

INTERVIEW WITH: Bill Woverton
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MH: Bill, I want to thank you for agreeing to the interview. It is January 26th, 2016 and we are in Escalante, Utah at the Interagency Office. May I have you introduce yourself, date of birth and where you were born please?

BW: I am Bill Woverton. I was born July 17th, 1948 in Sacramento, California.

MH: Very good, and a little about the family you were raised in. Did you stay in Sacramento growing up?

BW: I stayed in Sacramento growing up. My father was a mechanical engineer for the Western Pacific Railroad until he retired in 1981. My mother was a housewife raising four kids, of which I was the first one. I have two sisters and had one brother who left us at an untimely age. My parents unfortunately, did not work out and they split up after twenty-three years, as so many do.

MH: Yes. Your educational background, did you finish your secondary schooling in Sacramento?

BW: I graduated from Bella Vista High School in Fair Oaks, California. We lived just outside Sacramento, twenty miles northeast.

MH: That is a different place now.

BW: Yes, it is. I actually went by my high school and it has been fifty years this spring since I graduated and it has not changed a bit except the trees around it have gotten bigger. I ended up going to the University of Wyoming, graduated there in 1971 with a BS in Mechanical Engineering.

MH: Following in your dad's footsteps?

BW: Yes, that is what I wanted to do. I ended up going to work for the Southern Pacific Railroad. It was my passion at the time. It lasted about eleven and a half years and I was furloughed in the summer of 1982. Friday, August the 13th was my last day of full time employment ever. I never did go back to full time work.

MH: Please tell me how you came to this area and then the Russian olive control project.

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BW: I am more optimistic that Russian olive eradication from this watershed is possible if we can get a few stubborn property owners to eventually go along with it. And while we are on this subject I think it is possible the stuff has a fairly limited range and its range is pretty much along water courses, with very little finding its way outside the water courses. You don't have to ransack every square inch of ground looking for it. It grows so fast and it is so distinctive, it just doesn't stay hidden for very long. It is easy to find and easy to get rid of. I think eradication is a possible reality. Tamarisk, not so. It spreads so far and wide that everyplace out there that gets water is going to get Tamarisk, stock ponds in particular away from the water courses. Russian olive spread is limited by the size of its seeds which can only be spread by the birds or floating, carried by water. Tamarisk seeds are tiny, tiny wispy little things that blow in the wind everywhere. Anytime you go out there with a bull dozer, throw up and dam in a wash to make a pond, you are going to get tamarisk no matter how far you are from the nearest Tamarisk. They are everywhere.

MH: They made check dams coming out of the Bryce drainages in the 60s, I think, really to stop the intense erosional effects of flooding out of Bryce, to protect the range and agricultural lands below. And near these manmade ponds, it is always teeming with Tamarisk, some willow, then what you do? Those catch dams are all filled-in now. It seems it is useful for this purpose for ten or twenty years, then it is not useful. Except as habitat.

BW: Check dams all fill in with sediment, and the flat will become a Tamarisk farm. Check dams create ideal conditions for it by ponding up water. Tamarisk does not thrive where floods are frequent and forceful. It does very well when an area is inundated without any intense forceful flooding.

Back to where we were...I had been hiking now and then with a friend I had met in California in about 1978. It was the fall of '78. She and I both saw an article in Backpacker magazine that talked about the Escalante here. She suggested we do a trip there. We did in the spring, April, Easter Sunday we started our first trip in 1979. We set out to do a grandiose loop trip that I had come up with, thinking that as far away as this was, we would do one big trip here and never come back. I didn't know what we were getting in for.

It ended up, because of problems we had getting into canyons, we ended up doing a trip down Coyote Gulch and back, after a misadventure over to the north. We came back the following year, went down Coyote again. First time we went, we could not go anywhere on the river because of the snowmelt, raging with snowmelt. Second time we came back we made it up to Stevens Canyon and got up it a little ways. By then I was hooked. I forgot about the mountains, the Sierra where I had been hiking my whole life, until then. It was so different, so much, so many canyons, I thought if Coyote Gulch was as spectacular and beautiful as it is, and the river when you look at the map and there are all these others canyons, they are all just waiting. That became my focus for basically ever since. I didn't get here in '81. I did the Paria instead, with several other people. That was when I was limited to vacation time I had with the railroad. In '82 I was furloughed from the railroad and the first thing I did was a six day backpack trip in the Sierra, the Minarets. The second thing was come back here for four weeks with another guy, literally with a written laundry list of things that had to be done before I went and found another engineering job and who knows how long before I had any reasonable vacation again. I

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never did do that though. I did a trip with my brother for a week or so, then another longer trip with another guy in May of 1983. At some point someone in the Sierra Club out there who I was talking to about this area, who had also been to Dark Canyon already, suggested I lead a trip here. I ended up leading two trips in 1984, one published one, but so many people called me wanting to go we ended up doing two, back to back. The following year, I did two more trips.

