

Jim Denney
District Facilities Manager,
McKenzie River Ranger Station, Oregon

Interviewer: Carol Winkler
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Carol Winkler (CW): So this is Jim Denney, and we're here in McKenzie Bridge, Oregon. This is Carol Winkler. It's June 7th, 2004. We're here with Jim in his studio. So Jim, we'll start out our interview by talking about where you were born and your early days.

Jim Denney (JD): Sure. Well, I was born in South Carolina, Greenville, don't remember anything about that. All my earliest memories are from Oregon and Washington. In fact, one of my earliest memories is Cililo Falls, before it was inundated by the dam below it. And I've actually done some paintings of that site as well. My grandparents met each other in a logging camp in Wisconsin; moved out here during the Depression. So my family on both sides is pretty much connected to Oregon and Washington. And that has been the theme of my work in the studio for about twenty years, is what has happened to the Oregon landscape, its history, and perhaps its future. I've worked for the Forest Service since 1978 as a seasonal firefighter, and then was hired full-time after I left teaching at Carnegie Mellon University in 1989. And I started working full time for the Forest Service in 1990.

CW: So where did you spend most of your school years?

JD: Went to several different schools as an undergraduate student. I come from a fairly modest... I'm the first person to go to college in my family from both sides. And I started at a junior college in Eugene, at Lane Community College. And then I went to Oregon College of Education for a year, which I think is now Western Oregon College. Western Oregon University. And then I finished up with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Oregon, where I studied with Frank Okada. For graduate school, I started graduate school in 1978 at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, and I studied... The head of my thesis committee was Roger Shimamura. It's just interesting: Roger Shimamura and Frank Okada were both in the same internment camp during World War II. They were both at Minadoka. Frank's just a little older than Roger. Frank passed away a couple of years ago. And Roger just retired from the University of Kansas. So those were my two main guys that I studied with, and there's many other important people that I studied with, like Harold Hoy, who's retired from Lane Community College, and other folks as well. But those would probably be my three main guys, I guess.

CW: So you were interested in art from a young age.

JD: Yeah. In fact, I think my parents still may have a drawing somewhere where I won some award at the state fair when I was probably six years old. So yeah, I've been drawing forever. I think I thought I was going to be a scientist when I started out, but math skills kind of led me to the art direction, I guess. [Laughs] So yeah, I've always been interested in art.

CW: So after school, did you take up a career in art?

JD: Well I've always been working pretty seriously in making the paintings. I applied for... I thought I'd just live at Fish Lake. I kind of fell in love with that place shortly after I started working for the Forest Service. The Fish Lake Remount Depot. And I applied for one teaching job, in 1981, and I just happened to have had a show in New York at the same time that they wanted me to come out for an interview for the job, so it was kind of impressive I guess to them to show up with this huge tube of large canvases rolled up. So while I was in New York they offered me the job, and moved to Pittsburgh, where I taught at Carnegie Mellon University from 1981 to 1989. And then when I stopped teaching I moved back here, and then started working for the Forest Service full time. And bought this house and built this studio, I think in 1994. And we'll see what the future holds. Who knows?

CW: So you started out as a firefighter. How'd that go for you? You didn't enjoy it that much?

JD: Yeah. I think the firefighting, the imagery from that experience were probably the first things I started doing when I started doing paintings that were based on the Oregon landscape. Certainly those images were the most influential or the most powerful ones to me. And the firefighting in the early years, certainly you saw lots of fire, but it was really burning slash. And I think that started some of my interest... Certainly I've always been interested in the environment. And in Oregon history. But those experiences started to inform me about the Forest Service's role in resource management. Especially in terms of having a family that grew up... When I grew up they were all working in the woods, or in mills. So really tied to resource extraction from the Northwest. And also being the son of a logger. I saw, you know, if had lots of memories of really good times, and then lots of really bad times, where the timber industry would fall off, and my dad wouldn't have a job, and we'd have to move all over the place. So I think from an early age I've been pretty suspicious of how that industry is managed for the long term versus the short term.

