

30 Bonner History Roundtable: Fire in the mountains and the BFPA

<https://youtu.be/D9uDVzeH6WM?si=nDoMjTSf2UqMzuNm>

March 17, 2019

Andy Lukes

Kim Briggeman

(This program has been edited for clarity.)

(Intro music playing with credits)

[00:00:57] **Judy Matson:** Welcome to our final 2019 Roundtable. It's been a great season and we're looking forward to next year already. But for today, we have a really special program that we'll get around to announcing in just a second here. First, a few housekeeping announcements. MCAT is here. They have two cameras here.

So, those of you in the audience, you're going to be on camera this time, so you have to stay awake the whole program. I want to thank them so much for coming and Friends of Two Rivers who applied for the grant for them to be here and preserve these really important historic programs that we've been putting on.

And I want to thank them and all of you for making the effort to make sure that Bonner history lives on. I also want to thank St. Ann Church. We haven't been here until today this year. It's kind of like a homecoming. They're always such a gracious host. We have cookies and coffee and tea in the back, so please help yourself at any time during the program that you feel like you want a snack. The restrooms are on the south end or west, whichever, behind the partition. To reach, go around the table and back along the hallway there.

And, a special event that we have in March every year for the past several years is the Better Than Butte Pasty Supper. So if you don't think they are, you're going to have to eat one or two to make sure that you're evaluating it properly. It's a great bargain. If you need to leave, you can take with for \$5 per pasty. If you're going to stay here for supper \$7 will get you a pasty with gravy and coleslaw, all homemade and delicious. So hope you can stay.

Next I would like to introduce Kim Briggeman, who really doesn't need an introduction, but I will tell you that he's going to talk a little bit about the explanation of the history [of] the religious history panels that you see around the room. And he also is going to tell you of the availability of some St. Ann history books that he brought. So, Kim.

[00:03:15] **Kim Briggeman:** Thank you, Judy Matson. Yeah, this has nothing to do with the BFPA, but we are here for history and we are in a church. And [a] night in 2017, a year and a half ago, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Missoula celebrated their 125th anniversary, I guess you'd call it. And in conjunction with that, Patrice Schwenk, who was the librarian at Loyola, among other things, put together panels apropos to everything St. Francis, into St. Francis history. So as you look around, you'll see St. Patrick Hospital, the various parishes around the area. Father [Lawrence] Palladino, is over there. Ravalli.No DeSmet. I guess DeSmet was gone by the time St. Francis came around. So that's the explanation here. We get 'em on loan for an undetermined amount of time. But fortunately it's through Lent at least.

[00:04:33] **Jim Habeck:** I wanted to know... I want to know whether the pasties are green.

Kim Briggeman: They're pasties. They don't have to be green. It's just Irish, Irish all over them. I'd like to...

Unknown speaker: An Irishman from Butte helped make them.

Kim Briggeman: An Irishman from Butte helped make them. That's right. Actually, several of them, including Father Mike Poole, who started this tradition when he was out here, I don't know, 6, 7, 8 years ago, somewhere like that.

So, with that, I'll get outta here. I'm going to introduce Andy, but Andy's going to kind of introduce himself and talk about Fire on the Mountain, The History of the BFPA

[00:05:24] **Andy Lukes:** Thanks, Kim. It's nice to see so much green. I brought some green along here too. Hopefully everyone here will get something out of this presentation. The history of the BFPA for over 50 years was a history of the Bonner, Milltown, West Riverside community, and I think it's been a very integral part of our lives from 1921.

I don't know. Is there anybody here that's older than... that was born before 1921? Till 1971, the BFPA was active in this community as a private land fire protection organization. [I am] supposed to give a little

background on myself and I'm... I wasn't born in Bonner-Milltown. I was born in the Midwest. Didn't come out West till 1961 to work for the Forest Service in northern Idaho.

I was a fire control person, fell in love with the West and was fortunate enough after going to college and getting a degree or two there to go ahead and be able to stay and put down roots. I met my wife, that changed my career path, and became part of the Bonner community.

The BFPA is one of three fire protection associations that came to Montana. They were homegrown. It was based on a need to protect lands, property and timber on private lands that fell outside the jurisdiction of the various government agencies, state agencies, and what have you. The BFPA was the second, not the first fire protection agency in Montana that protected private lands.

Principally, all three associations were directed at forest lands as the primary. The people that started the BFPA, (indicates chart) and I've got a chart here with some of the key players that started it, were associated with the companies or had large interest in forest lands. And because of their interest in growing trees as a product, to make economic sense, they wanted to protect them and they fell outside the jurisdiction of various government agencies here.

And I'm gonna give some history of what went on in Montana, but what in the orange, (refers to map) which I know you can't see very well, is the BFPA's area of fire protection that they initiated in 1921 and the blue is the Northern Montana Forest Protection Association. They initiated it in 1911.

The third Fire Protection District was the Anaconda Forest Fire Protection District, and that was in 1956. So these three associations kind of filled the gap between the various land ownerships, the Flathead Indian reservation, Forest Service lands, BLM lands, and various other forest ownerships or development ownerships.

[00:09:19] I know it's hard to see there, but Missoula is right here. Basically it runs from just a little west of St. Regis all the way to close to McDonald Pass. The association kind of fit in to cover the gaps between the forest boundaries. And as such, it kind of, you can see down here, this is the Bitterroot Valley. This is the Sapphires on the east side of the Bitterroot Valley. That was part of the BFPA over to Deer Lodge-Drummond area right here. Here's just bumping up against the forest boundaries up against what became the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. Evaro Hill, the Flathead Indian Reservation, and then along the reservation boundary.

It was created at a time that brought out the need to protect forest lands. And I'll go a little bit through the history of it, and when you get a chance, come up, take a look at it. [map] There's a lot of small things you can't see here on that protection area.

To give the background, go all the way back to 1803 - the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Louisiana Purchase and what have you. The lands were purchased from France, or I should say the US purchased the claim that France made to the lands. So, the United States government or Jefferson assumed that responsibility and acquired lands which were paid for at the rate of, I think about 3 cents an acre at that point in time.

So that was kind of the beginning. That was a monetary transaction. Before then that was kind of free rein for anybody that was on the land. As we are in St. Ann, the St. Mary's Mission was established by Father Ravalli and that was in 1845. What became Missoula Mills, that occurred in 1860. Montana Territory, 1864, only had a population at that time of about 16,000 people in the state of Montana.

The first settlements in the Bitterroot Valley outside of the St. Mary's Mission occurred in 1870, and then we got into the legislation portion, the Timber and Stone Act, which allowed people to go on the land and purchase up to 160 acres for \$2.50 cents per acre. So, land that was owned by the government was sequentially converted over to private lands with the Timber and Stone Act.

So Missoula was incorporated as a city in 1883. And some of the earliest laws that were passed by the territory involved fire protection. In 1889, we became a state. We were admitted as the state of Montana and in the union. The state's legislature in 1895 enacted basic fire laws very similar to the codes that had previously been adopted.

The federal government in 1905 became very active in the administration of federal forest reserves. Gifford Pinchot, the establishment of the national forest and what have you, was in full force and also involved with surveying lands that were out here in the Montana territory or state.

Of the key things that happened: In 1907, the state established an office of state fire warden. This is kind of significant in that it was two years later that they finally got around to establishing the Office of State Forester. A lot of things started happening at and during that period. It was kind of a critical period of development.

[00:15:01]The most significant thing was, and I think just about everybody in this room is familiar with, is the 1910 fire. That fire was a major turning point in what happened in in Montana regarding fire prevention protection. 3 million acres in Montana and Idaho were burned. 83 plus people were killed by the fire.

The timber at that point in time was just in the process of getting a lot of value. People recognize the value of it, but in order to have value, you have to be able to convert timber into useful products. The history of Montana mining generated a big demand for timber. Timber was important to everybody's daily life. If you needed to bring firewood in every night to keep warm, it was pretty important stuff. And to build houses and do things. Timber became very critical. The railroads came out west here, passed through Missoula, created an opportunity to tap wider markets. What happened in Butte in terms of the copper mining and such was a real boom.

