

Narrator: Robert Elofson  
Date: May 24, 2014  
Interviewed by: Jordan Woolston  
Place: Port Angeles, WA

Jordan Woolston: Okay so, let me set these aside so I can take notes, and, can you tell me your name?

Robert Elofson: Robert Elofson

JW: And where were you born?

RE: In Port Angeles Washington

JW: What year were you born?

RE: 1952

JW: What do you remember about your parents?

RE: Well, actually not much because I was raised in foster homes from when I was six on because my mom died when I was six.

JW: Did she?

RE: Ya she, I believe there was some complications with kidney or liver and they thought it was one and it was the other and so, and by the time they realized it, it was too late.

JW: So you were raised in foster care?

RE: Yeah, in foster homes, yeah.

JW: So did you know your grandparents, then?

RE: I knew my grandmother, my grandfather died the same year I was born, I think about four or five months after I was born.

JW: Really? So, if... were you raised by tribal members or were you raised by....

RE: I was raised by, well of course my mom and dad until I was six and then by an uncle for the next, uh, four or five years, five years, four years.

JW: Till you were like eight or nine?

RE: Ten.

JW: And then you went with...

RE: I went to other foster homes, I, I have type one diabetes that... I did, no, it came out when I was ten.

JW: Oh really?

RE: Yeah.

JW: So you've been dealing with that your entire life?

RE: Yeah and my aunt and uncle had a hard time, and I had a hard time, you know, keeping on my diets and stuff so they moved me to some place that had more experience with it

JW: And you stayed with them until you were...

RE: No

JW: No?

RE: I moved a lot

JW: You moved a lot?

RE: I moved continuous, I think I lived in a total of about eleven different foster homes

JW: Really? Wow.

RE: Yeah I have, yeah.

JW: Do you keep in touch with those people still?

RE: Some.

JW: Some of them?

RE: Some of them, yeah.

JW: So was there, as far as your like heritage and stuff, was something that you were involved with when you were younger?

RE: Well, It was before the, what was it, Indian child welfare act? [Yeah] it was before that. So most of the families, I stayed with my sister for one year, and that was when I was about fifteen and I stayed with my other, my aunt and uncle till I was ten, so you

know between ten and eighteen about seven years was spent with other families outside [inaudible] of the tribal members and families

JW: How many, did you just have one sister or did you have more siblings?

RE: No, I have, lets see one, two, three, four, five, five sisters and two brothers.

JW: Oh my, and where were you in that

RE: I have three brothers. I was just about the middle, I have two brothers and a sister that are younger, and, see I have, two of the sisters are half sisters, different dads, and my brother was a half, one brother was a half brother, so of the six of us, I was the fourth one, I had two older sisters, of the six by my mom and dad, I was the third one

JW: So right in the middle?

RE: I have two sisters yeah, and one younger sister and two younger brothers.

JW: And were they in foster care as well?

RE: Yeah, um, yeah.

JW: Wow

RE: It's sad, well my half brother was raised at Neah Bay

JW: Really?

RE: He was, he was Makah, he passed away, and one sister was raised, was adopted out, my one half sister was adopted out so only one half sister was raised with the other six.

JW: Did you, do you, are you in contact with them, the ones that are still alive?

RE: Everyone, yeah, my half brother and my half sister that we were raised with passed away just a year or so or two ago.

JW: I'm sorry

RE: Yeah.

JW: Well, so, uh this changes a lot of my questions knowing that you were raised in foster care, when did you, uh, what so, so what was the community around here like when you were growing up? Was...

RE: I stayed around here until I was twelve, then I moved to Seattle with a foster family, then I lived in the Seattle area for three...[counts to self] let see, for about four years and then I lived in Yakima for one year.

JW: Yakima?

RE: Yeah with a foster family, and then I moved with my sister and a foster family, and then I lived in Ellensburg for a year...

JW: Oh wow

RE: I graduated...

JW: So you moved around a lot?

RE: I graduated from Ellensburg High School

JW: Oh did you?

RE: Yeah.

JW: And what, you went to college too, right, after that?

RE: Yeah, Western Washington and University of Washington

JW: And what did you go to, to college for?