So to answer your question: firefighting, yeah, I did that. Even when I was teaching, much to the... I think it puzzled my fellow professors, why I would want to go out and do a menial labor job every summer. I think I probably took some delight in making them puzzled. So yeah, I came back every summer and worked for the Forest Service. Sometimes I volunteered to do... I also became very interested in historic restoration stuff. First officially I [word unclear] other sites on the Willamette National Forest, so I've done some of that, and I continue to be very interested in that. So it's kind of complicated.

CW: Have you ever spent time as a lookout?

JD: No, but I've worked at lookouts. I have a good friend, Don Allen, who's the head of the Sand Mountain Society, and I helped in the initial construction, and then helped through the process... Mainly just helping Don do the majority of the work and the folks with Sand Mountain Society. And I've worked at Carpenter lookout. Picked up on restoration work that was already going on there, but did a lot of the interior stuff. And also have done some work at some other lookout sites. But no, never.... Well I went up to Lookout when we've had fires, and that sort of thing, just sort of a substitute, but not in terms of long-term employment.

CW: Have you pretty much acquired your restoration skills on the job?

JD: Yes, I think so. And then the Forest Service has been good enough to send me to some training as well. Some things like structural repair of log cabins, putting in new logs, to doing historically accurate cedar shake roofs, things like that. Done some training in Idaho and Montana. Run by people like Harrison Goodall or the region, I guess what is it, Montana would be region four; their historic restoration team at Nine Mile Remount Depot. So yeah, I've been trained as well. Carefully trained. [Laughs] But I mean one of the things, when you're an artist, and I lived in New York off and on while I was teaching, you have to do things to make money, and so one of the things you do is like build stuff. You know, doing renovations in lofts, things like that. So some of those skills I just picked up, because I was an artist and built things.

CW: You're handy with your hands, I guess.

JD: Yeah. [Laughs] Somewhat.

CW: So the job here has evolved pretty much into full-time building restorations...?

JD: Yeah, well I guess my title-- I guess I'm self-titled—is the facility manager for the McKenzie River Ranger District, so it's under my charge to take care of all the administrative buildings. But that also include, in those administrative buildings, a lot of historic buildings. For instance, all the buildings of the Fish Lake Remount Depot, and the three C buildings across the street at the Horace Work Creek center. And then I do work at the lookouts that are at the district, that I already mentioned, Carpenter being the one that's our main lookout. But Sand Mountain, the society takes care of Sand Mountain. But then there's some trail shelters that I've done work on as well; restored the three C shelter at Hand Lake. And I've done some other work as well, and will continue to have projects. I've been fortunate in that I've had lots of help from volunteer groups. And then sometimes fire will throw me some folks, and some recreation folks, as well as some folks from Heritage Resources will put in for some different projects. Like the restoration of the Charity Ann Marks gravesite, on the [Name unclear] Wagon road. Restored the restoration [Laughs] with some Heritage Resource people. So yeah, that work ranges from day to day, from monitoring water systems and things like that, to repairs of modern buildings, and the restoration work. And I have some folks to help me do that stuff, so it's fairly interesting.

CW: What's your experience f working with volunteers, or groups of volunteers?

JD: Well, it ranges. Two summers I've had a large group come out from Michigan, that... They bring out anywhere from nine to ten people. And they'll stay for a couple weeks, and we've done extensive renovations on three buildings at Fish Lake, using those folks. And then I've had other volunteer groups ranging from Catlin Gables School in Portland, to some church group folks. For instance, I've done some work, restoration work, on one of the lodges that is under special use permit...

CW: White Ranch?

JD: Yeah, White Ranch. And kind of gathered materials for them and gave them input into the work that they've actually done. So that was kind of nice. And they've done a pretty good job over the past couple years, replacing rotten sill logs and some walls, and redoing a whole roof structure that was sorely needed. I've had other volunteer groups from just different areas; anywhere from snowmobile clubs, to just people who are interested in restoration work. So lots of different folk.

CW: Habitat?