People realized that timber had an economic value, not only an aesthetic value, but it was something that could be used and reused and was critical to a person's life. I know they've got over 10,000 uses of a tree. These, in terms of the Forest Products Lab. So it was kind of a critical thing.

As I said over here, 1911, the Northern Montana Forest Protection Association. What was happening in the West at that point in time was Montana was kind of a place you stopped to get to the West Coast, to Seattle, to Oregon, to California. The people in Washington and Oregon had beautiful timbers. Some of the best timber in the world, the Douglas fir forests and such, and it had tremendous economic value. And they were the leaders in private forest protective associations. The federal government was just getting its feet on the ground, didn't have the resources. And people that had timber. it was kind of like having a bank account.

Okay. But it, timber, is a different kind of a bank account. You have to grow it first or it has to be grown if you have it. If you have money in the bank, basically you're fairly certain. But if you have a stand of timber, it is only valuable in the economic use that you can put it to. So here in Montana, people that had timberlands, particularly the Anaconda company, private individuals J. [Julius] Neils. Anybody that had acquired timberlands was kind of concerned because their bank account was in jeopardy. So if you had a fire, in order to grow that bank account, you had to wait a long period of time. It was valuable. And so that recognition of the value of timber and to be able to put it to economic use needed to be protected. And if you had a ranch and you had timber on your ranch there, that was an asset that you needed to be able to protect. And that was the main reason that we have three private or fire protection associations protecting private lands.

So, the Office of State Forester was created in, as I said, in 1909 that they took the lead, they cooperated, and there was a really interesting relationship between private industry and the associations. They had a mutual desire to accomplish something, protect timberlands and the value that they had.

[00:19:51] So, I'm gonna run through a few of the laws and what have you, but there was a lot of government assistance. The Clarke-McNary Act provided opportunities for government agencies to transfer monies over to the state, to the office of State Forester and such to provide assistance to timberland owners and that form benefit[ted] the BFPA in particular because it allowed them to have money to supplement their own private monies.

The BFPA initially started at 2 cents an acre that they assessed amongst the timber companies and private forest land owners. If you didn't belong to the BFPA, if you had a fire on your property you were just outta luck. Basically, you had to bear the full cost of trying to put the fire out, whether it be on your timberlands or if your barn or whatever. So it was a mutual aid kind of society or organization. If you were part of it, you got the benefit of the fire protection and it was very a fair type situation and pretty well accepted by farmers, ranchers and timberland owners.

I've got so much material here, unfortunately, that it's hard to skip over any of it, but I'd like to go ahead and if you have a more detailed interest in the fire history of Montana and the BFPA in particular, this book by Gary Moon, *The History of Montana State Forestry* does a really good job of laying out a timeline as to what was happening and in terms of fire protection and the development of fire protection agencies.

The BFPA met a need. It was a need that was recognized all over the western United States. The real kind of organization that of timber growers on the West Coast created an organization called Western Forestry. And that extended into the Inland Empire here. And they were the major players in developing these various associations. Similar ones in Idaho developed in such. And they were the ones that were trying to do the job of protecting forest lands. And so they played a very valuable role in what we have today. But like all things, all good things, they usually come to an end.

And the fire protection associations, because they had a problem that was specific to them. And that problem was you couldn't get reasonably priced insurance on timberland because it was such a long time span and what have you. Also the nation had moved on in terms of laws, liabilities. We have almost more lawyers in the state here than we have trees these days.

And liability became a real major concern for these private forest protection associations. So, it was kind of a challenge to buck the tide of staying in business as a private association. So ultimately all three associations chose to go ahead and turn their responsibilities over to the state. And in Montana it was to the office of State Forester or the subsequently Department of Natural Resources. So that's, in a kind of a broad nutshell, that's the rough history of the BFPA in Montana. And Judy and other members of the Bonner history group that provided a whole variety of pictures and some things that if you get a chance when you're having a coffee break here to take a look at. They're interesting things and we hope that when we get the chance to have the open mic here and such we want to gather as much information as we can of your interactions with the BFPA, your memories and such and also anything about that organization. We all have, I think, stories to share.

[00:25:39] As I said, I didn't work for the BFPA, but I did work for seven years with State Forestry, yet in the early seventies, and we did fight fire with several BFPA personnel. So, I'd like to go ahead and just flip a few charts here.

The pictures that we have, I think most of you're familiar with River City restaurant there. A tremendous addition to the community here. That restaurant was previously the Western Lumber Company there and headquarters. And early on in 1943 it became the headquarters for the BFPA.

Prior to that, it [BFPA] had been in the old school building in Bonner, which was torn down shortly after 1943, I understand. So this became the headquarters for the BFPA. [Illustrates on drawing] And this is from kind of memory of what it was when I worked out of that building. They had three buildings that were from the CCCs, they were brought from Lolo Creek up Graves Creek as CCC camp, and also a vehicle shed.

Two were used for storage. One was a shop to maintain the BFPA's equipment. The BFPA was a very efficient, manpower-wise can-do type operation. They were fortunate in their history to have fire wardens that were very good at fire control activities. Foresters by their training use fire as a tool.

But then they **also** use RISE to the occasion to protect forest stands because once a fire goes through a stand of timber, you have two choices. You can walk away from it basically, or you can try to salvage what you can. And the BFPA was noted for a very active, aggressive fire program mainly due to the fire wardens that were in charge of active suppression.

(shows on map) The River City Grill here and the old air station here for filling your tires are the only two buildings still in existence here. So, to orient you, if you're not familiar with it, the Town Pump building is located right here. It used to be the office or the headquarters for Champion Timberlands operations there for a period of time.

To kind of conclude a little bit, and we can talk about other things, fire lookouts and some of the patrol activities here during the open mic discussion portion of it. But the BFPA, just to give you an idea and mention the fire wardens, the people that started the organization are people that were really shakers and movers in the Missoula, Western Montana community here.

[00:29:57] W.C. Lubrecht and Kenneth Ross were major managers for the Anaconda Company there. Lubrecht was very generous in terms of providing the mechanism to give the School of Forestry the Lubrecht Forest, 30,000 plus acres, and people that were on the board and standing committees and what have you were all related or had some financial interest in making sure timber was protected.

The first fire warden was a professor at the Forestry School, T.C. Spaulding. He later became a dean at the school here. He must have been quite an individual from the little reading I've done about him. He was a real good fire person.

He was followed by Les Talbot who passed away here in the late eighties, and he was another really remarkable individual from what I've been told. He spent essentially his entire career, outside of the time he spent in the South Pacific during World War II, as the man to go to really go ahead and protect forest lands. While he was away, there's Jack Clack filled in for him and then Ralph Hanson, who was a resident of the Piltzville community here.

Ralph was the one I had most interactions with. He dispatched you for fires and pulled you away from what you thought you should be doing to go out and fight fires. And I've got the time periods as to when they served on the little flip chart there. But Ralph served from '65 to '71 as an employee of the BFPA and then stayed on with State Forestry. And that's where I got to know him 'cuz he kind of dispatched us and really helped us in a lot of ways.

Another long term employee that spent his entire career with the BFPA is Art Ahlin. He worked outta Drummond. The BFPA had basically three main operational points. One was in Drummond, Montana, and then

up in the... oh gosh, trying to remember... when you get a little older, things kind of fade on you and such, but anyway, I shouldn't forget it, but things happen.

Art Ahlin spent in the Drummond area his entire life protecting forest lands in that area. And he was assisted by Tim Murphy, who also passed away. And he was kind of an assistant fire warden there. And Tim was charged, at the time that the BFPA was going down to provide fire protection services as part of the Anaconda Company.

