

OH-3087, Charles Wilkie, 8-5-2014, Worland, WY In Flight

Part 1

BOGART: [00:00:00] This is Barbara Bogart. I am just outside of Worland, Wyoming, with Mr. Chuck Wilkie. The date is August 5<sup>th</sup>?

WILKIE: Fifth.

BOGART: Two-thousand-fourteen and we are going to be talking about aviation in this part of the state. I want to start out by asking you how you got interested in aviation.

WILKIE: Well interestingly enough, I'm not a pilot.

BOGART: Oh really?

WILKIE: No. (laughs) I'm probably the only member on the board that's not a pilot. Everybody flies something or other, but not me. I always flew with other people, with various services and so forth. I started out -- I've put in a career with the Bureau of Land Management. So I had 36 and a half years with the bureau. One of the things that we did, [00:01:00] or the bureau did, was a lot of aerial surveillance of both livestock and wildlife, and various different phases of it. That's really how I got started flying. I started flying with Bud [Road Armor?] in

Rawlins, Wyoming, in 1966. Our task was to count all the cattle in the Red Desert.

BOGART: Oh my gosh.

WILKIE: And so we hopped in our little Cessna 172 and we went and flew, and flew, and flew for days. That desert is a big place. We did our very best to count every cattle that was out there in the Red Dessert. Of course, a 172 is just a little, old, bitty, puddle-jumping airplane. It's pretty small, but [00:02:00] we rattled right out there and flew until we couldn't stand it anymore. Then we'd come in for a while and rest up. But that's really where we got started.

BOGART: Well let me ask you a couple questions about that.

Did he work for the BLM or was he just a charter pilot?

WILKIE: He was a charter pilot. So we would just hire. The bureau would just hire him.

BOGART: And were you based in Rawlins then with the BLM?

WILKIE: At that point in time, yes I was. I started -- I worked three years -- well yeah -- three years in Rawlins on a part-time basis then because I was just a temporary employee. When I came back -- when I got out of college, I came back and ended up taking a position in Rawlins that didn't last. I lasted in Rawlins a whole six weeks [00:03:00]. But during that period of time was when we

were doing this -- I guess I was the temporary help, so they had me -- at some point in time they had me count cows, counting cattle.

BOGART: How did you do that? Did you go back and forth?

WILKIE: You flew a big grid. You flew a big grid. You'd lay out a particular piece of country and you'd fly grids back and forth. Or if they were -- often times livestock will be down along the drainages. So you'd fly the drainages and if you thought you had a reasonable count, why then you'd go onto another drainage. But anyway, they said, "If you want your job, it's in Worland, Wyoming." So in 1966 I came to Worland for the first time. [00:04:00] In Worland, we did quite a bit of flying, and there again it was with the bureau. We did both things. We flew livestock -- counted livestock on allotments -- but then we flew quite a lot of game surveys too. We were primarily looking at elk. We were primarily counting elk. Over the years -- I don't know how many trips we took. It was a lot of them. I've flown all the mountain ranges around here many times. There again, in those days it was Sky Aviation. You'd get a charter and go and fly.

BOGART: How often would you do those surveys?

WILKIE: [00:05:00] Probably not annually, but almost. You might skip a year or so, but generally we were trying to

coordinate with Wyoming Game and Fish on the numbers of animals that we were -- and as you know, the animals were running on public land. So we wanted to know how many elk we had and what the elk numbers were looking like.

BOGART: Were you also looking at the concentrations of where they were? Or did they move around so much that you can't keep track?

WILKIE: Well no. You go by herds and herd units, as you know. So if you went and looked at the Penny Rock Herd, you knew if you looked around there long enough you'd find them. You knew they were there somewhere. So it depended on the herd units. [00:06:00] Later on, after a few years -- maybe three or four years -- we ended up with wildlife biologists working for the bureau. At the time when I first started out, I was a range conservationist and there weren't any wildlife biologists. Then we got wildlife biologists. So then, at that point in time, it became a joint effort back and forth between the biologists -- the game and fish biologists -- and us. We flew with aviation out of Worland. We flew with Elgin Air Service out of Cody, and some other folks out of Cody, and counted Elk.

BOGART: So the district that you were working for [00:07:00] included the whole Big Horn Basin?

WILKIE: Yeah, at that point. Well the bureau's organization, The Bureau of Land Management's organization, has always kind of put the Big Horn Basin in one unit. It's fluctuated around, but it never got less than the Big Horn Basin. Right at this point in time, I think it's bigger. Now I think it goes all the Big Horn Basin, plus part of the Wind River Basin. But it goes back and forth by years. Then, in addition to that, we did -- back in those days we were doing a lot of sagebrush control. So we were spraying sagebrush. Often times -- well just about every spring, we would have [00:08:00] a contract, or two, or three, with whoever the low bidder was at that point in time, to spray sagebrush. So if you were a contract supervisor or contract administrator, well then you were expected to be out on the field and you flew. You didn't fly with them so much as you just interfaced with the company doing the work. You coordinated and showed them what it was that you wanted done, and then observe to see if they did that. We worked with lots of different companies. One of the ones that we worked with quite a lot was Hawkins and Powers. You know all about Hawkins and Powers out of Greybull. They were big at the time. [00:09:00] I flew with Dan Hawkins, and I flew with Gene Powers, and I flew with those guys. I remember when Hawkins and Powers, they had a

helicopter. A Kaman Helicopter, which if you know your helicopters, it's a twin-prop helicopter and the pros are synchronized so that when they turn, they turn together. It was a military invention to begin with. But we sprayed quite a lot of brush with it, (laughs) with a Kaman, and they were an interesting old aircraft. When they first started up, sitting on the ground, you swore they were going to beat themselves to death. But they would finally get everything wound up and get all the props in sync and then away they went. They [00:10:00] had the capability of moving big loads. They were a good spray chopper because they could pick up a big load of spray and go with it.