JD: Well the folks who came out from Michigan had done lots of Habitat for Humanity houses. But they're really wonderful people, they've done a lot of work in the Grand Tetons. They recently received a national award for their restoration work there. So they like to give something back, as citizens. So I think we'll be doing a lot more restoration work with them at Fish Lake. Maybe at Clear Lake Shelters also. We have a long list of things that need to be done.

CW: What do you think is the draw of these historic buildings to these kind of folks?

JD: Well, I think a real passion, and a love for the past. An interest in America's history. And I think some of those folks might, I mean people have as many different reasons as there are people, but I think generally to come here, it's a beautiful place. And it is rich with history, and compared to back east, a fairly recent history. And they get to see buildings that are in dire need of attention, and through their work they'll be here for maybe the next generation of people to enjoy.

CW: Tell me a little bit about your stint as Teddy Roosevelt.

JD: I don't know how I got fanangled into that, but... yeah. I haven't thought about that for a long time. At a time my boisterous self did a kind of living history thing with Teddy Roosevelt, and that kind of snowballed into doing that quite a bit. And I'm not doing it anymore, just because I'm busy and I have to kind of, there's only so many hours in the day. But I did do that for a number of years, probably from pretty much all the nineties I did that. And some of it was really fun, and people got a kick out of it. And I certainly learned a lot about Roosevelt. I certainly have a great admiration for his energy, that's for sure. And an admiration for some of his ideas concerning resource management. And then a pretty profound disagreement with a lot of other things about his ideas about America's role in the world. But I learned a lot about him, that was for sure, doing that stuff. I felt like it was important, if I was going to do this living history thing, that there be some accuracy about it and I just wouldn't be making up stuff. So I tried to have it rooted in some kind of reality.

CW: [inaudible]

JD: Yes. [Laughs] Tony {Farkay?} and I, we were quite a team for a while, doing that stuff. That was enjoyable. Like I say, I haven't done it for a couple years now, and who knows what the future will hold, but right now I'm interested in being in my studio as much as I can.

CW: How does that work out? How do you find time to continue as an artist?

JD: I don't say I have as much energy as Teddy Roosevelt, but I'm blessed with a considerable amount of energy. So I work now, I work in the evenings, and I work on the weekends, and I have the kind of job where I have the luxury of being able to think about what I'm doing in my studio sometimes when I'm at work. And certainly a lot of the imagery and a lot of the ideas that I work with in my paintings are not unrelated to what I do in the field, or with the Forest Service in general. So yeah, that's how I do it. And I've thought about it a lot, because when I taught, the schedule was certainly a lot easier than the schedule of an eight o'clock to four thirty, every day, five days a week job. I only had to teach two days a week and then do a seminar on an evening of another day. So that schedule was a lot easier in terms of actual time, but when you think about it, dealing with students, and being on graduate committees, and being on other committees, you know, there's still a considerable amount of work too. I don't know what the trade-off is. I'm not as productive as I was when I was teaching, but I still think I'm fairly productive.

CW: Would you think of your art to be in a certain school, or philosophy, or....

JD: Well I make, now, at present, my paintings are more psychological, I guess. Internal psychology of my own. Whereas in the past, maybe twenty years before that, they've really been about the land, sense of home, sense of place, and a sense of outrage and a sense of condemnation, and a sense of disgust, and a sense of urgency and seeing a landscape transformed before my eyes. And so I would suppose that they would say in some regard that they're paintings about the environment as much as they're paintings about the landscape. I certainly have used references in the paintings; like, the painting that's sitting in front of you uses imagery from the photographer Darius Kinsey, who was a very important photographer in the Northwest that documented early railroads and logging, as well as mountains and just the landscape of the Northwest in general. But I also have used painters from the Hudson River school like Frederick Church, have used references to Alfred Bierstadt, you know, lots of what we call American landscape painting. So yeah, I'm a landscape painter who does paintings that's concerned with the environment. And now, those are still concerns, but there might be other things coming into it.