RE: Well I started with, in physics, I was always, I was interested in astronomy when I was a kid and you know I found that a lot of the, as I studied astronomy, that to, you know actually understand things you needed a physics degree, [laughs] so...

JW: Physics aren't easy.

RE: Yeah and, well I was a good student, I was very high scorer on all of the standardized tests so I decided, you know that, I could do physics, so I go onto physics and I...I actually got, I asked for application for Caltech and MIT and they were about twelve pages long [laughs].

JW: Did you apply for them?

RE: No, [laughs] I started looking at the ones that were in Washington State, which was the best in Washington State and when my senior year, I took a trip with a friend up to Ar, um, Arlington and I, you know, it was near Western and I heard Western was like the second best school as far as sciences were concerned, in Western Washington. Okay first of all, [interviewer laughs] I had already decided that I did not want to go to school in Eastern Washington, it was always brown half of the year and...

JW: I know, I am from Idaho so I know exactly how it is, it's brown.

RE: Yeah so [laughs] so, yeah, brown and white, [laughs] so anyway, I decided that it was not my type of country, so I thought if I went to school, you know, if I wasn't going to go to a real good school like that, I checked the best, and the best in the sciences were UW, and I was familiar with Seattle, I knew what it was like but I had gone up to Western, and Western was about forty-thousand people during those times and just beautiful you know.

JW: And that's Bellingham, right?

RE: Yeah, yeah-beautiful area, you know, it had all kinds of parks and lakes, and you know, really intermediate size, was easy to get around in.

JW: So you like the outdoors, is that something that drew you to the area?

RE: Yeah, I've always liked the outdoors, but, so I decided to go there and I started, like I said, in physics then I went down to the UW for my sophomore year in physics; see I turned out for tennis, I played tennis in high school [really?] yeah I was one of the few natives that did that, and I, anyway I went to Western and he said I made varsity but I had shoulder length hair and he said I had to cut my hair.

JW: He said you had to cut your hair?

RE: This was in 1970, you know, he was, he was the last coach in the Northwest to ask for a hair cut from his players.

JW: Did you cut it?

RE: No I didn't.

JW: Good for you.

RE: I never played a varsity match, I tried again my junior...I went down to UW thinking, you know okay, I was the first freshman ever to be asked to be on the varsity team at Western.

JW: Really?

RE: Yeah I was good enough to do that, so I thought well maybe I'm good enough to go try out at UW, and that turned out to be not even close to the case, I think I got beat six—three six-two by the last guy on the team. The difference between the number six team ranked in the nation and the, you know, number two team in the Northwest Small College Conference is quite a bit.[laughs]

JW: A big difference.

RE: [Laughs] Yeah a big difference, yeah they were, they were ranked number six in the nation that year...

JW: Wow.

RE: And I was the last guy cut, but I was, I was far from making it.

JW: Do you still play tennis?

RE: Yeah...

JW: Yeah?

RE: Yeah, no, do I still?

JW: Yeah

RE: No, uh-uh, I was a serve and volley player and man, it wasn't long after I got out of school that, you know I used to play six days a week and that's pretty much what you have to do to play good competitive serve and volley. I wasn't really happy with playing bad tennis [interviewer laughs] so when I came home I switched playing some basketball and some softball...

JW: But still remained...into the...active?

RE: Into the athletics, yeah.

JW: So did you graduate from western with a physics degree?

RE: Yeah, I have a Bachelor of Arts in Physics and a Bachelor of Science in Biology.

JW: Really?

RE: Yeah.

JW: Wow, that's quite impressive, so let me ask you, you were around here until you were 12 or so and then you moved away?

RE: Yeah.

JW: Do you remember there being important people in your community here? Was there a sense of, um...

RE: Oh yeah the tribes always, you now I mean, there always was, I was always really close with my grandmother and Billy Charles. Yeah, there were people here that I stayed in touch with.

JW: That you kept in touch with even when you were, even when you were out?

RE: Yeah Billy Charles was a Husky fan so every once-and-a-while he'd invite me to go to a husky game with him.

JW: And so those were the important, your grandmother and...what was your grandmothers name?

RE: Yeah, Louise Sampson.

JW: Louise Sampson

RE: Yeah.

JW: I know the name Sampson.

RE: Yeah, from, there's lots of em [laughs].

