Alan Watson Interview with Dave Parsons May 2016

**Alan Watson**: Please tell us about any early experiences in your life that contributed to your interest in parks and nature generally.

**David**:   Much in my early life set me up for the path I would follow with my career. I grew up in an academic household in Berkeley, California. My father was a professor of geography at UC Berkeley, where he was friends with a number of leading names in the conservation field, including David Brower and Starker Leopold. Maybe even more importantly, we spent a lot of time as a family traveling, including visiting many of the national parks in the western US. We often camped out, at times just sleeping out under the stars.

There was no designated wilderness at that time, of course. But in the 1950s and early '60s as we visited most of the big western parks I became interested in parks and nature. Also, as a young teenager I started backpacking in the Sierra Nevada of California. Through my college years I backpacked for at least a week every summer; something I continue to do to this day.

**Alan**:  How about research about those parks or about nature? Where did that interest in science come from?

**David**:  When I started college at UC Davis, I wasn't sure what I wanted to go into. I ended up declaring a general biology major. The experience I had between my junior and senior years when I received a grant through a plant ecology professor at Davis (Jack Major) to spend the summer in the Sierra Nevada documenting the southern distributions of mountain hemlock trees, had a great influence on my thinking. This involved a full summer of backpacking in the beautiful Sierra Nevada as well as exploring historical documents on the natural history of the area. This experience helped me realize that science was a good way to continue my love of the outdoors.

I initially was accepted into a Masters program at UC Berkeley to study wildlife biology under Starker Leopold. Then I decided maybe it wasn't such a good idea to go study under a family friend.

I ended up at Stanford University; a place that is probably not often thought of as a stepping stone to a career working in issues related to parks and wilderness. I decided to go there primarily because Dr. Paul Ehrlich was studying human population issues and human impacts on the environment. He, of course, was regularly appearing on Johnny Carson late at night. He had just published his book "The Population Bomb” which I found very interesting. I was also intrigued by the work Ehrlich was doing with a botanist, Dr. Peter Raven, on the coevolution of plants and animals.

I thought these would be exciting fields in which to continue my studies. But, it didn’t take long to realize that Dr. Ehrlich’s grad students tended to study relatively narrow questions related to butterflies or other invertebrates, and he spent very little time with them. Then, Dr. Raven decided to leave Stanford as he took a position as Director of the Missouri Botanical Gardens. I soon switched into something that led me more down the direction of broad ecological questions, studying plant ecology under Dr. Harold Mooney.

**Alan**:  If you hadn't gone to graduate school do you think you would have still gone into the nature management field? Do you have an alternative career you might have pursued?

**David**:  As a kid, the aptitude tests we’d take always showed that I should be a park or forest ranger. I was also interested in the history of the western US. And, for a while, I was intrigued by the nursery business. I could easily have easily gone one of those directions.

**Alan**:  I can't picture you doing anything else. Transitioning, I'm curious about when you started to think about the field of research for wilderness, and maybe leading into number two, how did you come to be the Director of the Leopold Institute? What path took you here?

**David**:  Straight out of grad school I interviewed at three different universities for assistant professorships...that was what most Stanford graduates did. But, I soon realized that those jobs weren't in places I was particularly intrigued by....and I wasn’t even sure that was the career path I wanted to follow. Then, out of the blue my major professor, Hal Mooney, showed me a letter that he'd received from the National Park Service saying that they were going to be advertising to fill a job to run the research program at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. That was the first time I realized that parks even had jobs like that.

He said, "I think this might fit your interests really well." I applied and was interviewed, both in San Francisco and down at the park. I was offered the job and took it. It all happened fast, near the end of my last year in grad school.

I then spent close to 21 years as a Research Scientist for the National Park Service. In addition to conducting my own research I played an important role in coordinating and communicating with university scientists to assure that work they did in the parks was as useful as possible to park managers. I soon realized that this was just as important a part of my job (developing and overseeing research programs with outside cooperators that could help park managers with difficult management decisions) as actually doing the science myself. In time I was able to justify and hire two additional permanent, full‑time research grade scientists as well as several support positions. We had a small building built by the park for the scientists; a level of support that they just never had had before.