In the fall of '85 I learned that Glen Canyon NRA was planning on abolishing the sub-district ranger position here because of budget constraints which led me to start thinking about offering to help out as a volunteer here. They were fine with that. I started making plans and thought about volunteering, coming back here, keeping my house out there, put my stuff in storage, rent my house out. The more I thought about it though, the less viable it seemed to be. I decided to take the plunge; sell the house, pull up stakes, take the money and run with it. That is what I did. I led one more trip in '86 and that was a house hunting trip. I found a house and bought it that summer and moved in September of '86 to Escalante. I get to celebrate thirty years here this fall.

MH: Congratulations, it's a great place.

BW: Getting furloughed is probably one of the best things that ever happened to me, otherwise I might had stuck it out there for whose knows how long. It not only forced me to do something different, it left me free to do something different. I forgot about engineering. I had already planned on signing up as a volunteer for Glen Canyon when I got here. I did that the day after I got here, in September of '86. I volunteered for about a year and a half. The seasonal backcountry ranger position opened up in 1988. They did abolish the sub-district ranger position, but they eventually refilled it, a political move to say we need more money in the budget. They hired a new sub-district ranger in 1987 and I showed him around. By the time it came time to hire a new seasonal, he knew who he wanted to hire. He had to pull a few strings and work the system to get past a few others who were not really qualified, but were there inline and rated out higher than I did. He managed to hire me and I ended up putting in twenty-four seasons with the park service, most of it here in Glen Canyon, as a seasonal. I chose to remain strictly seasonal because I could afford to and the way the system is, in order to get permanent you have to move on and move up. You can't stick with one thing. That is not what I wanted to do. My heart was here, this is where I wanted to be and wanted to work. I chose to remain seasonal.

MH: So, let's talk about you eventual involvement with Russian olive eradication? I think I know that you are the one who initiated this project.

BW: I started the Russian olive project, single handedly. I can take full credit for that. It grew out tamarisk eradication in Coyote Gulch. That was instigated by my boss, Jim Bowman, the person who hired me, sometime in the early 90s, '92, '93. He said let's take a stab at getting rid of tamarisk. Tamarisk is another non-native invasive weed. It does not belong there. Coyote Gulch is the busiest and most popular canyon that we have down there. That is where we spend the majority of our time. It was a natural fit to see if we could do something for the place- get rid of the Tamarisk. It was his idea, wasn't mine. His idea, coming from a background with some firefighting experience, was to go whack away at it with Pulaskis. They had me cut some Tamarisk with a chain saw down at Lee's Ferry in the summer of 1989, when I was working at

Wahweep for a while. There was no money for the seasonal position here. I had heard that you had to have an herbicide to kill it because cutting it down did not kill it. They wanted some cut down around the Grand Canyon's buildings at Lee's Ferry so hopefully they would not catch fire the next time they had a big fire in the Tamarisk forest. (Although it would have been better to let them burn down and start over as ratty as they were) I went down with a chain saw and cut them down. We had no herbicide to treat it. I don't know what came of that. I never got back to see. I knew in the back of my head that herbicide was necessary. We didn't have any, but he wanted to see what would happen. We went and chopped down some stuff with Pulaskis which was brutally hard work. It all grew right back, because we did not use herbicide. This was like rule number one and rule number two. Rule number one, the boss is always right. Rule number two, if the boss is wrong, see rule number one. (Laughter) I didn't like the idea of Pulaskis, it didn't take long to figure out. A saw and a lopper were much better. Obviously we had to get herbicide or we would be wasting our time. Eventually we went to saws and loppers and got herbicide. I got together a couple of National Sierra Club groups together to help us out there. We worked on it for a couple of years. Then in '94 a succession of things happened that forced me to go elsewhere for a time. Gates of the Arctic in 1994, Zion in '95 and '96, and The Maze at Canyonlands in '97, 8 and 9.