JW: There's Charles' and Sampson's, yeah I know both of those names from the research that I've done.

RE: Yeah. Yeah my family, my grandmother, my dad was, uh my grandfather was a Sampson and my grandmother was a Mike before.

JW: A Mike and a Sampson, so your grandfather's name was Sampson, what was his first name?

RE: Robert.

JW: Robert Sampson

RE: Yeah that's actually, I use his name. My full name is Arnold Robert Elofson

JW: Oh really?

RE: Being that my dad kind of gave up on us after there were six of us when mom died and he didn't try so I thought, I'd um...

JW: Take grandpas name?

RE: [Laughs] Yeah.

JW: It's a nice name

RE: Well , you know, yeah it is.

JW: So what were some of your earliest memories around here?

RE: Well you know um, my earliest ones were you know, living on, we actually had a farm with chickens and cows, we used to milk the cows, you know I can remember butchering some cattle and I can remember the, getting the chicken eggs and you know, I can remember rhubarb and gooseberries being picked for different things, and blackberries um..[pauses] It wasn't a great time when I was younger because my dad was an alcoholic and, and so that, that part of life, was not very good towards the end, I can remember. And mom, my mom then got sick, so...

JW: So there was upheaval when you were...

RE: Yeah there was, we were, I can remember, the other stuff, was my, you know from like four years old and younger. The last couple years I can remember, you know, staying with friends and relatives a lot, and you know, and having problems around the house...

JW: Yeah but there was...

RE: Paying bills and things like that.

JW: There was some happy memories?

RE: Yeah well we had friends that, you know, we would stay with quite a bit and they were nice people.

JW: Where was the farm at?

RE: It's a, Power Plant Road, just up from the dam there so...

JW: Is it still there?

RE: Oh yeah, well that's where we live, that's where, it's a family property.

JW: Really?

RE: Yeah it was a family trust property.

JW: And its right up the road from the dam?

RE: Yeah, yeah right at Power Plant Road.



JW: Do you, I know, you didn't spend a lot of time with them but would there, do you remember any particular values that your parents passed along to you that were important to them?

RE: No, eh but I uh, you know I think that I picked up a lot when I stayed with Jim and Marie, which I did from you know six to ten, and that probably...

JW: Jim and Marie, who's that?

RE: Uh, My uncle...

JW: Your uncle?

RE: And aunt yeah, and he wasn't a true relationship uncle, but he was raised by my grandmother, so he was basically an uncle. And uh, yeah he was a hard worker, logger, honest hardworking man, good role model.

JW: And is that something he said that was important, was to be hardworking, was that...was just led by example?

RE: No, but, well you know, we had to do our chores around the house and never thought it was anything different you know. I mean he'd be out, he'd be gone twelve hours a day, you know during the summer, putting in ten hour work days and hour trips both ways.

JW: Wow.

RE: Yeah he was hardworking and then the ah, the one family I stayed with, which I still stay in contact with, where a Norwegian family, they were one of my friends, I ran away from the home that I moved to Seattle with, and they took me in for about eight months and he was a steel worker and the mom was just a very good mother, a big family and...yeah and actually the mom just passed away a few weeks ago.

JW: I'm sorry.

RE: Yeah, no, it was good to go over and [see them] say hello to the family again yeah.

JW: So you ran away from your home in Seattle?

RE: Yeah it was, oh, I wasn't happy, it was, you know, I didn't suffer any major physical or sexual abuse or anything in my foster homes, like I know a lot of people do and have, but yeah, I did not so...

JW: You just weren't happy?

RE: I just was not happy, I was stubborn, [laughs] I knew what I wanted to do and when I wanted to do it [laughs] actually, they did, you know, the worst part about that was they

wouldn't let me turn out for football my sophomore year in school, but they, they used me a lot for cleaning house and taking care of watching the kids.

JW: Oh.

RE: So you know, I mean, after I was twelve it was you know, immediately when I turned twelve I was, you know, fairly intelligent and could do the... I'd start watching the kids and I used to do a lot of the house before then and, so I just wasn't, you know, I wasn't happy. It wasn't bad, I mean I can still remember having tons of friends, fun with my friends, it wasn't like, you know every hour of the day, but you know, I figured when I was doing two hours of cleaning and they weren't [laughs] I wasn't happy.