Also, there was a small period Don MacKenzie, that ran the operation at the headquarters operation by Seeley Lake, stood in for a year as a fire warden. But these were the people that on the ground made it work. With that maybe we can talk with Kim a little bit, he's going to talk on what...

Jim Habeck: I have a question for you though.

Andy Lukes: Sure. You bet.

[00:34:08] **Jim Habeck:** One, the historic timeline included the Forest Homestead Act.

Andy Lukes: That's correct.

Jim Habeck: And that I have to believe that foresters trying to protect forest and homesteaders would've been at each other's throats because the trees are removed to grow crops, corn or wheat or water. But where did that fit into Western Montana?

Andy Lukes: Well, that was more of a thing on the East Coast than it was out here.

Jim Habeck: The Swan Valley up by Seeley Lake and so on. Or forest that were opened up for homesteading.

Andy Lukes: Yeah, most of it was timber-related use on there. It didn't grow wheat very well. It was tough climate to do it. Trees were kind of the main economic crop there. So, I don't know how to really answer because, it goes both ways. And the lower valley bottoms, where you have agricultural land, there was pretty easy to portion off the 160 acres for crops and whatever was not suitable. And it, was in timber or grazing the valley.

[00:35:27] **Jim Habeck:** The grassland valley area that had been almost all dedicated for homesteading. And then the post-1910 or something, people still were coming in from the east looking for a homestead. I don't know the year they formed the Homestead Act.

Andy Lukes: Yeah, I've got it here, but right now I can't speak to it. The Timber and Stone Act was the one that probably really concentrated on timbered areas because the people wanted a place to call home. But they really wanted the timber 'cuz that had the values potentially for staying on the land for five years and such to prove up. It was kind of a no-brainer there. If you had the opportunity to get the 160 acres of land that had timber on it, that's what you chose. And it got cut over in one way, shape, or form. And it still had value as cut over land. In fact, in some cases it may improve the value if it was close to an area that was being developed. So, yeah.

unknown speaker: Is this helping mic, or

Andy Lukes: well, we are gonna try to get the mic to Kim. That's what we were trying to do here.

Kim Briggeman: I'm going to suggest a deviation from our plan here. I'd like to hear some stories. Now I'm gonna circle back. My job is to talk about something I don't know much about. After the BFPA transferred over to... its responsibilities were transferred over to the state in 1971, they maintained a board. They had lots of money left over. And so I was going to talk about that, but I think there's lots of stories to be told before that, about when it was in operation. And so if we could do the open mic now, and Andy, if you could come up and return to the podium here.

Judy Matson: So, as we've been doing the last few meetings we are going to pass this mic around. You're welcome to stand up or come up in front, but you don't need to. You can stay at your seat if you wish.

Remember the ice cream cone idea where you need to hold it [mic] close to your mouth so that it picks up the sound of your voice. And this is really important for our historic preservation because these stories that we're telling today are probably what people are going to have in the future to know about the BFPA.

So, thanks to all of you in advance for... So what I'm going to do is start here with Kenny. If he has something to say, he'll say it, he'll pass it on around, and we'll just go around the room. And then if you think of something that you should have said after we get around, raise your hand. Nobody's gonna get cut off, but this will just keep the mic moving in case somebody wants to say something or someone doesn't. So Kenny.

Ken Peers: Thank you. I worked at Bonner for almost 25 years and I graduated high school in '52 and went to work there. And I had three encounters with the BFPA and the first one was in the summer of '52 because

Bonner was the manpower for the BFPA basically. And so if they had a fire, they would gather up guys from the mill.

And I happened to be lucky enough of be one of 'em in the first trip we had. They put us in a truck and took us up to McNamara Landing and then put us on a scooter car with a trailer on it, and took us up to a fire that was close to Belmont. And quite fortunately, we got up there and it was just a stump that was burning. So it was just a nice scenic trip for us because a lot of us had never seen that part of the Blackfoot, because it had no roads at that time.

[00:39:57] But the next time was in 1960 after I'd come back from the service and went to work and was married. And the first fire we went on was Elk Creek. And it was a real good burner at that time, but that was probably the best fire protection anybody could ever have because Bonner and the BFPA. They didn't, they really fought the fire. The one night that we were there, the winds came up and the fire was going down a ridge. You could see it reaching out and it was about a mile long. And they put two Cats on that night and one on each side of it. And they ran that fire down before daylight and it was over with.

That was when they really fought fires. They didn't fly over and drop water on 'em, cuz that doesn't do much good as I see it. But on the... then the third encounter was the Gold Creek fire. And that was a big fire. And we were all involved in that, mostly just digging lines and what not. The one story I have to bring back with that was my buddy Bob. He got... he disturbed a nest of yellow jackets and he was stung 27 times. And so they hauled him out of there on a gurney and took him to Missoula and got him all fixed up. But that's basically everything I had to do with the BFPA. They were a good organization and it was nice to help them out.

Judy Matson: This is Kenny Peers and we all know Kenny. But somebody in the future may not remember. And so I forgot to ask you to also please say your name when you get, if you want to speak in the mic. Do you have anything? Just go ahead and pass it on down

[00:42:16] **Bob Lamley:** My name's Bob Lamley and I worked for the Anaconda Company. Started in 1953 in the Timberlands and enjoyed working with such people as Ralph Hanson. He was really an excellent road locator and we worked in the Thompson River all that time. And so I've worked with most of the timberlands in the Thompson River, which is about a third of the timberlands that's owned by the company in this area.

And one thing about Ralph Hanson was that he was really good at locating roads, and he taught me a lot about road location and everything. And when one day they said, "Ralph, come to Missoula," and that's when he became a fire warden at the BFPA. So my experience with Ralph Hanson was really good and I worked with him. Also I worked with Tim Murphy in Timberlands. So that's about all I want to say.

[00:43:24] **Lee Legreid:** I'm Lee Legreid. I was probably one of the few left that was on that Gold Creek fire in 1960 at the top of the Jocko Divide up there. And at the time, they wanted to recruit everybody they could get out of Missoula and there was like two busloads of us that went up at the same time.

And I was up there 13 days. Had a lot of hours in. It was a dollar 77 in an hour. And after the 13 days out of those two busloads they brought up, I think there was about maybe eight or nine of us left out of that first bunch that went up. But I just happened to remember that story and I thought I'd mentioned it.

[00:44:17] **Ron Wakimoto:** Hi I'm Ron Wakimoto. For over 33 years I was the fire professor at the University of Montana. So I got to deal with... I didn't come here till '82, joined the faculty in '82 and I worked with the directors. So George Neff, Martin Briggeman, Gary Moon, Ernie Corrick. Those... Marshall Moy. Those were the guys that I dealt with and Ralph as well. Ralph Hanson. And it always, at these big national meetings, there were all always these Canadians running around with Ralph. And I finally figured it out that when you go to school here, you gotta make some money to pay for school.

And the Canadians really liked being here rather than going home. And because it was BFPA, Ralph could hire 'em. That's a big difference when you're trying to go to school. So it really made a... it just, Ralph was beaming when he'd run around with those guys at a big meeting.

[00:45:20] **Andy Lukes:** Yeah. In 1965, when I graduated in Forest Management, 40% of the class was Canadians. And so it affected a lot of our speech patterns there. And also it had a lot to do with the amount of beer consumption that occurred within the area because it was a real treat for those Canadians to come on down and do it. And very strong ties. In fact I almost went up to work in Canada in '65 'cuz they had a shortage of people that were trained in forestry at that point in time. And they were really anxious to look for people wherever they could find them. So...

[00:46:11] **Tony Liane:** I'm Tony Liane. I started working for the Anaconda Company in either in 1970 or '71, and I knew Ralph Hanson at that time.

I worked in Timberlands and then when I got out of the Army, I came back to work for Champion International. As Andy mentioned, by that time the state had taken over the fire protection responsibilities for the former BFPA-protected lands. As foresters, as Andy said, we started probably lots of fires, but it was for management purposes. It was burning piles, burning - doing broadcast burns to do regeneration, getting rid of the slash as we were required to do under state law. And then occasionally we helped fight fires with the state in, and I can't remember, maybe somebody here will know it.