CW: [inaudible question]

JD: No, I don't think so particularly. I think long term, we've known for quite a number of years that there's global warming, and what that offers to the temperate forests of the Northwest might not be very good. Certainly these are landscapes that have had incredible, catastrophic change in the past. I mean, I was here, just returned from finishing graduate school, when Mount St. Helen's erupted, so to say that I haven't seen how dramatically the landscape can change in the Northwest, I mean I have seen that. But I'm not very optimistic about things staying at some kind of steady state now. It would seem to me that it's a very dynamic, well, just look around the last few summers in terms of fire, That's certainly been one of the interests I've had in the landscape in the Northwest, is the role of fire in it.. And for years having worked having worked... Forest fire is very interesting to see what has happened as you continue to suppress all these little fires, and what happens like the B&B complex last summer, what happens when you combine that with bug kill and damaged trees, what happens with that sort of stuff. So yeah, I

suppose the painting will always have that. As long as they're dealing with the landscape of the Northwest, or just the environment in general, I don't think there's a lot of optimism, I don't have a lot of optimism on how that's going to happen. But I would say that one function of the paintings is just to bear witness to a great change. And you know, I'm not wise enough to say that I have solutions for those problems. I certainly think that maybe a little long-term thinking would be in order. I think we've witnessed in this administration some of the greatest unraveling of the protection of the resources in the history of the United States. And the previous administration had all these great, had a great opportunity to make very, very substantial changes, and I will always be very disappointed that the previous administration did not live up to its promise, with many, many very bright people on board. There were some changes made, but not enough. So, that's what I think about in the paintings.

CW: [inaudible question]

JD: Oh, we don't do that in federal lands as much, that's for sure, but if you go up and down the McKenzie River valley you can see that on private ground, despite Oregon having this incredibly advanced forest protection act, we see that that act is maybe not as forward thinking as it could be. And there will always be a need, I think, as long as we exclude certain things from the forest, like fire, that the forest will have to be manipulated in some way or we will continue to have like these really big fires that maybe you don't want to have at the frequency we're going to have now. But you know, I'm not optimistic about that because of the climatic change things. It's very complicated. And I won't even go into population issues and what all that means in terms of the pressures on the resource space. But I feel fortunate to work for the Forest Service because there are many good people that work here. And many people that understand that the things that the national forests offer; clean water, clean air, an environment that people can recreate in, in a really beautiful setting—those are wonderful goals, wonderful things to have. And that we also manage national forests, I think, better than forests are managed anywhere else in the world. What happens when we don't manage our forests... I think that the pressures are in other parts of the world; for instance, Canadian forests. I think it's incredibly strange that we will be sending foresters to go to Russia to look at how we can take their natural resource base and ship it to us, you know? Very strange. And I suppose in a global economy that's what you'll see, is a shifting from our resource bases toward raking them from the third world, or developing countries, or countries like Russia. That was kind of a convoluted answer, wasn't it?

CW: Being next door to the H.K. Andrews Research Station, has that had any influence on you

JD: Yeah, I think so That was such an important place. And continues to be an important place in fundamental resources. I've been lucky to know some of the people that work there, and I find it very interesting, the kind of research that goes on there. From, you know, the first important research on the spotted owl, and what that has meant to the forests of the Northwest. It's interesting to think that the original research that was done at the H.J. Andrews was for logging systems. So it's kind of interesting to see how that important facility has kind of went from making the extractive part of the Forest Service more efficient, to a place where you're protecting the last bits of certain bird and animal species. So yeah, I think that is a very important place, and it certainly gives one as much hope as one can have about this declining or threatened resource. Also very fortunate to live right next to the Three Sisters Wilderness Area, just up the

road here a little bit. And I'm reminded of all these places, of all these good ideas that we had. For instance if you look at the large map that's up at the ranger station, the 3D map, you can look up the Horace Creek Drainage and you can see the route of the proposed highway that we have went right through Horace Creek and right over to Bend, right through the Three Sisters. Well luckily, that great idea didn't happen. But then you can look up on top of the ridge that overlooks Horace Creek, and look at {Whoppity?}, which was the road that was constructed, this million dollar road that was going to... like that'll contain the wilderness, it won't go any farther now. And that has to do with one of the earliest controversies of when I was a kid growing up in Eugene, was the controversy to save French Peak. And that was maybe one of the first things, as a young person in Oregon, besides being a young person when Tom McCall was the governor—"Please visit Oregon, just don't stay"—you know, that kind of awareness that happened in the late '60s, was important in my development, in terms of how I viewed the landscape. So, a convoluted answer to the H.K. Andrews; yeah, I think it was very important.