While I was away Jim kept the Tamarisk work going in Coyote. In the meantime they moved in a permanent subject to furlough position in place of my seasonal. That was a goal they had, they wanted all the seasonals upgraded to subject to furlough positions. It meant I would have to jump through a bunch of hoops and probably go elsewhere for a time to get my all magical permanent "status", which I didn't want to do. That guy moved on in the end of '99, and they were going to leave that position vacant the following year to save money, a common trick. Jim (Bowman) did not want to have to run the sub-district alone, so he talked them in to bringing me back from Canyonlands as a plain old seasonal, which costs a lot less money than a subject to furlough. That is how I was reestablished back here in 2000.

The first thing I did was go out with him on Hole in the Rock road where they had a chainsaw crew from Lake Mead to go work on Tamarisk in the upper reaches of the Coyote Gulch Drainage. They were closing in on the last of it and wanted to clear out the watershed just like we are trying to clear the whole Escalante River watershed of Russian olive now. I was down there for a few days with them. When I got back into Coyote and started looking around I saw there was not a whole lot of Tamarisk left. Every trip down there, I took my tools and a little herbicide and whittled away at it.

There was a smattering of Russian olive in Coyote, which we knew did not belong, so we got rid of them too. It turned out there was the Mother forest in an abandoned channel up in the Dry Fork of Coyote. It took a chainsaw crew to get rid of them. At the time we had not discovered them yet as far as I know. We continued working up Coyote on the Tamarisk and eventually pretty much got it all wiped out. The stuff that was cut on the BLM along the Hole in the Rock Road never had any follow-up done. An awful lot of it grew back. You don't get a hundred percent kill rate.

It raised my awareness of the Russian olive thing and also sometime in the early 90's, before I left in '94, I floated the river from Highway 12 to Coyote. That was my first awareness of what a

nuisance Russian olive was starting to become. It is the only tree species out there that grows out and curves down and obstructs the river. It seemed like every time I encountered one of those things, growing low over the river, that the current wanted to take me there. I had not learned paddling techniques well enough to really stay out of it. I ended up getting swept under it a bunch of times. It is horrible, horrible stuff. I had no idea what was in-store. It was there, like a snapshot, a still frame out of a movie that does not tell you what is going on in the movie.

That was the beginning of awareness and a little bit in Coyote, then in '95 or '96 Jim invited me to come back up here and go with him down Silver Falls Creek and up on Silver Falls Bench with a couple of archeologist to recover, or you might say, steal, an Anasazi pot that some visitors had found and reported. They wanted to collect it. We went up there and Jim and I ended up going out to the rim of the river canyon and looking down between Silver Falls Creek and Harris Wash and I noticed all the Russian olive that had come up in the cottonwoods down there. I remarked about it to Jim. I said, "Sure seems like there is a lot of Russian olive showing up down there." Jim said, "Yeah, I know it, it makes me sick." He had been seeing it, being there the whole time from '87 up to '95, '96. We left it at that. I went on to Zion and The Maze and came back here. After spending a season or so on the Tamarisk in Coyote I also found a few Russian olives between Stevens Canyon and Coyote, a mile and a half along the river. I just worked it myself. There was way too much Tamarisk for one person to deal with there. It had all grown up in the mudflat after the flooding of Lake Powell in '83. That was hopeless. I never could have done that. But the Russian olives were few enough I could. Sometime that year, my friend Bob Read, who had fallen in love with Choprock on a trip there with me in 1990 ten years earlier, had noticed Russian olive rapidly invading up Choprock from the river, being spread by the birds. He wanted to do something about it and asked if it would be alright with us to start working on it.

I went out there with him and we worked on it together and got Choprock cleared out over the next couple of seasons. That was the beginning-outside of Coyote Gulch. In September I decided to take a stab at it working upstream from Stevens Canyon. I spent a whole day on my own working up. I actually got about two miles done in one day, which will never be done again. I did several more trips the following spring, 2001 and pushed it about nine miles upstream from Coyote up to a mile above Fool's Canyon, all by myself. It was still fairly sparse that far down the river.