At that time you had the Forest Service that was doing fire protection. You had the state that was doing fire protection. You had the BLM that was doing fire protection. And the Forest Service protected Forest Service lands, the BLM protected BLM lands and the state protected state and private lands.

And so, because the land ownership is so jumbled up here in Western Montana, you would have fire engines of one color or another going past each other going to their own fires. And it was not very efficient. And I can't remember exactly when, but I think it was in the eighties the..., an effort was made by the agencies, the state, federal agencies to reduce that confusion.

And they decided that they would split up the state of Montana to do fire protection. And so you didn't have fire engines crisscrossing each other across the state. So the BLM took most of Eastern Montana for their fire protection and protected state, private and forest service and BLM lands. On the west side, the Forest Service had protection for Forest Service, state, BLM, and private lands. The state also had fire protection responsibilities for Forest Service, state, BLM and private lands, but it was blocked up so it was more efficient for all of these forces to move back and forth and do fire protection and do fire suppression work.

I worked for the state starting in 1997. Oh, one thing I was gonna mention is in that period between early seventies and mid- to late-eighties, it seemed like it was a wetter period. We didn't have lots of big major fires, and in the nineties it started drying out. We started having more fires. I went to work for the state in 1997 as the area manager for Southwest Land Office.

[00:50:08] And we basically had responsibility for all of the BFPA lands, the former protection lands up in the Blackfoot, down in the Garnets and out towards St. Regis and up Lolo and so we changed operations a lot from the days of the BFPA to today and how we fight fire and the training that goes into the firefighters, the safety equipment that firefighters are required to have, the type of equipment that we have available for firefighting. And so a lot has changed in the years since 1971 when the BFPA turned over responsibility to the state. So it was an interesting time period.

[00:51:06] **Joe Gorsch:** Joe Gorsch from Butte, America, and I'm not Irish.

Unknown speaker: I'm sorry.

Joe Gorsch: I did work for the Anaconda Company, but that was down on the 42- and the 4,400-foot levels of the Anselmo Mine. However, I used your timber for posts, caps, girts, and lagging. But anyway, those were good old days. However, in 1956, '54, no, 19... yeah... '56. I met Gary Moon when his office was in the corner of the forestry school on campus.

For some reason Gary picked on me and what a great guy. He called me down the office, closed the door, and told me what I should be doing. He suggested I switch into the five-year curriculum. Before I got out of the five-year curriculum he hired me. He said he would, I should say, to go to work for the state of Montana.

When I went to work for him, he not only invited me to both homes for dinner, but that wasn't the reason, I usually was given some guidance. And, by God, it was all good! Gary was a great guy. And as a result of him and his pushing, steering me along. And I need a lot of that being from Butte. But he was one heck of a good boss and I think I owe my career path to Gary. Thank you, Gary.

[00:53:36] **Jim Habeck:** Jim Habeck. I'm a retired professor of plant ecology with a specialty in fire ecology. And I was a forestry student before many of you were born. 1952. Is that right? '52, '53. And the dean of forestry told me that as a senior I would be running around looking at forestry logging camps, learning how to make contracts, get bids and so on like that.

I said, "I'm... won't I be getting any more forest ecology?" "You've had all you need." This was Ross Williams, Dean Ross Williams, and some of you... So anyway, I switched from on the campus UM in 1952-'53 to be a botany major. And Smokey Joe Kramer was the plant ecologist, but he was trained in Nebraska.

And what kind of a piece of equipment did I inherit when I finally took over his job? What was his principal field piece of equipment? A shovel, bunches of shovels. Why? If you're, if you get your training from Nebraska, everything that is ecologically of importance happens where? Under the ground where you can't see. So on field

trips, he took his students out and dug holes to see where the roots extended. Different plants. Two plants side by side could be different root "systems," and so on.

[00:55:07] Anyway, I came back in 1960 and was on the committee for both wildlife and graduate, was on a number of graduate committees. And anyway, I got interested in forestry in the sense of fire. And I got many research grants for Glacier Park, the Selway Wilderness and elsewhere working on the role of the natural role of fire. That's where we are now nowadays. If you go up Gold Creek, one homestead which had their old growth Ponderosa pine left. What's the name of that place? [Primm] And you can still see the remnants and relics of the homestead itself. And it's one of the best pieces of landscape that's left in the Blackfoot drainage. And then we learned about river pigs. I won't go into that.

[00:56:09] **Jerry Buckhouse:** My name is Jerry Buckhouse and I lived in Milltown. I was born in Missoula and we moved to Milltown in the early '40s. And I went to grade school at Bonner and high school at Hellgate. It was called Hellgate but, it was Missoula County High School then. And anyway, I worked at the mill and I had my name in at the BFPA to volunteer for fires, and I got a call in the early '60s, probably the same fire that this other fella talked about. Up Gold Creek. And we were told that that fire didn't have a road to it. So we had to walk in and it was at night. We had to carry all of our equipment. We had Pulaskis and chainsaws and shovels and what have you. We probably hiked for over four hours and ended up on top of a ridge. We could smell the smoke. And the head guy told us, "We'll wait here till daylight. Get a couple hours sleep and then go down to the fire." Well, we got over the ridge and we heard a vehicle down below. Evidently you could drive to the fire. (laughter)

We worked on that fire for one day and we were told that it was a bunch of Indians that came on the fire. Part of the fire was on the reservation. So they sent us home. And the next day we got a call that said the fire blew up. I don't know if the Indians had anything to do with that, but I was put on a water truck. And we took the water truck to Arlee and had a flat tire. I had to get that tire fixed. But I was in charge of that water truck for the rest of the fire. And I don't remember how long we were there. It was over a week. During the fire, they punched a hole from there clear back to the head end of Gold Creek so we could drive out that way to get back home.

And they said, "Anybody that wants to ride home, get on the water truck." And I'll bet we had 50 guys on that water truck. But I'll tell you, it was the slowest ride home that they ever had. So that was my experience on the fire.

[00:59:33] **Mary Ann Buckhouse:** Well, I guess I better follow Jerry. He usually follows me. Hi, everyone. I'm Mary Ann Buckhouse. And I kind of consider myself an old forester because I started with the Anaconda Company August 1, 1956. And I worked for them for 37 years with my foresters. And I see several of my wonderful guys around here today, Bob and Tony, I think I even remember Joe, and Craig. So it's always good to see these wonderful people. I just have so many special memories of them. And it was... I feel it was 37 years well spent. I started when I was 18. Now I'm 81, so... (laughs) And I retired in 50, excuse me, in 1993. But back to the BFPA.

But I want to mention, I'm going to also mention these fellows. George Neff was my first boss. And I was 18. I was his secretary. And then I also worked for Ernie Corrick for many years. And he was actually the vice president of the Western Timberlands when we merged with California, Oregon, Washington and Montana. And then, of course, after Ernie retired, I worked with Blaine Bloomgren, whom some of you may know. So I was very fortunate to have wonderful bosses and wonderful co-workers. And about Ralph Hanson. I don't know, and I remember Les Tarbert, I think it's Tarbert? And Jim Murphy was his name. Very handsome forester, I do say that. And he has passed on, as well as George and Ernie. Blaine is still kicking around pretty good. Maybe he's here today, I don't know. But I wanted to mention Ralph Hanson did build, when he retired, he built his home right across the street from Jerry and I in the Bonner Pines addition. And then I think Ralph passed then, and his son, Bob, of course, inherited the property. And then Bob and his wife moved into that house, and so I was neighbors to Ralph and then his son, Bob.