JW: I know how you feel, so when did you come back to Port Angeles?

RE: Well, I started when I was twenty, I started coming home. I worked the first couple summers out of town so I think when I was twenty, uh, when I was when I was eighteen, nineteen, I worked, I think at other places, and then we when I was twenty I started coming home, and there was one other year when I worked out of town during the summer, but I started coming home pretty regularly. You know, well probably when I got to college I started coming home more and more regularly.

JW: Was there a reason?

RE: Uh no, just cause I had a car, and I could get here [laughs].

JW: So when you came back did you start becoming more involved with your family that was here, the tribal members that were here?

RE: Yeah, we all started, you know my brothers, we all went to college to some extent and so, you know we did start moving back here after school and I, and I you know, I... actually that's one of the reasons I started my biology degree is I realized that I wanted to move home you know. Along about my sophomore, junior year, between my sophomore and junior year, you know I came home that summer and decided I want to move here because we had our property you know and stuff and I just realized there's no job for a physics major here unless you wanted to teach at a college and I didn't particularly like the idea of teaching [laughs].

JW: I understand that, so the biology would have been...

RE: Yeah biology, you know there's lots of places, US Fish and Wildlife, Washington State Fish and Wildlife...it was before the Boldt decision when I started, but not long before the Boldt, it was like two years before the Boldt decision I started working on my biology degree and so... I worked for the park service for two years, two summers too, I worked as a [inaudible] crew one year and a fire crew another, and I just thought you know that'd be a good life. You know go and spend a lot of time in the park, and anyways, so, I did all that and why it was going Western Washington Native American Student Union we were pretty active on the fish-ins, we actually took part in the fish-ins.

We went down to one on the Nisqually but they cancelled it because I think Billy Frank was in jail that day, but we went to about three to four on the Puyallup River.

JW: That's right down by where I live.

RE: What?

JW: I live by right there.

RE: Oh do you? Yeah we were on that, where the Puyallup River goes right by that bridge...

JW: Did you ever get arrested?

RE: No, actually we were lucky not doing that, I think, and you know the only other thing we did that where I could have got arrested and I missed out on that too, [laughs] but we took over the BIA during the BIA takeovers in D.C.. We went and took over the one in Everett and the Native American Student Union took part in that and I, I left my insulin at home; I'm diabetic and I left my insulin and I go 'Oh crap I left my insulin I have to go home and get it.' You know, and so [laughs] I went home to get, uh, and they came in during the night and kicked everybody out. They got a little pushy I guess but nobody got injured or anything.

JW: So you missed getting kicked out? [Laughs]

RE: [Laughs] Well, the funny thing was my books were in there and I had to go knock on the door and there were sheriffs there at the door and I go, 'Well I left my books here yesterday.' [Laughs] They go 'Well, we'll escort you back to get your books.' [Laughs]

JW: Really?

RE: They escorted me back and I got my books and walked out, I was wondering if they would arrest me cause they were, you know, obviously I took part in the procedures but I... they weren't. I guess they already decided not to file charges or anything.

JW: Did they arrest any of the other people that were there?

RE: They, yeah they, I think they book you know, but they never press charges on anybody.

JW: So you were...

RE: They might have just kicked them out, cause I don't... I actually don't remember anyone from the, from our school getting booked. Yeah they must have just escorted them out of the building but they weren't gentle about it, they said [laughs].

JW: I've seen pictures and things from that era and that whole, the occupation too, from various places, so you were fairly active in...

RE: Yeah, yeah we were yeah. The Native American Student Union was very active as a matter of fact. We had a bunch of people up there that worked very hard. I mean there was three or four times we went to National Indian Education Conferences and sent four or five students. We would do a lot of fundraising efforts, and you know, and raise, you know a good portion of the funding and then talk the student union into paying, you know like paying for the automobile and stuff, covering the automobile and stuff, yeah we...we were pretty active.

JW: What do you think about that period of your life, did that...

RE: Oh it was, it was great, I mean you know, I was turning out for tennis but I was playing basketball with the Native American Student Union team and we would go to Indian tournaments, you know the union that I was active in there, and you know I was working, you know, staying in the Bellingham area. Yeah school was very enjoyable. I didn't have, never had much money. I mean, I think we, my finances were twenty-five hundred dollars a year and that was supposed to cover rent, tuition, books [laughs].