CW: Did you ever find yourself out participating in protests around environmental issues?

JD: Oh, I think I've done my fair of being in marches, whatever.

CW: [inaudible question]

JD: Oh, I think in the teen-age years you always have conflicts with your parents, don't you? But, don't get me wrong. If I had a choice of who I was going to hang with, I would much rather be hanging around someone who came from the timber industry than I would be hanging around with a typical environmental protester. I don't know what that would be. But my point being is that I have great admiration for people that work in the forest and have worked in the forest, as loggers and people in that industry, because they are some of the best and most hard-working people I've ever been around, and I certainly admire that. You asked before how I find time. Well, because I work really hard. And I think that's a gift that I received from my father, and from my grandfather. It's interesting. I do a lot of paintings that have to do with dams and issues concerning the management of rivers and declining resources like salmon, etc. My grandfather worked on the Grand Coulee Dam.

CW: Any stories about him?

JD: Yeah. You know, the folk stories as well as probably some stories that are based more on fact. I think he just worked really hard. Lived in Nespelem, Washington. I think on a trip up there to see my grandparents, is when I saw [name unclear] Falls. Which is almost like a dream memory. I was very, very young. And I think it happened, but you never can be sure. My mother says it did. Yeah, I can't reiterate that strongly enough, my admiration for people that work in the forest, along with the tragedy of where we find ourself now. It's not their fault. But it certainly is the fault of people who should have had the foresight to see down the road what would happen if they continued at the pace at which they were working. Especially the Willamette National Forest. I remember when I started working here on the McKenzie River Ranger District. Driving to work from Eugene. I don't remember what the record was but I think it was forty-seven logging trucks loaded that I passed coming down. Which is about one truck a minute. Or maybe it was a bit more than that. I have it written down somewhere, I'm sure. But it was really quite

remarkable. And when I used to burn slash. It says in the fire crew; it was really the brush disposal crew, I think, more than anything else. But you know, we would burn two, three, four units a night. It was really... That was probably the most we ever did. But certainly we could burn two. And there was just like, you'd go up Deer Creek Drainage, you'd go up Horace Creek, you'd go up Boulder, all these, you know? All these. It was pretty interesting how much activity there was in terms of [word unclear] logs down the road.. That was unsustainable. And I can't even say what's happened with private land. People should have known better. The Forest Service did a great job when that was their mission, but they should have known better. I think we have, I won't say better leadership; it's just leadership oriented in a different direction. There's more pressure from the public, I think. But we have an administration that, speaking just for myself, is just hell-bent on getting this organization in the hands of private enterprise as soon as possible. That seems to be my take on it. And that is from, not just Forest Service, but from, look at the EPA, look at any resource organization. So, on that soapbox for a second.

CW: So could you talk a little bit about how your art work interfaces with the community?