BOGART: Excuse me for interrupting, but then this might sound like a dumb question, but (coughs) what was the sagebrush control for? What were you trying to keep it from spreading into? The agricultural layouts?

WILKIE: No, no, no. (laughs) Sagebrush control was helping out the ranchers and cowboys. They had run cattle -- lots, and lots, and lots, and lots of cattle -- on this country for years and years. Of course, when you run cattle, the sagebrush increases because when you take the grass out of there, [00:11:00] it takes the competition away from the sagebrush and the sagebrush increases. Well, pretty soon you've got a pretty heavy stand of sagebrush and not near

as much grass as what the ranchers want to see. So we were doing contracts to thin out areas. We used different practices. Sometimes we sprayed it in big blocks. Sometimes we didn't. Sometimes we'd strip spray it. You'd just keep alternating strips with the hopes of leaving a strip of live sagebrush down in between a strip where you'd killed it off. We did quite a lot of that. We coordinated quite a lot of that with the Wyoming Game and Fish because the Game and Fish wasn't real keen on killing off all the sagebrush because it's extremely important habitat, game habitat. [00:12:00] We had many interesting meetings with Game and Fish and their biologists. I remember one that we had because the deal was -- one idea was that if you killed off all the sagebrush, the game animals would just leave. They would just be forced into some other area and it would be detrimental to them. We took a trip one time up -- I remember -- in the Garvin Basin, which is east of Lovell, and it's up on the edge of the Big Horn. We had, the year before, we had gone in there and strip sprayed that area and killed off every other strip of sagebrush, mostly. The idea being that we've done this now [00:13:00] and so the elk herd was just left. There won't be any elk in there. We came up on the ridge and there was brown animals all over. I mean you could see brown animals as far as you

could see. One of the biologists said, "Well I wonder what that is? There's not supposed to be cattle up here." I said, "No, those are not cattle. Those are elk." What, unfortunately, they found out was that those old cow elk really did like that idea of those strips because they would stash their calves -- they were already calved out -- and they would stash their calves in the sagebrush strips and then they would go out in between. They enjoyed all the forage that was out there. So nobody told them that they weren't supposed to like this.

BOGART: (laughs)

WILKIE: So there they were and heaven knows how many hundreds of head were there, but it was a whole elk mountainside was brown. [00:14:00] There were probably 500-600 I suppose. They were happier than clams. As long as we stayed away from them, they thought that was just great.

BOGART: Well you mentioned Hawkins and Powers. The only -- I have been in touch with Mr. Hawkins, but I haven't talked to him yet, and I know about their firefighting operations. But they also had spraying operations?

WILKIE: Oh sure. Well Hawkins and Powers, they did all kinds of things. They were big in fire control. They were big in sagebrush control. They flew charters and did surveillance. I flew with them at different times.

[00:15:00] [Cow Mountain?]. So if it flew, Hawkins and Powers was involved, if you know what I mean. They were a big flying company for years, and years, and years, and years, and years. They were very reputable. They were reputable people. If they told you something, that's the way it was, which was a good thing. But anyway --

BOGART: You mentioned Sky Aviation and it was based in Worland, right?

WILKIE: Worland, yeah.

BOGART: How old is that airport?

WILKIE: I don't know for sure. It's been around ever since Worland was here, or as soon as we had airplanes. But it wasn't just Sky. Mel Chrysler was here as well. In fact, he was here before Sky was. These outfits evolve and change and go on [00:16:00], but Chrysler was here. He coordinated, or cooperated, with Hawkins and Powers a lot.

BOGART: Someone else mentioned his name to me. Tell me about Chrysler. Someone said the family was still here.

WILKIE: I think some of the family is still here. I don't know them, but yeah. I think so. You'd have to ask around, but I think you could find some of them. It's like -- see Dan Hawkins is no longer. He's not alive any more. I'm not even sure about Gene Powers. I think Gene Powers is still alive. I know that they had a wreck and it killed

his wife. But Gene Powers was an interesting guy. He could fly a [00:17:00] PBY4 upside down, I guess if he wanted to. But he could fly those big, old bombers. He would take them in places that everybody else would have been absolutely scared to death. I remember him. We also did fire control and liaison with fire. I remember him on the Pole Mountain fire at Laramie. I had a crew of Shoshone -- Sho Araps we call them -- Shoshone Arapaho Indians in there. We were on this fire line and the line boss told us to back off. They said, "Back off and get back away from it because we're going to put a slurry drop in here [00:18:00] and we don't want you in the line because -- don't get hit." But Gene Powers brought a PBY4 in there. When we first saw him, he was below us. We were sitting above him. He was down and he was coming up at it. Just about the time he got to where we were, he jerked the doors open on that old spray plane and dumped 3,000 gallons of slurry out there and hit that fire dead on. Of course, he got a tremendous amount of lift when you drop that kind of weight. You get a tremendous amount of lift and that old PBY really went up in the air and let out a [beller?] and up in the air she went, and he waved at us.