Meanwhile, through the work with the Lake Mead crew, they had hired Debbie Northcutt from Flagstaff, Arizona. She had been leading Sierra Club service trips for many years. She had been involved some way or another in the Coyote Gulch Tamarisk project. She was hired as a cook for the Lake Mead crew, and that is where I met her. Meanwhile about that same time she organized the Wilderness Volunteers (WV) organization to see if they could do these service trips more cheaply. The Sierra Club service trips had gotten frightfully expensive for participants. In some cases they even charged more for a work trip than for a comparable fun hiking trip, which made no sense at all. They used to kind of subsidize them, give them a break. Then a group of "Harvard MBAs" allegedly "took over" the Sierra Club and decided they couldn't do that anymore. Anecdotal. The Sierra Club also got a wild hair that herbicides were bad and they did not want Sierra Club participants dealing with herbicides. All of a sudden we would have had to have another person following someone around with tools to spray what they cut. That is not

a viable way to do things. The Grand Canyon has never figured that out, they still prohibit volunteers using the herbicide.

WV was organized to do things at less cost to the participants and to get around this thing with herbicides. Around 2001 I talked to Debbie about getting a WV trip to make a start on the Russian olive on the lower Escalante River. After what I had done up stream, up to above Fool's by then, I thought that we could do a trip starting around Scorpion Gulch and clear everything out down to where I had worked up to, which would have been about ten miles. Little did I know what we were in for. There turned out to be one Hell of a lot more than what I anticipated and our tools were pathetic, our tools, our sprayers. We did not get much done and it was very disappointing.

It opened a door though. As a result of that Resource Management bought me a whole bunch of much nicer saws and limb loppers and chemical resistant sprayers. You might say we never looked back. That was the beginning. From then on [there were] two WV trips every year, one in the spring, one in the fall. One season we did three trips and kept working up stream. Eventually when we were halfway up the Glen Canyon part of the river, a little over twenty-five miles, we got the Utah Conservation Corps (UCC) involved. They did not have chain saws then. They sent a crew of five out with hand tools which unfortunately included three girls and two guys. The girls were not as strong as the guys, they had a terrible time making the saws work for them. I could tell by the sound they were struggling. I worked with them to show them how to make the saws work for them. It was a start. Sometime after that UCC bought their first chain saw to go out with me to cut Russian olive on the Escalante River, somewhere above Moody Creek. That was the beginning of becoming a real chain saw operation. Then somewhere along the way, spring of 2007, we had a crew from the Coconino Rural Environment Corps (CREC). They were much more geared up for chain sawing. They had many many chain saws and they had a better organized operation for chain saws going than UCC did. They later helped UCC come up to speed. They are pretty much comparable now.

We kept getting the CREC crews, as they were known- one, two, three times a year. One season I had four crews. As we are working our way up the river, the stuff had been migrating down the river, and consequently it was getting worse going up stream. Also getting worse every year. Getting worse in time and distance, slower and slower progress. We kept throwing all the resources we could at it with the chain saw crews. We used the volunteers with hand tools, their role became clearing the way for the chain saw crews, cutting the small stuff, getting it out of the way. Making access to the trunks of the bigger trees, so they could get in there with a chain saw and cut them later on, it worked very well. We were making almost two miles a year progress.

This is when the burn issue comes into play.

MH: If we can go back a second, your main work objective is to get rid of Tamarisk...

BW: Actually, we were only working on Russian olive. We worked on Tamarisk in Choprock, Neon and Baker Canyons. Three popular and well visited canyons, Neon especially, that did not have a lot of Tamarisk. That was the only Tamarisk work we have done out of Coyote.

MH: So, to get rid of the Russian olive with the major challenges we talked about being equipment, training, and resources to do the work properly. But what we are now getting to is the challenge with the slash.