I was very successful in leveraging money, both Park Service funds and from outside sources. For example, in the 1980;s the State of California put a lot of money into some watershed and acid rain research in the parks and significant air pollution work was funded by the Forest Service. In the early 1990’s we took advantage of a new NPS initiative to develop a research program, to study the potential effects of climate change, a program that continues today.

I had been successful in attracting some really top ‑‑ mostly academic ‑‑ scientists to work in the parks. We built a very successful program that was fast becoming a model for other parks. Then, in 1993 a decision was made at the Department level that all the research and scientists in the Department of the Interior agencies were going to be pulled out of their agencies and put into a new agency, to be called the National Biological Survey. That was when my life started to change.

Bruce Babbitt was Secretary of the Interior. This was his vision. We learned later that his hero was John Wesley Powell, who besides exploring the Colorado River and a lot of the West, had created the US Geological Survey. Babbitt figured he was going to make his legacy a biological equivalent of the USGS with the USBS.

He actually came out to Sequoia and visited with us. Our park superintendent at the time tried to convince him why this was not a good idea. A lot of people did. The chief scientist at the Park Service in Washington, along with the heads of science in the BLM, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and a couple of other minor agencies who had scientists were all called into planning meetings. The Park Service representative was dismissed after the first meeting and told not to come back, because he raised too many objections as to why this would not be good for the parks. They wanted a team player so they got some lower level person to continue and our chief scientist was completely out of all the planning and negotiations.

Nobody was sure if it was really going to happen but then it did happen. It was able to be done administratively. Within months, the newly elected Republican majority in the House of Representatives with Newt Gingrich as Speaker announced their “Contract for America”. One of the items in that initiative was to zero out this new National Biological Survey.

Everybody was trying to figure out what the future held. Nobody really wanted it to work. Some wanted it to go away and some wanted to go back the way it was. It was really frustrating to be caught in the middle.

That's when I, for the first time ever, thought about the idea of a different job, and when I saw an announcement for the director of a new cross‑cutting, interdisciplinary, inter‑agency research program (the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute), I decided to apply.

After about six months, I made an inquiry as to what happened with that position. They said, "Well, it still hasn't been filled." Bruce Kilgore, who was with the Park Service at the time but had a Forest Service background and knew a lot of those people, made a call or two and found out I hadn't been considered because I was from another agency. It turned out I should have been considered since it had been advertised government wide.

I believe it was in early January of '94 I was in DC for a meeting, when I got a phone call early one morning in my hotel room saying, "I'm from personnel at the Forest Service, I'm offering you the job as the Director of the Leopold Institute, do you accept?" Nobody had talked to me about the job, I really didn't know much about it. So I was able to stall for a couple months, make a trip up here, and then I really had to do some soul searching, but things weren't getting any better within the NBS and after consultation with my family, I decided to accept the position.

This meant moving out of a research‑grade position (I, just a year or two earlier had reached the GS15 level through research grade), which I was going to be able to maintain even although I wasn't sure how much science I would be able to do. I realized my strength was perhaps not the doing of the science as much as the facilitation and organizing of it. It seemed like a really natural fit to expand my interests to focus on what I thought I was best at.

There were a couple of other important ties that made the job seem fortuitous, that it was just meant to be. The Leopold family tie; Starker Leopold, one of Aldo's sons had been a family friend growing up, and had a number of mutual graduate students with my father. I had even briefly dated his daughter while in college. And Luna Leopold, another son who had once been the director of the USGS, had recently moved to Berkeley and he and his wife had become some of my parents’ best friends. Bob Lucas I knew of because he had studied under my father. David Cole had also taken classes from my dad; so I knew a lot of these names, and it just seemed like it was meant to be.

**Alan**:  I want you to talk just a minute about research for wilderness. You talk about the agencies, and moving here, and you came up here to learn more about it. You start thinking about doing/ managing research in wilderness, it seems different than what you were doing at Sequoia, or was it?

**David**:  I didn't view it as very different. Because research for the parks, the work we were doing there was mostly focused on management issues. At that time, in the '80s and into the '90s, the general feeling within the Parks was that they were the closest to what wilderness was supposed to be prior to the Wilderness Act, at least.