And I just have to mention one more thing. I worked for many, many years, and spent some time in the BFPA office, but we had a couple secretaries that worked with the foresters in that office. I still remember the combination to the vault. (laughter)

And then the other thing, 'cause then we had a fire in our brand new office. We built a brand new office when Ernie became Vice President of the Timberlands, etc. And we built a brand new, beautiful office. And, of course, that was fire that burned down in 1977? 78? Something like that. And we rebuilt that office, which was a lovely office. I think there were 43 of us in it when we first started, when we all moved into that office. But anyway many memories and I do remember my last day in that office which is now the Exxon station down there. I was the last one to leave that office when Stimson purchased the Timberlands.

I was not re-hired, so I retired when I was 56. But it was a sad day when I left that office because I remember everybody was going different ways and I was the last one to leave that office. I was the office administrator and, of course, I had to do my final duty, walk all around the office and make sure everything was locked up and everything was taken care of. And so then I just walked out the back door and said, "Thank you, Mary Ann, for 37 years of service." And that was the end of it. So that's my story.

[01:05:34] **Jerry Buckhouse:** I'll mention this one thing about Mary Ann. When they built the Town Pump, they put a casino in there. And Mary Ann refused to go in that office because the casino was right where her office was.

Mary Ann Buckhouse: You're right.

Danya Zimmerman: I've got a small story about that. My name is Danya Zimmerman and I kind of live here. I lied about my age during that Elk Creek fire and I got taken up there by the BFPA and was taken down into a creek bottom on a bulldozer and I ran a six-cylinder water-cooled McCulloch pump with no muffler for 30 hours. They fed me two sandwiches brought in by a mule train, and I rode back out of there on the bulldozer. And when I went through camp, everyone up there was eating steak. They had quarters of beef hanging around, so... I haven't volunteered again since then, so that was my BFPA story. (laughter)

Jim Labbe: Andy, you might have to get a referee before I get finished here. 'Cause I'll probably be hitting some politics and because, see, I actually worked for two different outfits. But anyway, my name's Jim Labbe. I was born and raised here at Bonner and the Milltown area. I first started with the Forest Service up at Seeley Lake in 1957.

I was a smoke chaser up there, fought fire and I was in fire prevention, and anyway, at that time, BFPA had an office in Seeley, and they had one in Ovando. And part of my duties, you know, when I was doing fire prevention and all that, I'd stop in and BS with those guys because I wanted to know who they were, and they wanted to know who I was, because we intermingled on fires and so on.

And I did the same thing with the guys over at Ovando. I'd get over there occasionally and I'd stop in and, because I wanted them to know, hey, we are kind of one agency. And I was on several fires with BFPA people up around Seeley, especially past the lake and around that neck of the woods.

And those guys, they knew the country. They knew how to get around, they were good firefighters, and I enjoyed working with them. I was on maybe a dozen fires up there that were actually BFPA fires, but the Forest Service would go in and help out on occasion because, you know, we had interest there, too. And so anyway, that's how I started out knowing the guys at the BFPA. While we're talking about the fires, you didn't mention the lookouts that the BFPA had.

Andy Lukes: No, in terms of reference, some of the stuff I had said five lookouts. I could only identify three, Hunter's Point, there. Saddle Mountain and Union Peak. They used temporary lookouts in the early days of the BFPA. They used lookout trees and tents. They also used mobile equipment, you know. They patrolled in cars and trucks and they built scratch roads. They laid miles and miles of phone line. They didn't have iPhones or anything like that to deal with. So they had to have a hardwired line. And that was one of the early problems the BFPA ran into, was just communication. And they had, they used the public, and ranchers' kids, farm kids, ranch kids anytime a fire... somebody tried to get to a phone or whatever that was available, But most of the time it was just go to the fire, period.

And so, that development took quite a period of time, but it also put a lot of responsibility on the people that were out there either with the BFPA or friends of the BFPA. And on a lot of cases whose property the fire was on when it was discovered wasn't generally known. And so, and on fires, I know it happened to me several times by Avon, Elliston, and I'm being dispatched by the state on a fire. It was close enough to fire protect Forest Service lands and so... You get on the fire, you go ahead and knock it down as quick as you could, and then you find out that it's actually on Forest Service fire protection, so you go through the whole process of turning the fire over, and you can get into some trouble, and I did it one time there doing the same thing.

I refused to turn it over to the Forest Service because they didn't have people that could deal with the fire. And so I just refused to get off the fire because it was a 10-acre fire in a post and pole patch. We had knocked the fire down. We had scratched line all the way around and Forest Service people came on the fire and they wanted to take it over and they thought it was a major fire when it was, you know, it was a later season fire. It wasn't going any place and what have you, so, you know, the boundaries are there and you just try to do the best you can to make it work, so.

[01:11:56] **Jim Labbe:** And, Andy, I think one other lookout you have was Mineral Peak out around Ovando. Not Mineral Peak, but Montour Hill. Yeah, Montour Hill. And I think at one time it might have even had Belmont Lookout.

Andy Lukes: Yeah, I couldn't find anything in the stuff I looked at there. But that's probably a good shot at it.

Jim Labbe: Yeah. Yeah. Belmont and then Hunter Point there on the Paws Up Ranch and all that.

Andy Lukes: Yeah, I forgot to mention that we actually appear to have on display there, the firefinder from Hunter's Point there. And it's a really unusual piece. I've never seen that design 'cause I was just mostly familiar with Forest Service lookouts, and so,

Steve Bixby: (unclear) called the portable base. It's a Bosworth, and it weighs probably 100 pounds, so whoever said it was portable never (unclear)

Andy Lukes: Yeah. Scott, could you introduce yourself there?

Steve Bixby: Steve Bixby.

Andy Lukes: Steve, excuse me.

Steve Bixby: from the Historical Museum, you probably

Several speakers: (overtalking)

Steve Bixby: So my name is Steve Bixby. I'm a volunteer out at the Historical Museum there at Fort Missoula. And it's kind of interesting. I knew absolutely nothing about the BFPA up until probably a month ago when I was talking to Ron. And I don't know how we got on the subject, but he told me a bit about it. And it just kind of clicked that in the collection there at the museum there was a firefinder that didn't quite... (overtalking)

Oh, yes, sure. And so this was one that I knew I had run across a while before, and it's kind of an oddball one. It's a Bosworth versus the Osborne the Forest Service usually used. And it, the map doesn't quite fit with the Forest Service because there's no green around there. So I really had no clue exactly what it was or where it came from. And Ron filled me in on that. And so, ironically, probably a week after that I got the Facebook message saying there's going to be this discussion. So [I] went back out and pulled this thing out of there. Interestingly, too, when getting this out, I found two other boxes with firefinders in those, and it's Union Peak and Saddle Mountain were the other two, so those are the three firefinders that are all out there in the museum.

This one, as I mentioned, was kind of the weird Bosworth design, and I've never seen a base like this on any of them. And normally they're on the post right in the middle of the lookout. And this guy is the portable one that is not at all portable, just based on the weight of that thing do try to pick it up.

Fortunately, it's in two pieces or it wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have been able to carry the thing in. But like I say, there's two more of those out at the museum. And kind of neat that, or interesting that it just happened to be that I was talking to Ron at the right time.

[01:15:05] **Jim Labbe:** Well, I opened up another can of worms there. Anyway, these fires that Jerry was talking about and the one on Gold Creek, Chamberlin Meadows, and all that. Anyway, the one up Gold Creek. See I was at Seeley Lake at the time. There were actually three different fires up there. The BFPA fire, Forest Service, and the reservation fire. It got to be kind of a mess.

So, we had our fire camp, BFPA had theirs and the Indians had theirs, whatever, and it got towards the end of the fire. And anyway, the Ranger sent me up there, just check and see what was going on. Sure as heck I get up there and here's an Indian crew sitting up there. Smoke coming up in fires and I, yeah, I don't need to say anymore, but we had to take care of it, yeah.

