposefully sarcastic, and yet the result wasn't much different. Reality wasn't quite like imagination. There were all sorts of trials and tribulations. However strong one's conviction seemed to be sitting in Minneapolis in a student co-op, it didn't quite pan out at Burntside Lake in July with black flies, ticks, and mosquitoes.

Yet some people have continued to live that lifestyle. I'd be fascinated to talk to people who tried it, those who remained and those who didn't, and if they feel that giving it up didn't really compromise them or, in fact, reflect a rejection of those values. And I'd like to talk with those who stayed and why they did and what they think about those who left.

**PS:** Yes, that'd be great. I'd love to hear what those people have to say. I've thought about, in my lifetime, doing something like that, as I think many people have. When you're dissatisfied with what you see as the result of your actions, feeling like you're dragged along and unable to really control your own destiny. I'm not sure those people control their own destinies any more than you or I do, but I may be wrong. But they might have more self-satisfaction.

**JF:** They might.

**PS:** They might, yes, which maybe is enough for some.

**JF:** It might be. And yet you wonder, how do you deal with it? And that's exactly what I'd like to find out--how do you deal with it when you try it, believing that this is right and you're using less and somehow you're being kinder to the earth? And then you don't make it because the mosquitoes are just too bad and you leave. What does that do to you? This thing that you really believed was right for you and right for the environment and everything else somehow doesn't work because of plain, old human discomfort. By God, washing machines may be evil and Tide may be awful, but it sure beats a washboard. [Laughter]

**PS:** Especially in July, next to a stream that's got black flies so bad that you can't breathe.

**JF:** And it becomes quite real. I'm using it as a means of discussing it here. It isn't amusing when you're actually trying to do it, and want to do it, and want to believe in it, and you just find you can't hack it. Anyway, that's another subject.

Let me ask you, has there been anything right now that I haven't asked you that you thought I would or think I should have?

**PS:** I may think of something later, but, actually, I'm very pleased with where we went with this and the sort of freedoms that we took to get off the specific subject. I don't think of loon preservation in really narrow bounds. This is probably obvious to you. Someone else you talk to might have given you something very different and maybe narrower. But this is me, and I guess I think I'm right. We have to think about it in the big picture, as they say on "Saturday Night Live"--"A. Whitney Brown and the big picture here." That's what matters. That's what matters.

**JF:** Thank you, Paul.