To tell you the truth, when Sequoia and Kings Canyon were designated as wilderness, not in the original bill, but in the '80s, it didn't even cause a ripple, because I don't think people understood what the Wilderness Act meant, and they felt like they were already doing most of what it called for. Doing research in support of large, protected natural areas was natural for me.

**Alan**:  When you came here, when you first started as Director, how did you prioritize the work at the Leopold Institute? How did you pick either wilderness‑related or administrative‑related, I guess I'm open to either one. What came to mind as the big topics, the first four or five years? What did you focus on?

**David**:  My recollection is that I relied pretty heavily on the staff that was here, because I recognized that everybody here had a really strong reputation in the areas they worked in. It was a small staff, so it was very difficult to address all the different needs that we knew were out there.

I didn't try to redirect the scientists that were here into other areas, but at the same time, I realized that the future and success of the Institute was really dependent on the other agencies who were our cooperators. During the first six months or so, when I had meetings with Congressmen Bruce Vento who had been a big pusher of the Leopold Institute, and his staff people, Jim Bradley in particular, it was clear this was to be not just a Forest Service effort, but the other three wilderness management agencies were going to be part of it.

Of course, with the transfer of the science function of the Department of the Interior to the NBS, a ripple was created that hadn't been envisioned when the Institute was first created. It was critical to work with those other agencies to show that we were responsive to what they saw as their biggest needs in wilderness. Shortly thereafter the NBS (later moved within the USGS) was added as a fifth partner agency.

That leads into the long story of frustration, of trying to deal with the higher levels of 5 different agencies, a lot of whom I don't think really appreciated what their responsibilities were with wilderness, or maybe in some cases didn't even care about them. That ended up being a huge part of my focus, trying to get the other agencies more involved.

At one point the Park Service called and offered to send us a particular person as an addition to our staff. I knew it was somebody we didn't want (he was a park superintendent, not a scientist), and they were just basically trying to place that person, and I said no. Then later there was a similar offer to move their national wilderness coordinator to the Institute. It started to feel as if they viewed us as a dumping place for some of their people, but at the same time we still had this vision that we would get money (and professional staff) from them. We did get some project money, but never got the base support that was expected.

Over the next several years I made many trips to Washington (and other locations) talking to an ever‑changing group of what they called the Wilderness Policy Council, the head wilderness people from each of those five agencies, trying to explain to them why this was in their interest, and how we could help them meet their needs.

I definitely spent more time on that than I did on science. I mostly just tried to facilitate the existing staff to keep their work going, but also to try to be at least somewhat responsive to the agency needs.

**Alan**:  That's certainly what I imagined, the administrative things were in a new situation with the Institute, and you were coming in with knowledge from a different program and organization. That I would think would have been real beneficial.

**David**:  The other thing that happened that very first year, was the House of Representatives went Republican and Congressman Bruce Vento, who had been the primary champion of the Leopold Institute lost his chairmanship of the House Subcommittee on Natural Resources. He was no longer in a position to help us get the resources and staff that had been envisioned.

**Alan**:  The 30th anniversary conference, I remember a lot of sad faces down there, Vento included even. He sat on a table and talked with his head down.

**David**:  "I can't do much about it," he said, "We're not in charge anymore." I soon began to sense a feeling at the top levels of the DOI agencies that "Whew! Now we don't have to do that."

**Alan**:  Over your lengthy time as director what factors influenced the choice about wilderness topics prioritized? I was wondering if you'd maybe give an example of something, how you influenced the topics we studied. You first came in, you certainly facilitated the scientists, and kept things moving, worked on administrative issues...

Talk about over time how you influenced topics studied, some indicators of success you feel.

**David**:  I don't know how much influence I really had. I was certainly influenced by the Institute staff...I had increasingly throughout my career sensed the importance of the human dimension of things. Coming here, and having Alan and some of his collaborators here, and to some extent David Cole, focusing more on the human aspect really just struck me as really critical, and that we needed to keep this going. My experiences in the Park Service had focused more heavily on the natural sciences, with some focus on human impacts on the natural resources.