BW: What happened as we worked our way up river, we noticed that lower down it was narrower, like the neck of the funnel where floods are more frequent and more forceful because you have all the tributaries feeding it. You could just leave stuff for the river to wash away, send it on down to that reservoir down there. Slash was not a problem there because you could count on the river to get rid of it, whole trees could, did, wash away if need be. I knew when we started to get above Twenty-Five Mile Wash, the river bottom gets much much wider. By then you are above the Moodys, all the other side canyons down there, above Twenty-Five Mile Wash, all of which are big contributors to flooding. You don't have the size of floods you have downstream plus the river bottom is wider where the floods will spread out more and not be as forceful at carrying the stuff away. I knew I was going to have a problem with slash piles being in the way. We had to go back and do follow-up afterward. If you have slash everywhere, it is a major pain. I was not having people chop things up in little bits and compact it in tiny piles no bigger than this little bitty office, the way they are doing it now. That is hideously labor intensive, terribly wasteful. It never even occurred to me to do that. The obvious solution was to burn the stuff. We only cut in manageable size pieces, which an average person can handle and toss out of the way into a pile. If there was a place to make a pile, fine. Otherwise, it was left on the assumption that we would come back and burn it later. By bringing it to a safe burn site rather than try and make piles that could be burned by a fire crew, there are not enough places to do that. That would also require chopping it up in little bits. You could go to all that kind of labor if you wanted to, but a big flood might still come along and wash it all away, and then you have wasted all your time. Cut in manageable sized pieces, leave it, if it doesn't get washed away then you come back collect it up and burn it. That is what I ended up doing, burned an awful lot of it that way including with some Sierra Club groups from California. They came all the back here in March for a few years to help me burn the stuff. We got rid of an awful lot that way.

We got a new sub-district ranger here in 2002. The Escalante sub-district ranger had been a "collateral duty" Glen Canyon Fire Management Officer. Not long before the Park Service had a fire get away from them down around Bandelier National Monument and burned down much of the town of Los Alamos, New Mexico as a results. The Service had decreed that every park that had fire as a concern had to update their fire management plans. Glen Canyon was no exception. I asked for a provision to be included in it for burning the slash out there. That was done, the provision was included plus a few minor details no one told me about, Emergency Medical Plan, Evacuation Plan. I continued until Spring of 2010 after the Escalante River Watershed Partnership (ERWP) had been formed, when I was asked to do a slide presentation here on the Russian olive project, which I did. It included several pictures of the fires, which also showed volunteers helping me collect stuff up and burn. What I didn't know was that there was a new deputy superintendent for Glen Canyon in the audience. I had never even heard of the guy much less met him. He freaked out. Someone in the audience told me he was very visibly shocked, horrified to find out there was burning going on out there. He came up afterward, introduced himself, complimented me on the project then asked if any of the fires had ever gotten away. They hadn't or it would have been a big incident. Then he went on his way. Next

thing I know he has gone back to headquarters and raised holy hell over this and put a stop to it. I had no means of getting rid of slash anymore.

For a year and a half we tried to work through the system, get it going with this again. The Fire Management provision specifically stated that fire qualified personnel would not be required for these burns, which meant that I did not have to get Red Carded. I had been Red Carded in 1989, but it had lapsed and I never gotten out on a fire. So, all I had to do was take a fire refresher and get Red Carded again. The other thing he freaked out over was that the volunteers in the pictures were not wearing Nomex fire clothing, never mind that they are only tossing stuff onto a fire, where no one is in any danger. I guess it was a liability thing. We already had some discussion about this. The only fire shirts we had here were all the wrong sizes, triple extra-large which two or three people could fit into comfortably. I asked to get some normal sized shirts, Small, Medium, Large, and that never happened for reasons I never knew. That could have easily been addressed and I could have gotten Red Carded. I even did go to a fire refresher class. We were working our way through all of this for a year and a half, struggling with it. There were endless, endless, endless discussions of this crisis down at headquarters. My boss, Jeff Kracht, (Jim Bowman's second successor) was the only one who supported me in this. As a matter of protocol I worked through him, my go between me and headquarters. He gave me lots of feedback, all the meetings, all the anguish over this, getting nowhere. Meanwhile, not one person from the agency, including Jeff, ever went out there to see what I was doing. Certainly not to witness any burning to see that it could be done safely. In fall 2011 for the first time ever I had a CREC crew twice, same crew twice. Now they have several crews that go out for four or five, eight day hitches. I never had that much help in a season. And I always had a different crew every time, always breaking in a new crew several times every year. I was out there in the fall with that one crew for eight days then we all came out, took days off and in between those two trips I was here in the office one day. Jeff came over and told me that John Spence from Resource Management, who helped me get this thing off the ground, had told the superintendent that there was no need to burn anything. The superintendent said, "Ok, no burning."

MH: So, what was the plan for getting rid of the slash?