BOGART: (laughs)

WILKIE: I mean honest to God, the guy, he gives this big wave [00:19:00] like this as he comes by and we go, "Holy cow!" Up in the air and away he went. Those are the kinds of things you don't forget. And having a bomber come up underneath you and then have the pilot of the bomber wave at you, it was pretty amazing. It really is. But I was on several fires where he flew. I was also on that fire, but I was on a fire up on the south fork of the Shoshone. He basically put that fire out by himself. He really didn't need us. So off and on we were associated with fire and fire suppression. Then in 1971 I left the Big Horn Basin. We were looking for advancement and moved on. [00:20:00] And I ricocheted around and went to the West Slope of Colorado and did a lot of game counts on the West Slope of Colorado. The thing to show you --

BOGART: I saw him earlier [going around?].

WILKIE: The thing that you find out real quick when you get into West, it's not like Wyoming.

BOGART: My sister lives in Craig. So I've spent some time over there.

WILKIE: Oh boy. So she's right on the edge of it. We were living in Eagle, which is over south there. Colorado is tall and there's a lot of mountains. When you fly in Colorado -- at least I never was very comfortable because

it's difficult flying. And you have to be extremely careful or you'll be extremely dead [00:21:00]. It will get you. We spent a lot of time -- when we were doing the elk surveys and so forth, we spent a lot of time maneuvering around so that when we started to do our count, we were going the right direction because down there you do not fly into them mountains. You fly away from them. We flew there. I flew in West Slope of Colorado for two or three winters. We counted a lot of game animals over that period of time.

BOGART: Is that when the surveys would happen most, would be in the winter?

WILKIE: Well generally fall and winter. Generally fall, early winter. Because there was a couple of reasons. We wanted to know how many animals we had, but also at that point in time, they would start to congregate together. They would group up. So when they grouped up, you had a little better shot at it. [00:22:00] So then we left Colorado and we went to Western Montana -- or we went to Missoula, Montana. In Missoula I had a project that was pretty interesting, at least I thought it was kind of interesting. The bureau up there was interested in bug infestation of timber; timber beetle infestations. They decided they was going start an infrared project, experiment. And what the infrared

amounted to was they'd give you a camera. You'd mount the camera on the wing of your aircraft and put infrared film in it. You would go out to wherever they had a bunch of [transects?] setup across a bunch of areas. [00:23:00] You flew because it was infrared film. You flew from 10:00 in the morning until 2:00 in the afternoon. So you flew right through the heat of the day. They asked for volunteers of who would do this. I said, "Oh, I can do it." They said, "Do you get airsick?" I said, "No." They said, "Well, you're probably our guy then." So you fly these transects and you would shoot pictures. Most times you had a spotter with you. The spotter was -- he was looking out of the aircraft, and talking to the pilot, and lining the pilot up on the transects, because when you were looking through the camera or looking through your gun sight on your camera you really didn't have time to line up a pilot too. So he would line you up [00:24:00] and he'd say, "OK." He would tell you and then you would shoot and you would get these infrared pictures. What infrared does is it's false. It's false color. Trees that are weakened by bugs will show up orange. So you fly over them and then you get these aerial photos. You can actually take them and sit down, and count the number of orange trees, and figure out how many bugs

you got. We had a lot of bugs. It was the beginning of this big infestation that is still with us really.

BOGART: And that would be in the late '70s?

WILKIE: Yeah. So --

BOGART: Well that would be interesting.

WILKIE: Yeah, it was. The only thing about it was is when you flew those transects and we were flying in [00:25:00] 182s and smaller aircraft. So you took quite a beating because you flew in the heat of the day and it was rough. I mean it would just pound you. I recall we were flying about up out of Philipsburg, Montana, and we flew a couple of passes there. Well we made a pass or two and my spotter said, "No. That last one we missed." He said, "You got to go around and do it again." Well we really didn't want to go around and do it again because part of the transect went down through this canyon and it was just really rough. It just beat us up something awful. So we made the second pass down through there and come up out of there, and that pilot looked at us and he says, "What would you guys think about going over here to Philipsburg [00:26:00] and sitting down and putting it down on the ground?" We said, "Yeah, if you want to go over there and land. That would be fine with us." So we went over there and landed, and got down and there was a little, old terminal there at the airport

strip. When we got out of the airplane, we noticed the pilot wasn't walking straight. He walked like a duck. He'd go this way, and then he'd go that way, and he'd go this way. We got over there and there was a pop machine there. We bought some bottles of Coca Cola and the pilot looked at us, and he said, "I don't know about you guys," but he said, "I am green as I can be." He said, "I was airsick." He said, "I can't hardly go." We said, "Well, we noticed you were walking kind of funny." He said, "Yeah." He said, "I am really airsick." So we had the pilot airsick (laughs), and of course my spotter was an old -- he was an old smoke jumper. [00:27:00] You can make smoke jumpers sick, but it isn't easy. (laughs) They've seen the worst when you're flying around these fires. When you're flying around fires, you can fly really rough air. So if you're afraid of getting pounded, you don't want to be anywhere near a forest fire. So we did that for a couple of years. It was kind of a kick in the head. We kind of enjoyed flying that stuff. Then we left. I left Montana. We came to Casper, Wyoming. Then things -- it always changes you know. We got to Casper and the big emphasis then was coal, and oil, and gas. You think well, what can you do with an airplane, and coal, and oil, and gas? But you'd be surprised [00:28:00]. We were doing a