I realized that all of what I had viewed as biological questions ultimately had a human component to them, whether they were fire, wildlife, or whatever.

In terms of research topics at the Institute, the primary two new areas that came about after I got here, were fire and, I would say wildlife, and they really came about in different ways. The importance of fire in wilderness was a topic that continually came up in our prioritization meetings, especially as we heard from agency managers.

While there were fire research programs in the other agencies, as well as in the Forest Service, there was a wilderness component to it that they felt was being ignored. I did have personal background in that area from my days in the Sierra Nevada. I don't recall exactly how the first money came about but Peter Landres took the initial lead in that area, working with me.

We were fortunate in being able to bring Carol Miller into the Institute. I had worked with Carol in the Sierra, and knew she had a personality and expertise that I thought would fit in well. She didn't come out of a wilderness background per se, but I had a hunch that that wasn't going to be a major issue for her. We brought her in first in a term appointment, and eventually got her into a permanent one. That's flourished, she's developed working relationships with a lot of other people both within the Forest Service, the other agencies, and in academia. She has been extremely successful in bringing additional staff into her program.

I believe the fire program is the biggest funded program in the Institute now. Not because it's necessarily the biggest wilderness issue, as much as because of how fire has become a major issue eating up all of the agencies' budgets.

The other area, wildlife, was a bit different story. In our continuing negotiations with the National Biological Survey ‑‑ which later got incorporated into the US Geological Survey as the Biological Resources Branch, we reminded them that they had the science responsibilities for Interior and that that included wilderness. So Steven Corn who had been in Fort Collins was put forward to us as the person they would like to send to Missoula to represent USGS interests. Steve had his own interests and funding sources, mostly in the area of declining amphibian populations, which was fine. That fit nicely into our priorities, and a lot of his work had been in National Parks, but also in a few Fish and Wildlife Service and Forest Service areas. It wasn't a bad fit, though like with Carol, he didn't come in with a background in wilderness per se. It was a continuing struggle to fully integrate his work into that of the rest of the Institute, but we made it work.

On the other hand, most of the work our core scientists did wasn't integrated very well with others here either. Most of them had their own external collaboration groups.

**Alan**:  As an indicator of success, Carol is still here, and Steve stayed until he retired. They certainly built careers on those topics.

**David**:  Yes; I think they were both quite successful and now, there are younger scientists here, Carol's got a second one in Sean, and Blake has taken over the role Steve played.

**Alan**:  They're continuing these important topics for the Leopold Institute. What determined the places the scientists at Leopold Institute studied? Were you ever involved in those decisions, did you try to guide us toward places? Topics is one thing, location seems to be another, and people often ask us how we decide. How do you think we decide, or what role did you play in those?

**David**:  For the most part, the role I would play was just, in most cases, questioning, reviewing why do you want to do this work where you're doing it? There was a conscious effort to try to spread our work into some geographic areas that we had not worked in in the past. For example, Alan worked hard to make sure some of his research was in the southern part of the country. However, often the money came with specific areas in mind. To some extent we had some freedom to determine where we worked, but not complete freedom.

There was an effort made, and Peter Landres took the lead on this, and actually hosted a couple of workshops. One in the South, I remember, I think that was Peter, and one in the southwest deserts, trying to bring together wilderness managers, mostly managers, a few scientists I believe, to talk about what their wilderness needs were that science and the Institute might be able to help with.

**Alan**:  I was going to say even I ventured off into Alaska, that was a pretty big issue, and you certainly supported that, and were a part of the decision. Is that a good idea? We've worked a lot of places in Alaska, we developed a lot of knowledge we didn't have before. Then we went on at some point in time.

**David**:  There were so may needs in so many places, that it was really hard to prioritize. I thought it was important to keep up an appearance of working throughout the country, in different parts of the country, but it had to be tempered to some extent to where the local interest was, and where the dollar support was. I don't recall a whole lot of projects that came in here where we were free to go do the work wherever we had wanted.

In some cases we may have applied for that money to work in Alaska or in certain places. On the whole, we did a pretty good job of spreading out between the Boundary Waters, and the Southeast, and maybe we were weak in the Northeast, but again, it was balancing the expertise we had here and the funding sources, and the interests of the agencies we were trying to be responsive to.