BW: There is no plan. His idea is that flooding will take care of it, and as he said in an email, "...nutrient redistribution by downstream flooding is the way riparian areas are supposed to work", or something like that. Never mind the frightful amount of the stuff that is left, or that it is not redistributed into the soil, it gets washed away and wrapped around trees and boulders. It is not replenishing the soil. Hogwash. It was all over for me. I stood up and looked Jeff in the eye and said, "Here is how it is going to be, we will get this resolved before next spring or I am not coming back to work". Right to his face. Already in this struggle I had told him once, "I don't need to be doing this, I'm secure, I can quit anytime". He told them that we were about to lose me if we can't get this worked it out. I was stabbed in the back by a guy who should have been supporting me. He would not communicate anything to me. It makes me furious to think about it.

MH: It stays with you because it is an injustice.

BW: That is exactly what it was. The fact that they made the decision in an office at headquarters, one hundred miles from the scene, without ever once going out to see what I was dealing with is what set me off. I went out with that second crew and I hardly slept the whole week, thinking about the things I wanted to tell them. For spite, the last night of the trip, I took the crew down to a side canyon below where we were working, where I had cut a clump of Tamarisk right in the wash in the side canyon, big ugly, conspicuous thing. That's all there was. I cut it down on the previous trip. There is always enough dead stuff in Tamarisk. I said, "Come on, we are going to have a bonfire", wearing short sleeves, shorts, no Nomex, no nothing. No one was burned. People aren't so stupid as to wade into a fire, when you are just tossing stuff on it. I told the crew it was probably my last trip and it was, that is how it turned out. I let them have it with this email which I sent to selected members of the Partnership ERWP. It found its way to the Superintendent and the Chief Ranger somehow, passed along. I have heard what really pissed them off is that the email went to members of the partnership who were members of the public, embarrassing them. I was at the end of my rope and hoped that other members of the partnership would have some influence with this one person who had stabbed me in the back, John Spence, to promote some dialog and reconsideration, something. Maybe [I was] scrambled at the time with rage and not really thinking very clearly. I was limbo during the winter and part way into the spring, even gave them a deadline. I had some discretion for my own work schedule, agenda, timing. It took two or three months before I heard my job was over and done with. It was end of 2011, last season.

MH: At that point, Amber had mentioned, ERWP had started out side of town ...

BW: They started working downstream from town and they ended up piecemealing and disconnected, but they finally finished it this past fall between town and Highway 12. Meanwhile, they had been working on a segment below Boulder Creek, downstream from Highway 12. Once they got finished up between Death Hollow and Sand Creek, then they had a crew go down and work between the Calf Creek Ranch private property and Phipps Wash. They are finally working downstream from Highway 12. They have crews working upstream taking up from where I left off in 2011. I made it to the mid-point of the river. It is eighty-five miles from beginning of the canyon out here to the beginning of Coyote Gulch. I made it 42 and a half miles up from Coyote plus all the side canyons in that stretch plus part of Harris Wash which is above that stretch. I was averaging two miles a year with these crews, when it was really thick, with these chain saw crews. I took a look at the work they were doing on BLM, the way they were doing it, and I predicted in an email to the Chief of Resource Management that if that was the way they were going to do it in Glen Canyon, they can expect to make maybe a quarter to a half mile a year. They low balled my estimate. At my rate of progress I would have made four times the progress they did. They have been doing better with a new representative from the Walton Foundation now, Peter Skidmore. We have not met. I understand that he is a hydrologist and he has said, "You do not have to cut that stuff up in two foot pieces to go in the river." Up to eight feet is supposedly ok- although I do not know all the criteria. I am done with it, I have a bitter attitude. I have nothing to contribute, all my experience has been rejected, the whole way I have been doing it, so what is the point of me taking part in it?

MH: You have not participated with any aspect of the ERWP since 2011?

BW: It was formed in 2009 when John Spence and Linda Whitham got their heads together and got it going. I went to all their meetings up until the end, 2011. In 2012 I had two volunteer groups on the calendar, one from the Sierra Club and one from Wilderness Volunteers to work with me in Glen Canyon had I continued working there. Because I did not go back to work at Glen Canyon, Glen Canyon had no one to go out there in my place, so I hijacked them. Boulder Community Alliance had contacted me and asked me to go to work for them doing follow-up work on private land, and there had been a lot of private land work done in Boulder. So, I said, "Yes, I can do that and I also have these volunteers groups, can we go work on the Calf Creek Ranch (on the Escalante) private property?" It was fine, worked out well.

MH: Of interest to me, picking up bits of history through these oral histories, is that at one time on the Escalante River, in the Calf Creek Ranch area, there was cane grown there.