JD: Yeah. I was one of the founding members of the McKenzie Arts Forum, which was a group which was founded with several basic principles. One was to support arts in the McKenzie school. It's an interesting process that's happened in the state of Oregon with this incredible decline in support for public schools. Well we found they had lost any art classes in the McKenzie schools, so we taught classes one year in the schools, our organization; but for the past three years I was the chairman of the McKenzie Arts Festival, which the major proceeds of the arts festival went to support arts in the school. I resigned from doing that for the reasons I said before, about maybe not doing Teddy Roosevelt anymore, there's just so many hours in the day. And the organization goes on and I wish that organization well and hope they can continue to do that. But I've been really lucky to do, through the McKenzie Arts Forum and through the Lane Council, a couple projects with local kids. One of which is the large water feature that's in front of the ranger station that I'm very proud of. Worked with, I think, seven kids from the high school. As well as a contractor who builds water features and was the kind of make-the-thing-work part of it. But it's very handsome. The kids carved salmon out of steotite soapstone; they're kind of located in the water feature, and collected rocks from the area to represent different parts of the McKenzie River drainage. So that was a really cool project. And it continues as the plants become mature it becomes more and more beautiful, I think. And did some more ephemeral projects with the kids. We did a project with scientists actually, from the H.J. Andrews. They would come in and present for an hour an idea, whether it be an animal or a plant, and the kids would make drawings from that. And we did an installation on the McKenzie River Trail on a Saturday, and had paintings and sculptures along the trail; the exhibit was kind of along the trail. Then doing some of the teaching stuff, one of the projects was having the kids do large drawing large pictures of salmon, and we've used the drawings in a couple installations. So I think that connection with the schools has been gratifying, and I hope it's been good for some of the kids. I know some of the kids remember it because, for instance, one of the kids went home and built a little water feature at their mom and dad's house, and that made me feel pretty good. And I like working with kids, and part of the restoration work, for instance, has used some of the local kids that are on the YCC crew. And they've done everything from painting to clean-up, to all sorts of stuff with the historic buildings, so that's been pretty cool. But the art thing was good. It just comes to a point where I can do all of that stuff, and everything takes away from time in my

studio. So I have to just decide. And I've decided that I have to work in my studio as much as I can.

CW: So would you call that environmental [rest of question inaudible].

JD: Yeah, I would think so. That was certainly my interest in having the H.J. Andrews folks to the presentation, so that, one, the kids could be aware that there was a place called the H.J. Andrews, and that, two, the kids could be aware that there were scientists that were working with ideas concerned with the environment. And three, that they could learn something about their local... Everything from the bugs to the plants to the more romantic wildlife that would be around. And the boys wouldn't just be thinking about deer hunting and getting an elk. They might think about the little beetles that live in the ground, or they might think about those little millipedes with the orange spots that exude cyanide out of them as protection. That's a pretty interesting thing to think about, you know? So yeah, certainly education about the environment is a critical issue. Especially as stewards of the land, if I was a kid growing up now, I might not be very happy about what I'm inheriting, if I thought about it very much. So maybe those kids will do a better job. I don't think they're going to be very happy about some of the things that they're going to find out, that we've left of the legacy. Some things we can be very proud of, but many things not.

CW: Are there other artists in the valley who draw their inspiration or actually use forest products in their art?

JD: Yeah, I'm sure there are. I know of a person who works in fiber who lives downriver who collects sticks and then strips the bark off of them to use in her weavings. I know of a knife-maker who goes out and collects burls from everything from I think rhododendron to all sorts of different materials that he incorporates in his knife-making. I'm sure there are other folks as well. Right now, I don't really hang out with too many other artists here. I'm kind of a solitary venture here. So that's the nature of making paintings is that you have to spend a lot of time by yourself. Yeah, but I'm sure that there are people that use those resources, yeah.

CW: [Inaudible question]

JD: Well. Funny you should say that. The first year of the arts festival I did like a little exhibition called the McKenzie Salon—it was above the general store—where I just had people that I was interested in seeing, and sometimes people would suggest folks to be included in that. One year one of the members of the Art Forum suggested a woman named Judith Sparks, who work I knew. And I remembered when I had a show at the [Holtz??] Center, the Jacobs Gallery in 1994, she left me a really wonderful letter about how much she liked my paintings, so of course I would like her. So I asked her to be in the exhibition that year, and I just really liked her work. And just this last year, by using some money from the Interpretive Association that sells materials in the ranger station, we commissioned Judith to make two large banners that depict the life cycle of the salmon and then human interaction with the salmon using Northwest Indian motifs to make that connection. So they're very, very beautiful, just installed them last week. They're airbrushed on silk. They're just gorgeous things. I'm very, very happy with those. And it's been very great to work with Judith as well. She's actually become a friend of mine now. So