In some cases it would be a local wilderness manager who would come to us that had the drive and the interest that would get our attention. Because without local support, a lot of the projects we did wouldn't have gone very well.

**Alan**:  One of our scientists used to suggest that we were a mile wide and an inch deep, and we needed to be an inch wide and a mile deep. Did you ever think about that? Did you influence us in trying to keep tighter, or to explore more? How did you deal with that?

**David**:  That was a continual challenge. We were so thin in terms of staff that you couldn't...to become really an expert in some topic, you needed to spend most of your time on that, and it was very hard to broaden out either discipline‑wise, topically, or geographically. So yeah, that was a constant struggle we had here.

As I would talk with the scientists about what they wanted to work on, what they might work on, that was certainly something we thought about, but when you only have four or five core scientists to deal with the wide breadth of issues that potentially need to be addressed, I didn't feel we could really afford to have just a few very focused, deep scientists using your terminology, that weren't broad. I encouraged breadth, but it was a continual challenge to provide such.

**Alan**:  I agree. It felt like the early days of wilderness science, they had a few questions. Bob Lucas even said, we start out with a few of us and a few questions we thought we'd answer fairly quickly. It seemed kind of narrow, specific, it just tended to get more and more broad. I don't know where we are today on that, it feels like a transition.

Let's go on. Who do you feel gave you the greatest support as Director of the Leopold Institute?

A couple clarifiers, who cared the most about your success and support, and the success of the Institute? Who did you most enjoy collaborating with? I'd like to think about how you reacted to either external or internal influences on you as Director of Leopold Institute.

**David**:  The greatest support came internally from the staff here, especially the staff that carried over from the previous work unit. They wanted to see the Institute succeed.

Other than a few individuals, I didn't sense the same support or desire to make sure we were successful from the national levels of any of the agencies, including the Forest Service Washington Office, where we initially reported, or the Rocky Mountain Research Station when we got put under their direction.

The interest in us being successful seemed to be fleeting in a sense when they would visit, or we would sit down with them, the interest was there but then nothing would happen. That was a very discouraging reality check, unfortunately.

In terms of collaborating, I tried not to play favorites within the Institute. I wasn't doing science per se. The writing I continued to do tended to be big overview issues.

My science collaboration, what was most memorable about that was people outside the agencies for the most part. Some of the university people, some of whom we got to come here, like Tom Swetnam from the University of Arizona, who took a 6 month sabbatical at the Institute; Lisa Graumlich, Norm Christensen and Greg Aplet are examples of distinguished scientists who we were able to get involved in wilderness issues. We got them to come to conferences and play keynote roles.

And, of course, each of the Institute scientists had their own group of collaborators, including internationally, with whom they worked. I think that these relationships did a lot to establish our reputation as a place where quality work was done.

To me, those were much more rewarding collaborations than trying to work with let's say the bureaucrats, the administrators within the agencies who had a lot of other things on their mind as well and had questionable commitment.

**Alan**:  That's what I was looking for. I appreciate that. Things with those people, it makes me smile. Good relationships we had with a lot of good scholars and. other scientists.

**David**:  Those were the names of people that I interacted with most. Each of the scientists here had their own group. Alan Watson, in particular, had some strong collaborators that appreciated the time he put in. I guess I should say those people also cared about the success of the Institute.

David Cole tended to work a bit more on his own although he did have several particularly strong collaborators with whom he worked, both scientists and managers. The Beyond Naturalness workshops he pulled together with Lauri Yung of the University of Montana and the book that came out of that were good examples of strong collaborations. As I say this I realize just how much David did work with outside collaborators.

Peter Landres's collaborations tended to be more with managers than scientists, but, again these were highly successful and Peter was very highly valued by those people.

I would say. Carol has collaborated pretty widely with both scientists and managers, including many proposals funded jointly with other collaborators.

We never would have made it very far at all here at ALWRI if we hadn't had the external collaborations.

**Alan**:  The mission of the Leopold Institute within overall Forest Service Research, think about within the Forest Service. You're in science generally, but I'm interested in you explaining to me how unique our mission was, or whether you think it's unique.