JW: What year is this in?

RE: 1970 through 76.

JW: Wow.

RE: Yeah and you know, I was eligible for food stamps almost the entire time I was in college because my income was so small. Because that is what they would give you that, the BIA would give you for school. It was not insufficient with the other things you could get, but like I, it was small enough that you were eligible for like food stamps you know, like half off food stamps for your entire college career.

JW: Wow, so what did you do for fun while you were doing all this other, while you active in all the other things, and school, and did you do anything besides just playing sports?

RE: Laughs, yeah I did some, it was a party school [laughs] it was ranked third in the nation on party school list [laughs].

JW: [Interviewer laughing] was it really?

RE: Yes.

JW: So you had fun then at school, school was a good thing?

RE: Yeah

JW: What did you do when you graduated, did you move back?

RE: I came straight home, when I graduated in 76, spring of 76, and I immediately came home because in 74 the Boldt decision passed and we were allowed to put out own fisheries together and I was our first fisheries biologist for Elwha.

JW: Really

RE: Yeah.

JW: So the Boldt decision was a big, I mean I know it was big thing for all of the tribes...

RE: Oh it was huge, it was huge for us at college too. I mean we followed it, you know, we followed it all the way, big celebration when it passed at school.

JW: I can imagine, so you came back and were the biologist for the first fishery...

RE: Yeah I was the fisheries, I was THE natural resources department [laughs].

JW: You were the natural resources department yourself.

RE: Yeah, there was nobody else in it.

JW: And did you enjoy that work?

RE: Yeah, no it was good. I was here for not quite three years and I helped design and build the hatchery, the hatchery that's over there, and I did the stream surveys for the phase two of the Boldt decision, the environmental ones. We weren't as successful as we wanted to be but you know it was good, it was fun. Actually, you know, it was quite a bit of fun because I found out, where I thought that a biologist would be at least half the time in they field, it was about five percent of the time in the field.

JW: Really?

RE: Well, when you were the fisheries department, yes [laughs].

JW: What were you doing the rest of the time?

RE: Meetings, you know... tons of meetings and everything and writing regs and putting fisheries together.

[Phone rings, answers, explains the phone call and a bit about his fiancé]

JW: I did want to talk about the dam too though. We've covered through most of this, and you have children, I know that right?

RE: Yeah I have a son and a daughter.

JW: And your daughter just graduated?

RE: Yeah she got her Juris Doctorate and a Masters in Environmental Law and Policy.

JW: Is she moving back here?

RE: She's starting to drive back Monday.

JW: Oh, so she coming back.

RE: Yeah, she's going to come back and she's enrolled at Upper Skagit but, you know, she's every... both communities consider her important, and as a matter of fact, the Valley News out of Lebanon, on the Sunday paper, they had a picture of her. She wove her own regalia; a cape and a cedar hat, cedar woven hat and a cedar woven cape she put together and wore so she was front-page news on the Lebanon, the neighboring town.

JW: How cool, that probably made you proud, I imagine?

RE: Yeah well yeah, I took some pictures.

[Takes out phone and shows interviewer the pictures of his daughters graduation cape and hat.]

[Inaudible]

RE: Yeah she's cum laude in her Juris Doctorate and magna cum laude in her Masters [laughs].

JW: So I'm imagining you're proud then, maybe a little bit?

RE: I told her she's smart, you know, kept saying, 'No dad that's you.' I said, 'No, if you go in and work on your study habits then you can do much better than you expect.'

JW: It just takes work, right?

RE: Oh yeah and she did, she said that she goes, 'I took your advice dad, I worked on my staying in you know, physically healthy and I worked hard and I took part in other things.' Like I did when I was at school and she said- 'But I still, I also concentrated on learning how to study and when to study and things like that.' And it worked very well for her, She would have done better except that her grandmother died, on her mom's side, while she was in school, like her third semester, and then her 14 year old dog died the last semester, so she had a hard time.

JW: So she had a rough time?

RE: Yeah she had a rough time a couple of quarters, she probably would have done a little better.

JW: Well, that's something to be proud of though, very proud. Your work with the dam, can we talk a little bit about that?

RE: Sure.