that was a nice project to work on. I hope I can do some more things. I've donated a couple things. I did a large painting, a couple paintings that hang in the office. One of them depicts, because McKenzie Ranger District combined with Blue River Ranger district a couple years ago, and anytime you do that there's always this attendant hand-wringing that goes with that. So I wanted to make a work that integrated the two districts. So I made a picture that was based on a view from Lookout Ridge, which is on the Blue River Ranger District, looking across the district at what would be the signature landmark of this area, that's the Three Sisters. And then as an interesting—this is something I do as a strategy of many of my works—there was a merchant in New York, in the mid-nineteenth century, who collected works by the Hudson River painters. One of the painters that he had bought a picture of was a guy named Sanford Gifford. And Sanford Gifford, the painting he had was this painting called Hunter Mountain. And Hunter Mountain depicted a clearcut with a little cabin in the middle of it. And the merchant's name was James Pinchot, and he had a son, and named his son after that painted: Gifford Pinchot, who was the father of the Forest Service. So the painting that was done by Sanford Gifford, I used the color situation that was in that painting for that picture. So it's kind of a complicated narrative, not that complicated, but a narrative that has to do with the history of the Forest Service and the history of these two ranger districts becoming a new ranger district. So I get to put some things up there to, and I guess my work is of a certain quality that that's okay. So that's nice. And it's nice to be able to do that, so it's kind of like my gift to the ranger district I guess.

CW: Did you do the one of the Three Sisters with the kind of...?

JD: Yeah. That's the one I'm talking about. That strange yellow color is right from that painting by Sanford Gifford, so... So I like that. And it was nice... Hunter Mountain, I'll go and visit it sometime. But I do like to go to New York a lot. I went to New York City twice last year, and I like to go back to see my artist friends. And I go see shows, etc. So who knows. Maybe I'll live there someday.

CW: [inaudible remark]

JD: Not tired, but you know, everything has costs. Live and work in this place which is really gorgeous and is really a special place, but I'm also really isolated from the input that any painter, artist needs from their peers. So it's a kind of an interesting balancing act, I guess. So we'll see. I just don't know what...

CW: Not going to die with your boots on here, you don't think?

JD: I don't know. I could, but I might not. I'm just not sure. I think that's a good place to be, where you don't know exactly what it is that your future is going to hold. One way would be pretty predictable; another way, who knows what is going to happen. I'd like to have my work seen more. I hadn't thought that's been important. It was really important to me in the... when I was teaching. And it's a funny thing about teaching at a university. The equivalent of publish or perish, for a visual artist, is to show their work. And so certainly I did that a lot for professional reasons. When I found that I didn't have to do that I found that I didn't really like the art world that well, and a lot of people in it, so I don't choose to participate that much, but I also find that kind of cuts your nose off to spite your face, because it's nice to have your work seen and

discussed, and I'm a really good painter, so not to be in that arena is troubling. So I'm going to work harder at doing that. It's nice to have a web site with work on it and have people look at it, and comment on those things. So I keep trying to update that and do things in that way as well. And there's a lot of new issues I want to engage in the work. My research is working here, but I'm also very interested in the West. I just made a trip to New Mexico a few months ago. And I'm always taken about when you travel in the West, how tired it looks. And how beat up it looks. And how many remnants of really great ideas there are out there that didn't work out very well. And it's frightening to think of, how many great ideas do we have right now that are going to wind up being those remnants? We all know that dams have a life span. You put a giant block in a river; stuff keeps coming down that river, you know? And what happens when those things silt up? A nice waterfall, I guess. So long term, I don't know what that stuff means. But it's very interesting to look at the West and think about, it wasn't very long ago that the Columbia River flowed free. From its start to the end. The intervention of those giant dams... who knows how long those last? I don't know. So it's interesting to think of the West as a big place. That is an arid place mainly. So I like to think about those things. That'll probably continue to be a theme in the work.

CW: Do you think there's a tradition of artists: visual artists, poets, writers, in the Forest Service?

JD: Well, I hadn't thought of it much. But I do know of some people, some people even in this district, have published poetry. The knife maker that I mentioned before is a Forest Service archaeologist. Yeah, I think there's probably a tradition somewhat. I mean,

CW: Ed Abbey.