BW: Have not heard of that.

MH: Just wondering where there were flats that such agriculture may have taken place. Maybe around the Calf Creek confluence? Any thoughts on that?

BW: For a few miles below highway 12 you have those wide bottom lands, part of the Calf Creek Ranches. Brad Bowman had cleared a part of his property of cottonwood, you can still see that cleared area to this day. There is a line of demarcation, the property line, between BLM and the private property. The property is a wide open field and on the BLM is cottonwood forest. He had cleared that property in order to farm something there to prove up a water right, which he had to do to establish a right to the water.

MH: The story I am referring to involved some cane that was farmed there, processed there and put into barrels, set next to the river to transport out- a season's worth of work, when a flash flood came through and took the whole lot away. Bringing me to another question about antique artifacts perhaps found on the river in your many excursions?

BW: There is stuff- nothing that interesting. There have been two things I have found which were perhaps the remains of a wooden bridge that had washed out. I think it was up on Boulder Creek when the dam at Spectacle Lake on Boulder Mountain broke and sent a huge flood down there. One of the pieces I found up on a huge boulder, maybe around Twenty-Five Mile wash. I ran across it one time and never have seen it again, and I do not know where it is anymore. The other one is similar. They are huge planks made of 2 x 6s stacked sideways to form a stout laminate. I could not imagine what other purpose this might have had. I think there were some remnants of blacktop clinging to it, the clue it was a bridge deck. There was another piece on another equally huge boulder way above the river just below Fold Canyon, between Scorpion and Fool's. That one I know where it is unless the big flood in 2006 washed it away.

MH: Interesting. You spent quite a bit of time out there, besides the obvious changes to the Russian olive or Tamarisk taking over and being taken out, what have you observed?

BW: I noticed willows have come back in places we have gotten rid of Russian olive. The Russian olive suffers no limitation from flooding at all. It likes it right along the river banks. Tamarisk tends to be more away from the river bank in the flood plain, where floods are shallower, not as forceful. The Russian olive generally grows right along the river bank. Sometimes there is overlap of

course. It spreads out and engulfs everything and kills everything underneath it. It shades and crowds everything out. One place in particular I have documented with some photos. In Harris Wash we cut some Russian olive along the bank which were growing about half way across the stream, completely engulfing the whole bank. We got that out of there, it may have been burned or washed away leaving the bank completely clear. Within a year that bank was completely over grown with new willows, seamlessly. You could not tell where the Russian olive had been.

MH: Amber mentioned that today, that when people look at this [Escalante River] restoration, the speed of how native plants have come back is unprecedented, within a season often times.

BW: It is a lesson they learned. Going way back to the beginning, she was getting money from the State maybe with a string attached requiring some proactive restoration. She was having to go out and cut willows and stick them in the ground here and there. It turned out you don't have to. The river itself will decide what it wants to have growing there, and it will get it established.

MH: Apparently this watershed is still viable and can do that. Most places like on the Virgin, or rivers in California just don't have the viability or success anymore.

BW: It is very dynamic and resilient ecosystem. One of the things that makes it that way is that it is still free flowing river. One of the things that played into my initial thinking about it was free flowing rivers in this country are precious few and far between. Yes, we do take water out of the river in some small diversions, but there is only one dam in the whole watershed above town here in North Creek that is even remotely capable of capturing the flood flow, the North Creek Dam. It can store some flood flow before it spills but all these other little diversions are designed so that floods bypass them. They only take the base flow of the river, they do not want all that muddy torrent going into their irrigation ponds. They normally only take the clear flow, and are designed with a trap that shuts off the diversion when the water rises or like a grate so the small trickle pours through the grate and goes off to a pipe in the pond. The other water and floods and debris just go right over the top of it. This river is still free to function as a river is supposed to and that is why it is able to restore itself the way it does so well.

MH: Nicely said. Other things you may have noticed...there was still grazing allowed on the Escalante for a time, as well, when you were working, right? Have you seen a change and what are the changes?

BW: The big thing there was the willows came back very well when the cows were evicted in 1992. Unfortunately, there are a whole bunch of them out there right now that nobody is doing anything about.

MH: On the river?

BW: Yes, they are getting in somewhere. They have been out there every winter for the last three-four winters. Every time I go out there, there is fresh cow sign. Steve Henry is my successor now and he told me awhile back that they know about them but he said no one will claim them, no one knows who they belong to apparently.