lot of oil field work and we were interested in putting a lot of the old, worn-out, orphan wells, putting them to bed. Go ahead and plugging them and getting them taken care of so they wouldn't be sitting around polluting everything. So we would have the companies do the work. We were doing thousands, and thousands of wells, but we wanted to check to see -- we really wanted to check if they were doing the rehab on them and putting these wells to bed the way they should be. One thing we found out that worked real well was by that point in time, GPS was coming along. We had just got to the point where GPS was coming into the picture.

BOGART: Would this have been [00:29:00] in the early '80s?

WILKIE: Yeah. This was early '80s, right.

BOGART: There was a big boom in Wyoming at that time.

WILKIE: Oh yeah, right. There was and that was when the big coal boom, or the big coal leasing effort really got going. So we would take a quad, a USGS quad, and sit down and plot all these wells on them. Then we would get the geographic coordinates of those wells. We'd literally climb in an aircraft -- we were using helicopters mostly, at that time -- and give those coordinates to the pilots. The pilot would key in his coordinates into his GPS unit and away we'd go. [00:30:00] Then you'd fly for a while and pretty

soon you'd land at an oil well. Then you'd pop back and you get to look down over, and then pop back up in the air and he'd punch the next one and go to the next one. You'd be surprised how many oil wells you can look at in a day. We didn't have to go and run around and look for them. A GPS unit would say, "You're there, so land." You're there, or fly around and take a look, or whatever you wanted to do. But we did lots, and lots, and lots of compliance in oil and gas with the aircraft and the GPS units. Then I managed to get out of all of that and ended up over in coal leasing. After that, my involvement with airplanes [00:31:00] was -- well, other than flying -- I was working with two states. I was working with Montana and Wyoming on coal leasing. So I flew a lot just getting back and forth between Cheyenne, and Billings, and the Powder River Basin. So we flew quite a lot of charters. We were flying twins at that time. We were flying King Aircraft and all kinds of those aircraft getting back and forth. But then the other thing we did was -- of course everybody in Washington, D.C., wanted to see what was going on in the Powder River Basin. So they would say, "Well, if we come out, will you give us a tour?" We said, "Sure." Well touring [00:32:00] the Powder River Basin from somewhere up in Southern Montana, down to Douglas, is a big job. So often times we

would charter an airplane. We flew with Lynch out of Billings, and we flew with Casper Air out of Casper. We would just get an aircraft. You got to where you knew all the mines inside and out. This is this property, and this is that mine. So you would come right down the -- down or up, whichever direction you were going -- the basin there and show them all those mines. We did that quite a lot.

BOGART: Were they surprised at the geographical extent of the basin? I know a lot of times Easterners have no idea what scale is out here.

WILKIE: Right. They [00:33:00] were amazed at the amount of area we were dealing with. For us people that were from this country-wide, it wasn't overwhelming. It's a long ways. That's the way it always is. We had some fun times. At that point in time, the United States Air Force was flying B-52s and B-1B bombers out of Rapid City, or wherever they were -- which would be anywhere in the world really. But they were flying reconnaissance and they were flying a practice flight with those bombers. It so happened that a bunch of their flights were right over the Powder River Basin. [00:34:00] On more than one occasion you'd be merrily up there flying along in your little 206 or something, looking at coal mines, then all of sudden you'd have a B-52 sitting right in front of you. Here's

this B-52. I recall one situation where the pilot said, "Uh-oh. We've got a B-52 right here." In a small craft, you didn't want to be close to those bombers because they do bad things to you. So the pilot corrected his course. He said, "Well, wait a minute. Let's get away from this 52." He corrected his course and I don't know if those guys were just having fun with us or what, but anyway the B-52 corrected its course right back at us again.

BOGART: (laughs) Oh no!

WILKIE: So here's this 52 coming right at us. The pilot said, "OK. That's enough of that." He bailed out. He said, "Well, let's see if this little boy can go down on the deck with me." We went down to 500 feet [00:35:00] and that old 52 came right over the top of us and went on their way. A B-52 looks pretty big.

BOGART: I'll bet.

WILKIE: When you're up in the sky with them, they're pretty formidable. They're a big bird. We never had any dealings with the B-1Bs, but we had B-1Bs come by us all the time. That was the big delta-wing bomber, the B-1 Bomber. They were a big bird. They would be on you. You didn't even know they were there and there they were. They would be on you so quick. They were amazing. They just went by us.

We did our thing. Hopefully they knew exactly where we were.

BOGART: I can see your passengers' eyes getting like this (laughs), and the pilot's too.

WILKIE: Yeah, no we made a great effort to stay away [00:36:00] from them because you just don't want to fly close to those guys in a light plane. So we flew the coal mines for until they got the coal all leased that they wanted to lease.

BOGART: What were you looking for when you were flying over them?