And then back to the one dealing or one fire that I did go on with the BFPA. I'd just gotten out [of] active duty out of the Army and I was working here at the mill that one summer '58. Another guy and I were swamping lumber out in the yard there for Lefty [Pleasant]. And I look up and there in the head of Deer Creek comes a big smoke. I told this other guy, I said, well, in a few minutes Lefty's gonna be here and he's going to gather us up. Well, yeah, he did. He ended up at the BFPA office and had gotten Joe Bouchard's ton and a half truck, state truck, and he hauled us up to the fire. And so that was one BFPA fire I was on when I worked for the company a short period of time.

And talking about, and this is where I need to be careful because of the politics. I don't mean anything negative, but I was a dispatcher out at Bonita from '62 until we shut down in late sixties. Then I went back dispatching in the early seventies and it was about that time that, I mean, the grain trucks and the yellow trucks and this and that, they're passing one another on the road going to a fire.

We gotta do something about that. Chuck Wright. Yeah, Chuck Wright was there and he and I had quite a few discussions about fires. And the road might be the boundary, this side is State, the other side is Forest Service. And we've gotta do something about that. And I guess through the years it got worked out pretty good to where you've got interagency, closest resource and all that. I'm glad to see that 'cuz it took a lot of political work and people getting to know one another... So, I guess that's kind of about it. You didn't even have to get a referee.

Rick Swanson: My name is Rick Swanson. And you were talking about the Elk Creek and Gold Creek fires. I was on both of those. One instance that I like to remember, well, I do like to remember, is we were walkin' the trail at night along the fire line, and if you heard it, you know what I heard and I heard snapping and cracking and I thought, "Oh boy, something's coming down. Which way do I run?" Well, I didn't, I just stood right there and when it came down, it was probably about 15 to 20 feet away from me, and that scared me.

And you were talking about the lagging and the girts and the caps that you had. I loaded many of those railroad cars out here at the small log mill when they were going.

[01:19:59] **Glenn Max Smith:** My name is Glenn Smith. A lot of the locals around here that grew up with me called me the Hooligan. I started my career out here at Bonner Mill in 1960. Before that, I worked the Saddle Mountain Fire down by Darby. So I'm used to Forest Service. I come into BFPA through the mill. They loaded us all up, says, "Gotta go to Gold Creek."

Okay, we go to Gold Creek. And we had no sandwiches. We had the tools and everything. They wanted us to work, but the meals at that time when they were getting set up were kind of iffy at best. So along towards about midnight, they managed to bring us up some sandwiches. A lot of 'em are processed meat. A lot of our crew wolfed them down. They thought that was the neatest thing they ever had. I elected from my experience at Saddle Mountain to stay with cheese and about an hour later, half our crew was dove out into the bushes. They were pukin' and havin' a hell of a time. That processed meat just didn't set too good.

Finally got a chance to go down. And I have to tie in with Kenny Peer's recollection. We get to go down to have breakfast. Now they've got the buses, old school buses that look kind of like today's concession stands where they pulled the side down and you get yourself something to eat. Okay. They had that set up.

They were cooking pancakes. They had syrup, man, they were eating high on the hog. We're sitting out there enjoying our meal and somebody says, "Hey," I believe the guy's name was Jake, "get up there and get a can of those preserves." Had a gallon can of preserves, we'll put 'em on our pancakes. Jake got up there. He reached through the window of that cook bus, got his can of preserves and there was a hundred bazillion yellow jackets in that thing. Chased ol' Jake cleared ta Gold Creek 'cuz we were parked right beside Gold Creek. Jake dove in and them hornets was so gosh damn mad they took it out on the rest of us. So we all had to take a bath in Gold Creek and until them hornets cooled off. So that was my experience with forest fires. I hope I never have to go out on another one.

Justin Iverson: I'm Justin Iverson from Potomac. I wasn't born until the BFPA was long cold. But when our fire department was started in Potomac some of the initial funding came from the trustees that were left managing the assets of the BFPA including the construction of our first fire department station. So, the BFPA name is positioned proudly up on top of that building.

And when I worked on the, it was Department of State lands, then DNRC fire crew up at Clearwater, all of our hand tools were painted blue and yellow. And I remember folks talking about the BFPA handles on the tools were maybe painted red and green. It helped identify which agency owned which tools. So now our fire department paints our tools red and green in honor of the BFPA tools. So I'm curious to know, to hear from anybody who actually worked with any of those tools, if they were painted that color, if that was just a story that got thrown.

Andy Lukes: They had an auction at the BFPA, I think it was '72 or late '73. There was about 200 and some people there. And if you had \$10, it was supposed to be bids, but went for \$10 for a shovel, Pulaski, and maybe a pickax or a piece of iron and what have you. And that was pretty well attended. They were red and green. I think I left some up at the lake and they disappeared. They were good tools. They were made very durable.

Cory Calnan: So my name is Cory Calnan and I'm the current Fire Management Officer for DNRC out of the Clearwater unit in the upper end of the Blackfoot. And it's just kind of neat to be here today and watch how, even how much things have changed in fire protection, how much the BFPA is woven through everything we still do. Property assessments for the state. Fire protection is still the model that we do. The way we fight fire, the way we handle things, the fire trails that are on every ridge line in the Blackfoot are still there today that we do use on occasion. So couple things. We do, or we did have the firefinder from the Montour Hill Lookout. We donated that last year to the Brand Bar Museum in Ovando. So you can see that firefinder there. And they

actually have a pretty cool exhibit of fire history in the Blackfoot watershed. So if you ever make it up the Blackfoot, swing by there.

The other thing that's still in existence is the old Hunter's Point Lookout. The building still exists. It's on the Clearwater unit compound. It's our oil house and has been an oil house for eons. So if you swing in the Clearwater unit, we have the Old Hunter's Point building that was moved off Hunter's Point.

[01:25:27] **Ryan Hall:** So my name's Ryan Hall, born and raised up in the Blackfoot, Potomac. Just wanted to thank everyone for putting this together and doing this. My grandpa years ago, Bob Hall, Robert Hall, worked there and I believe I had one uncle that worked for the BFPA. Sitting there doing math on my calculator and I think he lied about his age 'cuz I don't think he was 18 by the time you guys were shutting down. But anyway just wanted to thank everybody for putting this on. This is awesome. These are stories I've heard all my life, so come here and experience. It's pretty neat.

Craig Thomas: Craig Thomas. I started work for Anaconda Forest Products in July 26th, 1971, as a floor sweeper and a glue stick operator for a lamination department I think Lamley was running at the time. So I didn't work with the BFPA, however, there were some carryovers 'cuz I was sent on several fires and when everybody's talking about fire pay. Well I was on a forester salary and that's just the way it was. It's a fire and you're on salary and you go fight the fire. I have a, in my book, a chapter on fire, and that has a write-up by Fred Guenzler on the Gold Creek fire when he was burned over. And that might be interesting anybody was interested in reading that.

Last year, I, no... in '17, I spent 63 days on fires. Last year I spent 19 days on fires. And I can assure you it's a lot different from what was happening when I first started. And for all the youngsters here, never go in the corporate bathroom with Mary Ann. (laughter)

Dennis Sain: I'm Dennis Sain I worked in the mill starting in 1960 and the 1961 fire was quite an experience. They shut the mill down and Mutt Teague had that cab-over flatbed truck the company had kind of a stock rack. They put two-by-twelves across that there and loaded about 30 of us on that truck and we went to the Gold Creek fire.

I mean, that was, you didn't have a choice. You went. Art Feller who was working in the mill at that time. He had just got married and he was supposed to go on his honeymoon that weekend, but he spent the next week honeymooning on the fire. (laughter)

Robert Dunlop: Robert Dunlop. Andy, could you tell us what the protocol would've been in the early days of the BFPA? Let's say there is a fire that is called in. Did they have such a thing as a hotshot crew or a quick reaction, or they just called the mill and said send everybody up? Or how did it work?