MH: Aren't they are usually branded?

BW: And worth something to someone. The cold hard reality is that it is more trouble than they are worth to find them and get them out of there. And taking a swipe at BLM here, the BLM seems to think there should be cows everywhere. They would never have closed the river to grazing if it had been up to them. It was Park Service that wanted that. There is no incentive to do anything about it. There are places there, I was out there last fall in Fence Canyon and Choprock where it is so heavily beaten by cows, everything is churned up and looked like a rototiller had been run through it. It has been getting worse, more and more. One of the chain saw crews I visited with up above Silver Falls Creek this fall said there are cows right above where they were working.

MH: So, the cows are back on the river.

BW: It is not just that nobody knows about them, it is that nobody is doing anything about them. What happened, March 1990 someone went down there and shot twenty-one of their cows and burned down their line shacks. No one was ever caught. Not long after that, a few months maybe, the rancher, Art Lyman, came into Jim Bowman's office and asked if the Park Service would be interested in buying him out of the river allotment. The Park service was interested but it took about two years to come up with some money to buy him out, then figure out how to go about retiring the allotment. It had never been done before. Politically it is impossible today, none of it happening because of overwhelming opposition from the livestock industry and every county commissioner in the west. They all are square behind grazing. It is all on hold now. Grand Canyon Trust has bought some allotments but they have had to graze. It was finally done, and the way it came about was first BLM had to make a decision to close the allotment. This is a decision adverse to the rancher's interests, which gives him the right to appeal. He has two years to appeal. They determined the amount of money that would change hands based on the value of the forage he could have gotten from the allotment during the two year appeal period. The AUM fee times the number of cows allotted times the length of the seasonal and all that. It came up to around \$120,000 dollars and settled for about \$100,000. That was done and the allotment has remained closed from 1992 to the present.

MH: Have you been down there? How does it look?

BW: It looks great. With no cows and no Russian olive it is beautiful. The closure point was two and a half miles upriver from Harris Wash which left about five miles or so, four and a half above there in Glen Canyon still open. That was done because there was an existing fence across the river at that point. We rebuilt that fence to keep the cows out. It was like a pasture boundary with cows on both sides of it...already. One of those sacrificial fences, several stands of barbed wire hanging across the river, washed out with every flood. We built a cable hanging fence, still got wiped out.

MH: And what are you doing now, currently?

BW: Whatever I damned well please. I am retired. I continued to work for Boulder Community Alliance from 2012, 13, and some of 14 doing follow-up on private land in Boulder, Calf Creek Ranch work. We got all the Russian olive out of there and burned all the slash on the ground and cut down and burned the vast majority of standing dead trees except what we hauled away for firewood. Then I continued, when BCA took over spearheading the private land work over here,

doing the follow up work here as well. By then Boulder was pretty much done with Russian olive. There were three private land owners holding out over there, and won't let us get rid of the last little bit. BCA decided they would get out of the Russian olive business. It is continuing over here. The last work I did was not through BCA, but was asked by two property owners, Craig Sorenson and Doug Howland to work on Tamarisk on their private property on the Calf Creek Ranch. That was the result of a grant that came from somewhere to improve willow flycatcher habitat. I spent three and a half days last year doing that.

MH: So, a contractor?

BW: Yes. And we did burn most of it.

MH: One last question, as a component to slash removal, versus composting as in leaving it to rot and wash down as it will. How is the component of the remains from burning considered, if at all?

BW: It would not affect the ecology of the river system as I do it. You bring the fuel to a discrete point, you burn it at one site. You can burn a hell of a lot of stuff on one site. Yes, you will sterilize the soil for a while until a flood replaces it. It is not good soil anyway, it is mostly sand. Yes, if left in place to decay, it will build soil. The problem is the overwhelming quantity of it. You leave piles and standing dead trees which become an eyesore in National Park quality land and National Monument. It is no way to treat any place like that which the public visits. It is wrong and that is what I could not get through their thick skulls, it is wrong to just leave the stuff.

MH: My point is that if by burning are you releasing the material much quicker as ash versus decomposing piles of branches and trunks?

BW: The next flood will obliterate every fire site. And wherever possible, I would burn down next to the water. If there was a gravel bar, that is where I would do my fire.

MH: Interesting talking with you. I appreciate your time coming in to do this. Thanks again.

End of interview. Time:01:13:17