WILKIE: We were showing people from Washington what they were doing, and then looking at strip mining from the air, and also looking at rehab because the big thing was you're going to desecrate Wyoming. It will be just Western Kentucky. It's going to be nothing but one big coal mine, strip mine, and they'll walk off and leave it. We said, "No. It's not exactly going to work out that way because these guys, if they open up so many acres [00:37:00] to mine, they got to put so many acres to bed." They got to rehab it and put it back to bed. So we were up there and we were actually showing these people here's where the active mining is right at the moment, and here's where the rehab is. Here's how it looks from the air. You can see a

lot more rehab -- I mean you can see it from the ground, but you can see a lot more rehab in a day by getting in an airplane than you could down on the ground. That's what we were doing. Some of the people -- it was very interesting to see their reactions, and for them to realize what was really happening. I was an EIS [00:38:00] team leader for coal leasing in the Powder River Basin for three or four years. Like I said, we flew a lot. I probably flew more right there in that period of time than any other time during my career, actually, because it was a rare month that I didn't go somewhere. We would fly out of Casper and fly into Billings. When we flew into Billings, we came across this country. We'd come over the top and come over. So we'd get to see the Big Horn Basin again. (laughs) Then in -- let's see -- in 19 -- oh, I guess it was in '87, 1987, the coal kind of went away and I ended up taking a job again in Worland. [00:39:00] But there again, I was more in management and I had all my people doing all the flying. So I flew a little bit, but that was kind of the end of my flying days. Of course I was too old to fight fire anymore, so I was out of the fire scene, thank goodness. Fire got really serious back in those days.

BOGART: Well tell me a little bit about the aviation in and around Worland. The one thing that I've heard several

times on this trip is about Sergeant and the Pepsi -- is there a bottling plant here? The Pepsi plant? Tell me about that.

WILKIE: Admiral Beverage. Actually, we've two things associated with soft drinks if you will. We've got Crown Cork and Seal, which builds [00:40:00] cans. Did you realize that we build about a billion soft drink cans a month here in Worland?

BOGART: Is that right?

WILKIE: We ship cans all over the country. Then, in addition to that, we keep some of the cans and send them over to Admiral Beverage and they put Pepsi in them; Pepsi and any kind of thing that Admiral bottles, including water. Those folks, they have their own private jet. They fly out of Worland. There's a small jet aircraft that fly in and out of the Worland Airport all the time. Everybody says, "Well, [00:41:00] why is the airport so important in Worland?" I said, "Well, there are many businesses that are dependent, extremely dependent, on this airport. That's why we're extremely interested in keeping it viable, keeping it alive." It's a struggle. With a small community -- as small as Worland is, because we're just a little, old place nobody ever heard of -- but that airport

is extremely important to us. That's why we lobby so hard to keep it here.

BOGART: Is it a joint powers, city-county? Or who owns the airport?

WILKIE: It is a joint powers, to answer your question, but primarily it's the city of Worland [00:42:00]. They're the primary holder of the airport. Through the joint powers, it all works together between the city of Worland and the county commissioners, Washakie County commissioners. They understand the importance of that facility. So they're supportive. You don't really have to bang on them to get them to support you. That's great. That's a great thing. That's one of the reasons we're hanging on.

BOGART: Well how did you -- tell me about being on the Aeronautics Commission. How did this happen?

WILKIE: (laughs) [00:43:00] That was kind of a -- I don't know. It was a strange deal to me. I was involved with the Washakie County Economic Development Board. I was on the Economic Development Board for four or five years, I guess, or more. I had gotten off of it. My term was up and I had gotten off of it. I figured I probably ought to retire, since I retired from everything else. I was hanging around and Matt Mead got elected governor. One day the phone rang and the gentleman on the line said, "I'm the

Executive Director for Governor Mead [00:44:00] and we would like to have you on the Aeronautics Commission." I said, "Well, I don't know. (laughs) I'm not really associated with any aeronautics business. I don't fly. I don't know." They said, "Yeah, we know all of that, but we'd like to have you be on the commission anyway." I said, "Well, I can certainly do it. I certainly have an interest in aviation, and I certainly understand the value of aviation to Wyoming." So that's how I got involved.

BOGART: When was that? What year was that?

WILKIE: That was [00:45:00] when Matt Mead was elected governor, which was in '10, right? Two thousand ten?

BOGART: I was gone from Wyoming for four years. So there's like a gap here. When I moved back last year, yes, he was governor. So that would be about right.

WILKIE: Yeah and he's up for reelection now, which is --

BOGART: That would be right, 2010.

WILKIE: And it's a six-year term. Who knows? If he gets reelected, I may stay on. If somebody else gets on, maybe it will be somebody else, but whatever. So in 2010, I started working with the Aviation Commission, the Aeronautics Commission, and working with the Aeronautics Branch of Wyoming Department [00:46:00] of Transportation. We're under DOT.

BOGART: OK, that makes sense.