JW: Just because it is such, a really amazing, historic thing for that dam to be coming out. When did you guys, when did you start working with the...

RE: Well, they, they were working on it when I got here. The tribe, for safety reasons, the tribe had gotten involved in the re-licensing, and this was very good because we didn't even have a fisheries department or a natural resources department, but the tribe had already started working on the dam safety issue because the re-licensing had come up. So they had a lawyer working on that already, Russ Bush, and they were successful on getting the safety improvements, as a matter of fact, they had studies they, with some help with funding from BIA, they had some studies done and they applied it to that process to the FERC re-licensing, and FERC just said you have to take care of these before we will consider, even consider re-licensing you first. And so they took care of them and the dam was supposedly safe only for about a 6.5 earthquake and they improved it to about an 8.5, 8.5 earthquake, so they did those and when that was done then we started looking at fish passage.

JW: Because there was never one built.

RE: Yeah, and because and well you know, like it was, Boldt decision had passed and we had some rights on the fisheries too so, you know, we started using them to look at that, and as we studied the cost of fish passage it was realized by both the owner of the dams and us that to pay for fish passage around the dams, both dams, which would, because it's Two-hundred-ten feet of solid rock, the Glines, they would have an elevator. They would have to use an elevator type system and they could do possible a fish ladder at the lower one but the cost would make the electricity, the amount of the electricity they were getting were half of the power they needed for the mill, so the cost of the electricity would go up higher than it would cost them to buy it straight from Bonneville. And they said they were willing to negotiate a deal and they negotiated a very good deal, they got cost at reduced rates, they got the equivalent of the difference in cost. Ok this is what they did, they got the electricity at a reduced rate and they got the difference in value for fifty years for buying that at the reduced rates and what it was costing them from the dams without fish passage, so they got 30 million dollars to cover a fifty year period of time to cover the increased rates, so, they got... they did well. And the projects, and the land surrounding were turned over to the US government and the tribe hopes to have the project land put in trust of the tribe.

JW: Is that... and that hasn't happened yet?

RE: It hasn't happened but, there...the park and the tribe they... there were four possibilities that were supposed to be considered; the State Parks, wildlife refuge, National Parks, or the tribe. And the wildlife refuge said it wasn't big enough and State Parks said they weren't interested because they were having trouble taking care of what they have, and we talked to the National Park and said, 'You know, eighty-five percent of that watershed is already in the park and we would feel like it is more appropriate that it come to the tribe since we have only a small part at the mouth and this would put another two point five mile of the river in trust of the tribe and we feel that it is the appropriate way to go and we would like your support in doing it,' and they agreed to do that.

JW: Wow, so that is a big deal

RE: Yeah.

JW: It's a very big deal, cause the rivers historic...

RE: It is, but isn't, not a money maker for the tribe right off the bat cause it'll probably cost us more to manage the land than we'll make out of them to start with.

JW: Well hopefully that will change.

RE: Yeah, as time goes on, and there's... we have plan of trying to work with the parks service and design a good trail access with limited access so that we, so you know people wont be wrecking it. We are supposed be keeping it in its natural state and it's in the trust, that was part of the laws requirement and anything that impacts the river, any parts of it that impact the river. There's at least a couple hundred acres on flats, and above the river, or on the flats at the...down at the bottom of the river that won't impact the river too much of any. Yeah the ones the... that near that where the dam was, that's up above the river valley and there's a couple sections on the river valley that are flat on each side of these lands, there's a place down on the bottom, on the... oh I'm sorry, on the upstream, and that's, that might be in the flood plain, that might be more limited on what we can do with it. It's been developed like, for a camping areas and boat launch, and the paths, and that's where... have you walked up there? [Laughs]

JW: I haven't been up there yet, I'm gonna go up there when I'm...

RE: Ok well I would advise that, you just take the first right, you go up to 101 and then you take it out. Anyway, you go to the bottom of the hill there's a big bridge there and the first right past the bridge, first concrete, it just like a block or two past the bridge, there's a road off to the right and at the end of that road is the boat ramp and you can walk down there and then down into the old lake bed, that's very...

JW: As it's not there anymore.



RE: Well the lakes not there anymore but its very, you'd be... I'm very impressed at what the... actually, I've got some pictures of that too, at how the vegetation's doing.