JD: Ed Abbey, absolutely. Funny you should say that. Ed Abbey, a lookout. Yeah that's right. It's funny, I did a show, the last I had in Pittsburgh, just two weeks before it went up I was reading a book by Edward Abbey, *A Fool of Progress*. And it was going through that book, I said, duh, this book is really about Edward {Abbey?}. Of course it is. And in the book the character was dying. It was very strange that he did die right as I was finishing that book. And so I dedicated the show, this exhibition, to Edward [Abbey?]. And I had a sign painter come in and write an Edward [Abbey?] quote on the wall. And I got a phone call from the gallery right after the exhibition opened that some people wanted to meet me, wanted to go out to dinner with me. And it was Edward [Abbey?]'s brother and Edward Abbey's sister, because Ed Abbey grew up in western Pennsylvania. So I went out to dinner with his family really. And his brother, Boots, who looks exactly like him. It was a pretty interesting dinner. He asked me, well how did you know Ed? I said, I didn't really know him. It's just his work was very important to me. And he said, well you know, there's a lot of inaccuracies in that. Boots [Abbey?] has a company called Abbey's Tree Removal Service, which I thought was pretty good too, you know? But that was really a wonderful thing. In fact, I've done some ... That particular exhibition, before I even knew Abbey was going to die, I'd done a painting that was really for Edward [Abbey?], that shows the arches in the park where Abbey worked for several summers, again using my strategy of combining observed things with things taken from other paintings to do some Frederic Church quotes and that theme. Yes, I guess there is a tradition then, isn't there. A pretty good tradition. I think that there's some other... I'm trying to think of who other... I don't know if Morris Graves

ever worked as a... No, I do know that there are some other Northwest painters that worked with Lookout Trail. That seems to be naturally a good place for a poet or a painter or somebody to be, wouldn't it? Being in that place where you have to look and think all the time. So yeah, I guess there is a tradition, isn't there. I'm part of that tradition. I have a new tradition. That's a good thing. Certainly this district has been supportive. I've been through three rangers here now, and the ranger that just left before John Allen was incredibly supportive. Not only just towards my direct work in terms of doing the restoration work, which is probably where I function best in my role here. But also very supportive of my work as an artist. It puzzles people, you know? Because I think the work could be looked at as very critical of what this agency does, and it is to a certain extent. But also supportive of the people that do a good job here too. So I try always to be clear about that. So yeah, I've been really lucky to have been here when John was here. I think he was really a very good steward. I'm sure there are other rangers around the country who are good stewards too. It's not all from the old school.

CW: You sound pretty open-minded and willing to look into other people's [words inaudible]

JD: Oh yeah. I think so. I mean there's still some of the old school around, bless their little hearts. But things are a lot different now than they were. But I don't know how long they'll stay with that difference. You know, the pendulum kind of goes back and forth. We're certainly under pressure to move in a certain direction, towards streamlining all those darn rules that we have. Which I share the frustration of a lot of people in the Forest Service where sometimes the surveys seem really, really redundant. And to my mind, when I look at them I think, how efficient are these things anyway? But it seems to be pretty critical to do that work. But it's under pressure now.

CW: Well, is there anything you'd like to add, to share with us.

JD: Oh jeez, just the importance I think of protecting historic resources on the district. Because it's the touchstone to see where specifically this agency has been and where it can go in the future. So the citizenry can be more informed about that. There's a wonderful story that can be told about this agency and its history on the land. And it's one that can be told with a certain amount of pride by those who work there. And those historic resources are really, like I say, the touchstone for telling that story. So I hope the next person who comes along can do a better job than I did with these resources, and that there can continue to be the kind of support that's needed to do those things. In terms of the art stuff, stay tuned. I mean, I think it will continue to be an interesting story. I've probably got ten, fifteen, twenty years left where I can be productive. I'm interested to see what happens. The new pictures are, you know, more complex in some ways than the older work. And it's all about questions. So, I think that's what I want to say.

CW: Okay. Thanks.

JD: You bet.

END OF INTERVIEW