Andy Lukes: Well, it was a tremendous resource, the mill and contractors and company loggers and what have you. It was the muscle to be able to handle the bigger fires. The BFPA was really an initial attack or a strike force type of thing. They wanted to get to the fire as quickly as they could, hit it as hard as they could to keep it small because if you could prevent that fire from growing, that was the way you dealt with it. And it was kind of a mindset. But the backup was basically the resources. In the early days, like for example, Don MacKenzie and Headquarters Camp by Seeley Lake. He had at his disposal around 300 loggers. So you had the manpower and what have you.

The beauty of the BFPA was that you were able to mobilize. In point that, and I can tell a story, I just want to make sure everybody gets their story out, about how the attitude of going out and getting after a fire. It was in that organization. In state forestry. I went to work for them in 1970 and if you went out on fire and such, you didn't get paid for it in cash at that point. It changed with the Department of Natural Resources. Gary Moon had a policy that if you went out on a fire, you still had to do your basic job, whether it was in cooperative forest management, state land management, and what have you.

So if you were on a fire four hours, you got one hour of comp time, regular professional time that you had, So that actually promoted an attitude on the part of anybody that went on a fire was you didn't sit around on the fire, you didn't, it came outta your hide basically. So you had a mentality of okay, you better get it done 'cuz you, you want to spend the weekend with your wife. Get the fire out because if the fire got big, it, it took away from your time.

And most of the jobs that state forestry had was the job needed to get done on a professional basis. And so, when it became such that people, were a little less aggressive or it was a possible incentive to not get a fire down as quickly as you could. And you mentioned the tribal part of it there, or it was mentioned and sometimes you can sit on a fire and not do things.

And human nature being what it is if you don't get, or if you get paid for not being aggressive. But that was Gary Moon's policy at that time. And most of the foresters that were there in the fifties and sixties and early seventies, that was the way business was done.

[01:32:06] **Anna Sain:** My name is Anna Sain and I'm going to talk about private industry versus the government. I am so sick and tired of the government and the Forest Service bowing to the whims of other people instead of trying to put a fire out. Yes, Ron Wakimoto, fire is a natural occurring element, but so is flooding. Okay. I personally called in when I was coming down Evaro, doing the loop to get on the interstate, a big snag, that evidently was hit by lightning, burning.

And when I called it in, they say, oh, is there by any houses or anything? And I says, no, but you never know what the Evaro winds will do. That became the Black Cat Fire. The Forest Service bows to everybody, but they don't want to necessarily put out a fire until it threatens people. And your insurance rates know what that means.

It's just silly that the Forest Service won't put out fires because things have changed from a natural occurring fire to where people live out there and people die and all of these other associated problems. Now I should give this mic back to my husband 'cuz he can tell you about the south people that fight Forest Service fires and protecting Garnet ghost town and a certain one-horn moose.

[01:35:15] **Robert Starr:** My name is Robert Starr and I had a question, a couple of them. One, the board up here, we used to call those alidade boards. Was that a manufacturer of a different board or were they all supposedly alidade boards and of different manufacturers?

Unknown speaker: (unclear)

Robert Starr: Okay, I just wondering 'cuz when I was on the lookout tower, they called 'em all alidade boards, correct? Okay. And how many here might remember the old signs from the US Forest Service? I know this is a little bit probably before BFPA, I don't know when they started. The big sign that says ax, shovel and bucket required to enter the national forest?

And at that time, I believe, if you were out in the forest, you could be put to work on a fire. Now I know that when I grew up - I was a little younger. I shouldn't have been on the fire, but I knew there was a fire at Lolo Creek, up Lolo Creek area. And I just drove up there, climbed out, walked over to the truck and asked him if I could work. And they said, yep, here's a shovel. Work up this side. And I turned in my time. And a few years later, or not few years, a few weeks later, I got a check from the Forest Service. But you could actually just go out there and go to work. Today you have to have all these little cards and credentials and this and that, and it is like you're gonna die here if you don't have all of this information. And it's almost like people are afraid to go to work on a fire, even if they are able bodied. Uh, another thing - I live over across the river here - here a few years ago, there was a fire about two blocks from my house. And that season we had 11 deliberately set fires on the Deer Creek Road. I went over there at two o'clock in the morning. I hear the Piltzville Fire Station light up with sirens and I woke up to that, had the windows open. I could smell smoke.

So. I just grabbed my shovel and I hopped in the truck. Where is it at? Go find it. Started working on it. Missoula Rural came up. East Missoula came up. I wasn't a legal firefighter by their accounts. So they had me handcuffed and were going to send me to jail. So the first thing that made me a little mad is they took my shovel and threw it in the middle of the road. I said, "You don't do that." I said, "Our fire trucks will run over that and ruin a tire." I said, I'm with East Missoula, as far as a board member. They just, nope, nope, this is the way it's going to be. Until the news media showed up. They took the handcuffs off, they hopped in their car, the deputies did, and they left.

So, you know, there's lots of help out here, even at our old age can do a lot. But I agree with Anna. The one she was talking about, the fire was Black Cat Fire. I worked at the paper mill at the time, and we watched that one tree smolder for three days before the wind came up. And, uh, a couple guys that had beer the night before could have put it out that afternoon.

I have one other question for anybody that might know. I'm looking for pictures from the BFBA on any of their possible firetrucks they used back in the day. I have old fire trucks and I'm starting to build up a... You guys will know them, the Dodge Power Wagon. And I would like to find a picture of an old BFPA fire truck and see if I can't make my Dodge Power Wagon into a BFPA truck. So, if you find something, a picture of it or something, please get it to me so I can just look at it. I won't take it away from you. I just want to look at it. And that's about it.

Judy Matson: Well, this has been great. Anybody have a second thought? You want to bring something else up?

Tony Liane: I don't want Mary Ann to downplay her importance to Anaconda and Champion. When I started working for Anaconda Company, I think Ernie Corrick was the chief forester, or lead forester, or whatever he was at that time. And so if we had a problem out in the woods, we'd call for Ernie Corrick. And if Ernie wasn't around, the second person we'd go to was Mary Ann. Because whatever the problem was, she knew enough about what was going on that she could solve the problem. So she was a very invaluable, very valuable, person in that office. It wasn't just a secretary. So we appreciate that, Mary Ann. (applause)

Judy Matson: Okay, Kim. Oh, just a second.

Ken Peers: I've got one other thing. It's not the BFPA. But, when I was in the service and I went through jump school and one of the guys that was training us was just asking, "Well, where are you from?" And I told him, "Missoula, Montana." And he said, "Well, do you know anything about the smokejumpers?"

And I said, well, I know one there. And that's Fred Brauer. And he said, "That's one of the greatest guys I ever knew." So I just thought I'd pass that on as just a little human interest.

[01:40:24] **Andy Lukes:** Yeah. I've got one quick story that I think you might be interested in. It kind of demonstrates the way fires were fought with BFBA personnel. After Ralph Hanson went to work for the state after the BFBA was shut down there, he was the dispatcher and fire warden there in the BFBA building. I was a forester working cooperative forest management. And I made the mistake of coming in one September day. I had an appointment and stopped off there. Ralph was looking for people to go to a fire. Okay. Well, it was out by Warm Springs, Warm Springs Creek, Cominco Mine. So the station had a fire employee there with the slip-on tanker. And so I jumped in with him and we headed toward the fire. What happened was we got a fire call on us right at Drummond saying, "We can't get any personnel on the fire to assist immediately, but you're the fire boss. You go ahead and take care of the fire."

Well, that fire turned out to be a hundred acre fire above the Cominco mine. It was on a steep slope. September. And by the time I got there, they had the prison fire crew, and I had worked on several fires with the prison fire crew. 20 man crew, usually three wardens. And so it got to be late in the day. We went ahead basically lining two sides of the fire and had a scratch line on the top of it.

And we had two engines there on the fire in the evening. And it was too cold because it was a late season fire, which normally died down. And it was too cold because we were dispatched without anything else but what was in the pickup. So, because we had the prison fire crew, we had to get the prison fire crew back to the prison.