WILKIE: We're just a little red-headed cousin to the rest of them because DOT is big. They're a big outfit in this state. But anyway, they got -- there's a staff in Cheyenne. The staff, they service all these airports in Wyoming. Their job is to oversee all of the efforts at the airports in Wyoming. So it's a multifaceted type of thing. It's not only just building the airports and doing all that. Their primary effort is safety. First thing is [00:47:00] can we have safety with our aviation? Can we not have things out there that are going to kill people? So the staff is always looking at that, and of course they interface with FAA. FAA is very vocal in what airports can do and what they can't. So from that standpoint, they get involved, but also there's funding. For all of these communities -- particularly smaller communities in Wyoming -- they're always pressed for funding. So FAA will say, "You've got to do this, this, and this, and this." And they'll say, "Well, yeah, that's nice except we're broke," and the FAA will say, "Well [00:48:00] don't worry about that. If you do this, we'll provide a certain amount of funding." If the state of Wyoming can provide some funding, and then if there's some -- then the local part of it. So it's a joint effort in part or all of these cases.

FAA, they will only do certain things. There are some things that they just won't do. If you want to build a road to your airport, they're not going to help you. Even though you -- why do you need an airport if you can't get to it? I mean really. So the staff in Cheyenne with aviation, [00:49:00] they're responsibility is to oversee the operation and interface with all these airports in Wyoming. So they maintain -- they've got an administrator and about half a dozen folks, including some engineers, and a whole bunch of specialists, to work on things, you know the various projects that come up. Our interface being -- and I don't know why I say our. The Aeronautics Commission is an oversight of this whole thing. The legislature, the Wyoming Legislature, provides funding [00:50:00], matching funding, or funding going along with the FAA funding and the local funding. So you're handing that funding all the time. We're looking at -- I don't know what our budget it is. It's several million dollars every year. Of course this is sustained funding and it goes on, and on, and on, and on hopefully.

BOGART: Now does the legislature -- it funds the commission obviously -- but then does it also provide funding for specific airport projects in the state, or is it just a general budget?

WILKIE: The way it normally -- normally they don't do -- they provide a fund with this money in it. [00:51:00] They rely on the aviation division to evaluate those and to spend that money. So the aviation outfit, they're actually the working arm of the legislature. They're the working arm of it. Somebody in Worland wants to do something with their runway, or FAA comes to whoever and says, "You're not in compliance with regulations, and you have to get into compliance with regulations or else we're going to shut you down." So then the airport manager and the airport board will pull together a proposal. Here's what we propose to do and here's what this would probably cost us [00:52:00]. They submit that to the -- most, part, or all of them have management plans. There's an airport management plan in place. If not, that's a continuing basis, on-going operation all the time of updating those plans to keep everything up to snuff. But anyway, they'll submit these projects and the projects will come in to the Aeronautics Administration. Through their engineers, and through their environmental people, and their administrative people, they rank these projects and say, "This year we're going to go with this one, this one, this one and this one. We're going to spend about that much money. This is the money we've got available, so this is what we're [00:53:00] going

to try to do." This goes on every day. The Aeronautics Commission -- the commission that I'm sitting on -- our job is to look over their shoulder and listen to what they have to say, listen to their proposals, listen to the proposals from the airport boards when they come in and say, "They really want us to do this," or, "We really want to do this, except we don't have enough money to do it. We don't have the money." Or they come in and say, "We think we can do this and this on these projects and we would like to hold off on that part of it until next year, at which time more funding will be available, and stall it for a year or so until we can get to it." So it's a planning -- it's a budgetary process [00:54:00] all the time.

BOGART: So the commission itself doesn't take on special projects and see them through. It's just this ongoing maintenance, expansion, airport upkeep kind of a thing.

WILKIE: We kind of watch over everybody's shoulder. We're watching over every shoulder, and hopefully we're assuring the governor and the legislative people that the funding that they're providing to do this is being well spent and being handled properly. Sometimes that's a struggle.

BOGART: Are there certain trends that you've seen, with regards to Wyoming airports, in the years you've been on the commission?

WILKIE: Of course -- actually, the amount of project work [00:55:00] that has been accomplished has been pretty significant. They've really done pretty well. There are a lot of good things about airports in Wyoming that have happened in the last few years. But the trend that we're seeing -- and the most alarming trend -- is with the big downturn in the economy and all this business, and then the downturn in support at various levels. It's been going down. When I first was involved with the commission, we were OK. If there was somebody come down the road and said, "You know, I need another half a million dollars because there was something we didn't plan on," we probably had another half a million [00:56:00] dollars that we could give them, or that we could provide for them. Now it's to the point where in 2015 or 2016, we may not have any extra money, or we may not have enough money to even do what it is that is being proposed to do. So what we're seeing is that right at the moment it's drying up. The funding and everything is becoming much more difficult.

BOGART: At the federal level as well as state and local?

WILKIE: Well, primarily at the federal level. I'll give you a good example. The Air Service Enhancement program -- if you know that is.

BOGART: I'm familiar with that, yeah.