**David**:  Many of the components of what we did were not particularly unique. It was the efforts and ability to integrate that work into the bigger overriding questions that wilderness brought to the table that was unique.

You could be an expert in any number of topics. That's what most scientists are, but to try to apply those to this administrative classification of wilderness and to integrate your work with other relevant works so it is applicable to the stewardship decisions that had to be made is what makes it unique.

To me, that's what was unique, the crosscutting, taking individual expertise and topics, and applying those to this bigger picture idea of wilderness. I'm not sure there are very many other examples where that would hold in agency research.

**Alan**:  In the Forest Service, that was unique. Does it make you think of anything else in science? You think other people deal with that complexity or that uniqueness? You run with anyone out there that was doing something similar to you, you felt like?

**David**:  No. To some extent, the Park Service Research programs in the late '70s, '80s, early '90 was closer to that than Forest Service research. One of the eye‑openers for me was coming into the Forest Service and realizing that these work units were very discipline‑based, whereas the Park Service, where there was one, or two, or three, or four scientists in a park you had to be more of a generalist; able to look at the broad picture. Everybody, for the most part was dealing with larger ecological, ecosystem, questions and with multiple questions at once.

The Fish and Wildlife Service was at the other extreme. The scientists I got to know that came out of that agency mostly were focused on very narrow questions where there was a certain bird or fish disease, for example. They did not look at the broader ecological interrelationships much, and they rarely considered the human aspects of such.

It's a unique situation. There are examples of small groups of scientists that work together in terms of universities or between universities. I'm not sure any science organization in this country facilitates that very well, the broad, what I would call, ecosystem level studies.

**Alan**:  That's consistent internationally, too. That's why we're novel, why we do a lot of international work. We're doing something other people don't quite understand.

We've had people come here from Denmark, from IUFRO trying to figure out how we work inter‑agency. How does that work? You're dealing with maybe less of a biophysical resource and more of a sociocultural thing sometimes. That's intriguing to them.

If I was trying to answer your question all of a sudden, I realized I would think international. We're novel. We're unusual. They can't quite figure this out sometimes.

I'm curious how you think about the science at the Leopold Institute during your time as director. Was it different from early wilderness related research prior to your arrival? I asked because we've interviewed people earlier than you in our program.

You're filling in a big part of the history of the Leopold Institute. How did those relate for what was happening before we became an institute and what was happening as an institute inter‑agency with you as Director?

**David**:  My impression was that prior to the Institute the Wilderness Research work unit of the Forest Service were the only people I'm aware of that were focusing specifically on wilderness questions, and that work was primarily focused on the human use component ‑‑ both the impacts of use, allocation of use, and perceptions of users.

Clearly, the founding documents for the Institute articulated broadening those questions out to include ecosystem, biology, and ecology components. While we continued to do the kind of work that had been done before, it was the expansion beyond those traditional recreation user and impact studies that was the big difference into more ecological questions, values questions, maybe some economics even.

**Alan**:  That leads well into the next question. As we became more diverse in agencies we represented, the disciplines we represented, can you evaluate the extent of the contribution of a collaborative, congenial atmosphere of work at Leopold Institute? Was that easy? Was it difficult? Did you have to manage us a lot? How did you feel about our atmosphere?

**David**:  It was difficult. The three of you that were here when I came were all pretty focused on your own interest. I had a hard time getting people to sit down and interact. At some point, I gave up in trying to force collaboration in terms of true collaboration.

Some of that was personality‑driven. Some of it was being entrenched, knowing that you were appreciated, and recognized for what you had been doing, and not wanting to change from that too much.

I decided not too far into my tenure here, that I was probably better off facilitating each of you with your own networks of collaborators, and to focus within Institute collaboration, more on trying to identify and see if we could reach agreement on priorities and things that might not even be, in all cases, what the people here would be doing. There wasn't hostility.

**Alan**:  Was it competitive?

**David**:  I don't think I sensed a competitiveness to it very much.

**Alan**:  I don't either. It feels like there is some sense that we could have been more cooperative, but we didn't find a way to do it. Like you said, it wasn't hostile. It wasn't real competitive. We're operating in our own.