So, that night I spent on the third floor of the old prison in the cells that they normally reserve for the clergy. There's a Catholic priest that stays there. And so I had the dubious distinction of coming home to my wife about 36 hours later having spent... to tell her that I spent the night in the prison, the old prison at Deer Lodge.

So I just wanted to tell you that that was... And Ralph Hanson dispatched us for that little episode.

But, one thing about fighting fires... the best time to fight fires has always been at night. You could do the work of two men at night. The fire, it's generally settled down. You got lower [higher] humidity. Uh, the art form, and it was practiced by the BFPA, I mean, once you got in the fire you didn't find, look for a place to sleep at night. Basically you went ahead and did the job that needed to be done. And, it was good to get home after a fire, but we didn't, you know, it was one of those things. It was just the way you did things, so...

(Unclear comment from the audience)

Andy Lukes: Yeah. Yeah, it was a different time, different place, different circumstance, but wildfire, you know, you need to be aggressive on it. I think we probably better end it here because there's a lot of cookies, a lot of coffee, and those pasties sound real good, so.

Unknown speaker: Thank you.

Andy Lukes: Yeah, take care.

[01:44:39] **Kim Briggeman:** I'll do mine really quick. It's basically on the BFPA legacy that lives on. And so, Justin and Corey and Ryan, thank you for coming. 'Cause I had no idea about that. About how you've kind of kept the BFPA's colors, etc. I think that's a great story. Did I say your names right? So I don't have anything, I never had anything to do with BFPA.

But in sometime in the '70s, all the records of the BFPA went to the UM Archives at the Mansfield [Library]. And so I spent some time looking through those and I just wanted to touch briefly on what happened after the BFPA was no longer a forest protective thing.

And I look around the crowd, especially with Ron [Wakimoto]. And Ron never missed a meeting from 1982 to 2002. Is that probably fairly close, Ron? So he sat at the meetings with George Neff, was the president. All

through those years they met once a year, usually in May, at the Village Red Lion or wherever. And, basically it sounds like what they did was find the way to spend their money down 'cause they had a lot of excess money.

And so I was just going to run over briefly some of the things that they gave that money left over to. There was actually a two-fold responsibility for the board, and there was, what, five or six people on the board, including my dad. He represented Montana Power, the Montana Power Company on the board.

And so, he joined in 1980, and like any good son, I had no idea what he did until I went through the minutes, I, oh there's my dad's name..., but he and Ernie Corrick, George Neff became great friends during that time. So, in 1973, the BFPA donated or sold all its remaining buildings and protection equipment, mainly to the state of Montana.

Relieved of direct fire prevention and protection responsibilities, the BFPA's principal functions changed to reviewing the State Forester's fire protection performance, to fire prevention and protection education, and the productive stewardship of the association's funds. So I just want to touch on that last one, the productive stewardship.

Well for one thing, they started out giving three scholarships, or three \$300 scholarships to forestry students at the VoTec, and that expanded throughout the '70s and '80s to the Forestry School at UM, and to SKC, right? The Salish Kootenai College. So that became a matter of thousands of dollars a year in scholarships to forestry students.

At the university it started out as forestry majors essentially. But at one point they, and Gary Moon was, I think, kind of helping, were running the scholarship program for BFPA. And at one time they expanded that to five incoming freshmen. So it was an incentive scholarship to join Forestry School, as I understand it.

Now you catch me if I'm wrong here, Ron. Go ahead.

Ron Wakimoto: I can't think of a guy's name. It was set up to be a freshman scholarship. Okay, let's try this. It was set up to be a freshman scholarship in the name of a particular person. But they still also did those other ones you're talking about in addition.

[01:49:17] **Kim Briggeman:** Okay. And I didn't write down... if it was in the minutes, I didn't write it down. So there were a lot of things I didn't write down.

So, on the board... Incidentally, George Neff was the president of the BFPA for 50 years. From 1952, I guess, till it officially finally closed in 2002. Marshall Moy was the secretary for, I think, most of those years, if not all. Ernie Corrick, Ed Schultz, and Bernice Lowe was the note taker, as I understand. And then, of course, Ralph Hanson was involved a lot of the time.

Among the larger scholarships, or not scholarships, but other gifts they gave, in 1980, \$4,000 to the UM Forestry Experiment, for the experimental sawmill out at the Fort. That was a donation. They supported and helped establish the State Tree Farm program.

As the years went on, it seemed like the donations became bigger. I think they were probably spending the money down. In 1989, there was a \$20,000 donation to the Montana Wood Products Association. And in 1990, \$25,000 to the National Forest Service Museum which was in its fledgling years there, and is now developing and still developing out on West Broadway where the lookout's at, etc.

I asked Lisa Tate, who's the executive director there, and she found that gift in their newsletter from February, 1990, I guess. And she said it said "the \$25,000 was received for this intent: when the museum is built it will include quality displays on the important role private associations have played as forestry evolved in America." Which to me means that the BFPA will be part of that museum and we're hoping that will come sooner rather than later. A couple of other things that BFPA helped fund: the Walter Hook mural at the, that was along the lunchroom at Bonner School for all our growing up years, or all my growing up years. They made, I think, 2,500 copies of those and sold them for \$20 apiece. So they're all over, obviously smaller ones. We've got a couple in our house, I know, but Walter Hook, and then they helped develop the John Mullan Park, roadside park across from Town Pump over there. Mainly, I think they gave \$2,700 for the sculpture of Meriwether Lewis and Seaman. And that park down there, and that was to Jim Rogers from Ovando there.

In summary, I'm gonna read you from the minutes of their last meeting dated May 22nd, 2000. "President Neff announced that this would be the final meeting of BFPA. At a board meeting on April 12th, 2000, the directors unanimously agreed that the time had come to dissolve the association, to liquidate the investment portfolio and distribute final grants.

"He noted that since 1972 when relieved of direct fire prevention and protection responsibilities, the association has dispersed \$527,000 in contribution grants, \$110,000 for pensions" - they took good care of their officers -

“and \$54,000 for operating expenses in addition to the proposed grants of about \$127,000 for this year, that would bring the total amount to over \$800,000.

“Gary Moon said that George Neff deserves a standing ovation for presiding over such an accomplishment. Everyone wholeheartedly agreed and applauded. President Neff responded that all members did this together. It's a record to be proud of,” and I wasn't gonna read this part, but I will now. The next thing in the minute said, “Bill Nelson presented to each director a certificate of appreciation from the Greenough-Potomac Fire Department. He said the Jaws of Life tool had already been used twice this year.” So the legacy lives on.

[01:55:08] **Mary Ann Buckhouse:** Excuse me, Kim. I thought I would also just mention that there is a scholarship at the University in Ernie Corrick's name, you know, I worked for...

Kim Briggeman: at the Forestry School scholarship at the university for Ernie.

Mary Ann Buckhouse: Anybody who wants to, they can contribute to that. I've done it several times.

Kim Briggeman: And something it can be attributed to. Jim, do you want this mic?

Jim Habeck: No. I would like to ask if there's anybody in the room that recalls being in the background of the Timberjack film production. One hand. Yeah. I figured there'd be about 20.

Kim Briggeman: Shirley was. No. Shirley, you skipped school that day, right? Shirley Cuplin. Okay. I'm finished. Is there... it's pasty time, as far as I know, unless there's something else that we need to, we're kind of running right towards four o'clock.

Thank you. That was better than I had hoped. (applause)

(Outro music and credits)



Transcription of this recording was funded by a Missoula County Rural Impact Grant.

The Bonner History Roundtable is a project of the Bonner Milltown History Center, 9397 Hwy 200 E, PO Box 726, Bonner, Montana 59823. Since beginning in 2009, programs are normally held the third Sunday of January, February and March, excluding March 2020 and all of 2021 due to the pandemic. The project has also been called The Bonner Area History Roundtable and the Working at the Mill Series.