WILKIE: Air Service Enhancement -- basically what it gets down to is it's a support [00:57:00] type funding for particular little airports that don't have enough business to keep going on their own. So basically, through the division -- if they're getting Air Service Enhancement funding, we will go to them and say, "Pull together a contract with this air carrier, and you pull that contract together, and we will reimburse that carrier and make sure that they can run a profitable operation out of there." Well what this does, then, is it allows these smaller communities to have air service. Worland is one of them. But [00:58:00] what has happened over the land with this downturn is that there have been a bunch of people say, "We don't know why we need this. We don't know why we need this enhanced air service. In fact, let's just get rid of it. We'll get rid of it." And you think a little town, a little community like Worland, with 4,000 or 5,000 people; you get rid of their airport, big deal. So what? But the thing that we have found -- I mean they were talking this talk and we were of course concerned, particularly because it was going to wipe out some of our little airports, like Laramie, and like Worland, and like Sheridan maybe [00:59:00], and some places. These things always kind of rattle along. Then we got to following a little closer. We got to watch a little

closer and they said, "Well what's the cutoff? If you're going to chop this off, what's the cutoff?" Well they said, "Well, we're going to cut it off clear up to communities of 200,000." Hey, well, 200,000 you've wiped out every place in Wyoming that were getting these funds. The only good thing was that areas that are larger airports don't get those funds. They don't utilize them anyway, so we don't care. Cut them all. We don't care about them guys, but our little guys do. But then we said, "Well, you're telling us that nationwide [01:00:00] that you're going to cut off everything up to 200,000? It's going to cutoff some places that normally you can fly to. They said, "Well, you know, maybe we need to go back and talk to our congressmen."

BOGART: Oh, what a good idea.

WILKIE: And maybe a bunch of those communities need to say, "You know, here's what it is that you're proposing to do. Maybe you don't understand what you're proposing to do, but here's what you're proposing to do." Well, sometimes those are eye opening situations. So that's what we're in. You say, "Well, what's the trend?" The trend is a downward trend at the moment, or at this time, but we're not convinced that that's going to stay that way. We're not convinced that particularly -- well -- particularly if the

[01:01:00] economy turned around and goes up. All of a sudden we have a strong economy again and we have a lot of businesses that are looking for air travel and air support. Then maybe this is not what's going -- maybe it's going to turn back. Maybe it will turn back at that point in time. We have -- we, when I say we -- the Aeronautics Division and the Commission have sat down and run studies on what does the money that's setup by the Wyoming legislature, what does it buy us? Does it really buy us anything or are we just spending it for fun? Well, what they found out is that [01:02:00] it's a good investment. It's returned money to the Wyoming economy every year. It isn't just frivolously thrown out there in the wind. It's not just being thrown away. This is an investment in the economy of Wyoming. We've got several studies that prove that, show that.

BOGART: I've seen some of those.

WILKIE: Have you?

BOGART: Yeah, the economic analysis, the impact of airports on the economy.

WILKIE: It's pretty amazing.

BOGART: Yeah, it is.

WILKIE: It really is. The other thing that is encouraging, at least to us, is we have several airports in Wyoming that

are growing and their business is strengthening tremendously. A good example is Cody. Cody [01:03:00], through a lot of hard work, they've got a brand new terminal in Cody. Everything is pretty nice there. But they've increased their ridership. They increased their ridership last year 19%. That's pretty significant.

Laramie was struggling along, kind of having a hard time, and all of a sudden they kind of turned the corner and did a few things. Then all of a sudden Laramie come out of it and they went up over 10,000 enplanements per year, which 10,000 is the number where you're enhanced air service kicks in and out. Through some contract negotiation and [01:04:00] (coughs) contact with the air carriers and so on, it's detailed. But through all of that, and with some changes of air service and so forth, all of a sudden Laramie has come back on the board. You know to us, it was always kind of a mystery why Laramie ever had problems anyway. You would think that with the college there, and the university there, and everything, that Laramie shouldn't have a problem. (coughs) They did. In fact they were in tough a shape as Worland was. In fact, Laramie and Worland were locked together in that mess. But that's an example. Another situation that's good is Rock Springs has come out of it. Rock Springs is in a lot better shape than

they were. They've added flights into Salt Lake and so forth. [01:05:00] So they've strengthened. Gillette has come leaps and bounds. And of course Gillette, in the midst of that big energy boom that they've got going on around there, you'd expect them to strengthen. And they really did. They've come along. There's been a lot of hard work that's gone into that. But they work at it all the time, and it's been getting better. That's good. Now Sheridan is another one. Sheridan has kind of struggled along. Sheridan isn't out of the woods right now.

Sheridan has got a lot of work to do.

BOGART: They're so close to Billings.

WILKIE: Right. Any time you're on the edge, you get this leakage [01:06:00]. Even Gillette, you think where do you get leakage out of Gillette? Billings, Rapid City. People will fall in a vehicle and just go to Rapid City. So if you're going to compete with that, you've got to sit down. You've got to do your homework. You've got to get everything lined up so that you can compete. Thank goodness they have. They've worked hard and they're starting to compete. Their ridership's going up. So that's good. But this gives you an idea of what our, the Commission's, involvement is.

BOGART: And I appreciate that. That's great.

WILKIE: It gives you a little idea. That's a gross over-simplification of this. You can sit [01:07:00] in our commission meetings with the division and listen to this go on for hour, after hour, after, hour. Some of it about makes you nuts. It bores you to tears. The reason it's so important -- it's important for us to know what they're doing. It's important for them to know that they're on the right track, or else if they weren't on the right track, somebody would be holding up their hand saying, "No, no, no. We don't agree with that. We don't think you ought to do that." So it kind of gives them some assurance, somebody's got their back. Somebody is saying, "Yeah. What you're doing is right. So carry on and we realize it." There's a lot of hard work and a lot of [01:08:00] talking to folks; a lot of talking to people.