**David**:  All of you, maybe David more than any, had your vision of what the right way to do things were. He, in particular, I can remember with both you, Alan, and with Peter where I would try to bring you together. He knew what he wanted done.

**Alan**:  Strong personality for sure.

**David**:  He was very much appreciated for what he did in the field. It was not worth my effort to try to force a change, such as insisting he work more closely with you and Peter.

**Alan**:  I’m interested in you talking about your role in the science community. Not necessarily the Wilderness Science Community, but beyond your duties at Leopold Institute or as an extension of them. What did you perceive your role or contribution to the larger science community to be? I perceive you did a lot and you enjoyed that.

**David**:  I was involved throughout my career with professional societies. I was especially active in the Ecological Society of America, where I held several offices and served as an editor, the longest‑running editor to date, for their journal Ecological Applications.

I organized a number of workshops and theme sessions at national and regional conferences, primarily in an effort to bring the importance of the needs of parks other large, protected natural landscapes, to the attention of the larger science communities, primarily to the ecological community.

Many of those conferences would be focused on graduate students that were perhaps in fairly narrow disciplinary topics but were looking for ways to make their work more widely relevant. I felt there was an important role I could play in bringing the importance of these kinds of applied issues to the larger science community.

The other major group I've been most involved with was the George Wright Society (GWS), which grew out of some early National Park Service science conferences into what now is a much broader interdisciplinary focus that goes way beyond parks. I’ve chaired several of their biennial conferences and worked hard to involve academia, NGO and international participation. I've served an unprecedented 4 three year terms on the on the GWS Board of Directors. This year, I'll be wrapping up my final tenure in that role.

It is the success in bringing scientists and managers together that I’ve liked so much about the GWS conferences. They were very different than Ecological Society of America conferences where you basically had only scientists in attendance. With the George Wright Society, it was everybody from field resource managers, to park superintendents, to Washington office staff, to scientists both inside and outside the agencies.

Those were probably my two primary involvements. They kept me pretty busy and still do to some extent, although the George Wright will be winding down now.

**Alan**:  Last question I want to ask is, you talked a little about retirement. I'm curious about things like whether wilderness and science are part of your identity. If so, how? What are your priorities in retirement? Anything you think about or want to talk about so that we know what it's like when you leave here.

**David**:   I would say wilderness, parks, science, none of those are as prominent in my life as I thought they would continue to be when I first retired.

David Cole and I have continued to work on one project for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks that involved several trips to those Parks, but that will be wrapping up soon. I do make it a priority to get in a week or so backpack trip each summer, generally in Sequoia/Kings Canyon as that is where I have the strongest sense of place.

I have a lot to keep me busy, mostly on our 20+ acres in the northern Bitterroot Valley; I'm outside working on the property (fence repair, weed management, taking care of our multitude of animals) much of the time. I also try to spend substantial time recreating, e.g., camping, skiing, hiking, etc. We’ve also taken a number of extended trips, including to Vietnam and Cambodia, Ecuador and Costa Rica as well as to parks and wilderness areas in the US.

I've sensed, to a certain extent, you are forgotten faster than I thought would be the case. And, as other past colleagues retire you gradually lose your contacts; it’s ...it's a new generation taking over.

I do maintain an Emeritus Scientist appointment with both the Forest Service and the National Park Service, but I’ve not been doing much for either of them recently.

Up until now, I don't think I’ve had a single day since I retired, which has been over five years now, when I've had the thought, "What am I going to do today?"

I still am pretty active. We still do a fair number of things with a number of other local retirees. I sense I might be even more involved than most of them are in terms of staying in touch, even as little as I do.

**Alan**:  Did you have a role model in retirement? When you retire, did you go, "I don't want to be like that person. I want to be like that person".

**David**:  I don't.

**Alan**:  We appreciate you doing the interview and to take this opportunity to thank you for your contributions at the Leopold Institute. What years do you think that was from '94 until...?

**David**:  May of '94 till January of 2010.

**Alan**:  And you were the Director of the Institute that entire time?

**David**:  That I was.

**Alan**:  Thank you, Dave.