BOGART: I'll bet. This is just great. I could monopolize your whole day, but I don't think I'll do that.

WILKIE: (laughs) Well, as you can tell, I enjoy talking about it.

BOGART: Well you have such a unique perspective on it with your experience flying with the BLM. That's really interesting, as well as the Aeronautics Commission work.

WILKIE: Like I said, for one thing or another, I've been around it for a long time.

BOGART: Well now we do paperwork. You know that. As I told you, this is a project of the state archives. So you and I have to --

WILKIE: State archives? It's --

BOGART: In Cheyenne.

WILKIE: In Cheyenne.

BOGART: This is their project. So you and I have to give permission for them [01:09:00] to use the information in the interview.

WILKIE: OK.

BOGART: Today is the fifth. And I will give you a copy of this after we both sign it.

WILKIE: And that's who you work for?

BOGART: I'm contracted with them to do the interviews.

WILKIE: So is that what you do? Are you a private consultant that bids on these contracts?

BOGART: Well, actually, it's much more informal in Wyoming than that. (laughs) I know a lot of the people who work on historical projects in the state. I heard about this project. They already had an interviewer lined up who backed out on them, so they asked me if I'd like to do it. I said, "Absolutely. I'd love to." Is your mailing address the same as your street address?

WILKIE: PO Box 1084. No, no, no. It's not our street address.

BOGART: 1084, OK. And what's the zip in Worland?

WILKIE: 82401. [01:10:00] I have to tell you an interesting story. When I was working coal in the Powder River Basin, we got sued by every environmentalist that was ever on Earth. Basically, we did pretty good. We put the first EIS together in 14 months. They came in and took it apart for 22 months. I mean they climbed in every crevice of that thing, and looked at it, and attacked us from every angle. When the smoke all -- see, look at that airplane right there. There's part of what goes on around Worland. He's spraying beets, or spraying something -- but any rate, [01:11:00] the only thing that they found was that in our effort to do that economic, or that environmental study, we hadn't coordinated well enough with the Indians. The Crows and the Northern Cheyennes, we hadn't coordinated well enough with them, which I knew that going in, but prior management to me had chosen not to do it. So I was behind the eight ball. I knew I didn't have enough. So they found that. So we were found to be deficient in our coordination with the Native Americans. I said, "Well, OK. Now what do we do?" You've got to put up a bunch of money because you got to do this study of the impact [01:12:00]

to the Native American people. So we had \$16-something-thousand setup and everything, and we let this bid for people to do this. We had a bunch of folks in Montana that said, "This is never going to work because the Native Americans won't let you on the reservation. They're not going to have nothing to do with it. They don't like you and they're not going to have nothing to do with you." That attitude stemmed from the fact that there had been some archeologists associated with the bureau that had been out there on the reservation that had been doing things they shouldn't have been doing. The Native people had apprehended them doing those things and had said, "Get off our reservation and don't ever come back." [01:13:00] They were grave robbing, and so forth, and so on. They were told, "Get out or else we'll put you in jail." So there was this bad attitude. Well anyway, we got this contractor. We got this contractor and it was a woman from out in Oregon. She got the bid. I was always amazed because everybody said, "No, they won't talk to her. They won't let her on the reservation." (laughs) She went down to the bank, or wherever, and she got herself a whole stack of \$100 bills. She went out on the reservation and met with the tribal council, and a bunch of people, and she said, "I'm looking for hosts." She said, "I've got this

contract and I need to go out and talk to the tribal elders [01:14:00] and I need to talk to these folks because I need to gather this information and the impacts about potential coal leasing out here with the Native Americans and so forth. But I'm looking for hosts," and she said, "I'm paying \$100 a day." She got out her \$100 bills and she said, "Anybody that would like to host me, here's your \$100." Well she had more hosts than you could shake a stick at. They fell into a car, or into the vehicles, and they went out on the reservation. She talked to every soul out there I guess.

BOGART: (laughs) That is great. It's a great story.

WILKIE: Isn't that a great story?

BOGART: That is.

WILKIE: They'll never let you out there. (laughs) It was --

BOGART: You just have to know how to do it.

WILKIE: It's a function of that green dollar.

BOGART: Absolutely.

WILKIE: But they were basically -- [01:15:00] some of the things that they were saying were true. There was tribal elders that were the old line tribal elder. They held a lot of animosity towards white people and they weren't going to talk to you. They wouldn't talk to you. Some of the things we've done, I understand why they wouldn't talk

to us. Why do you want to have anything to do with that bunch? But if Joe Little Shoulders comes out and said, "Hey, Uncle, this is my friend and they would like to sit down and talk with you over the table. Do you suppose you could do that?" Well, he probably would. (laughs) Anyway, that's just a little side note.

BOGART: Oh that's great. That is a great story. OK. I'm shutting off. [01:16:01]

END OF AUDIO FILE

Part 2

WILKIE: [00:00:00] To do my job and I'm going to just take the time and I'm going to go to Eastern Wyoming, and I'm going to open up my little office down in the Labonte Hotel, and I'm going to talk to people, and it was great. I had more fun. It was totally interesting. You just couldn't believe. If you've got the time, and you're sincere, they'll talk to you. They'll tell you how the cow ate the cabbage. (laughs)

BOGART: I've been doing this for a really long time.

END OF AUDIO FILE