JW: It's coming back?

RE: It's coming back very quickly, yeah.

[Interviewee looks on phone for pictures, shows interviewer pictures of the vegetation and former dam site]

RE: See, it's coming back very quickly, see the vegetation [inaudible]?

JW: So that's good, so do you guys, since you're a biologist, you'd have a good idea of how long you think that it's going to take for it to return...

RE: Oh you know, it's, the predictions I would say, that the predictions... original predictions on the project, it's going at least as well as they expected.

JW: Yeah?

RE: So, I would think you know, within fifteen years we might have a good... a fairly good sized alders and cottonwoods in there. You know, I mean with a decent circumference to em to you know to cover, you know, probably to cover most of the water. I mean it won't, there will be slow improvements but I think there will be improvements enough... to provide enough shade and stuff that it will be fairly easy for a fish to go through there.

JW: So you're hoping within the next fifteen years or so the fish will be...

RE: Yeah, well, you... just the way the fish are coming back, we are getting larger numbers of fish already just with the fact that the settling ponds... the river was so clear when it came out because of all of the sediment would settle out in the lakes, just highest flow is it would get muddy, so you know, most of the time, it was an ideal place for predation. We were getting like one percent return to our hatcheries and half a percent to the state, and three to eight percent is the average for a river, so, but we're already up above you know, were getting one and a half to two percent already just with the sediment coming back.

JW: Wow.

RE: So, you know, the vegetation is going to return there, the vegetation is going to return to the reservoir areas, the vegetation is gonna return to the estuaries, the estuary is getting bigger already, and so, you know, I don't know how long it's going to take but I actually expect that we'll have a harvest of Coho salmon, the steelhead and the... the steelhead and the Chinook are endangered, so those might... will take a little longer, but I

wouldn't be surprised if we have a harvest within one or two years after the moratorium ends.

JW: Really?

RE: Yeah and that'll be in the seventeen... March of two-thousand-seventeen, the next fall, I wouldn't be totally surprised at having some kind of Coho harvest then, yeah and it's going well, it's going well enough that...

JW: You're pleased with the, how it...

RE: I think it's going as well or better than expected.

JW: Cause it's the biggest dam removal in America

RE: Yeah, It's the biggest one that's been accomplished, there's a couple of other one in the works.

JW: Are there?

RE: Yeah, the Klamath and Penobscot.

JW: Really?

RE: Yeah, four dams on the Klamath and two on the Penobscot.

JW: And you guys are giving them a show at how to do it, right, right?

RE: [Laughs] Well we actually, I did provide... the head of the committee in congress, you know, did not want to pass this the year it passed. You know, we actually passed, when we went back there, our legal staff said five to six years for anything local like this to pass, and you know I, just said okay, if we have to work on it that at long we will, but I came aback here and I said... you know, I was in charge back here, and I said 'You know, it's our job to get it done now.' [Laughs] So we worked on it, and succeeded the first year that we took it to congress and it...

JW: And that was in ninety-two?

RE: Was one of the last twenty or thirty bills passed by congress in ninety-two, yeah, because I mean, you know, we had tons going for it. The company wanted it, the agencies wanted it by then, the environmental groups wanted it, the tribe wanted it, you know, and we had legal basis for that and so they... its seemed like everything was in favor, this was the best possible... with eighty-five percent of the river watershed in the park, I couldn't, you know, I mean I didn't see how you could have possibly anything better that deserved to get done, you know, with four to five thousand fish coming back when predicted three-hundred thousand used to.

JW: Yeah...

RE: You know so, yeah that's why I disregarded our legal peoples [laughs] opinion of how long it took.

JW: And you got it done

RE: Yeah and we got it done, well that was just the start. It took, you know, we were supposed to start dam removal in o'-four and we didn't do it until eleven, so it took seven years to get through some of the steps EIS, SEIS.

JW: What is that, I'm sorry?

RE: Environmental Impact Statement, and the S was a supplementary that had to update everything, as we got closer. See, they stated in the EIS, they stated that some of these things would be clearer in the future and we will do a supplement to clarify what's going to be done, so they did the EIS but they knew that the supplementary one would have to be done later. And that was, the first one was done in ninety-five and then it took till two-thousand to get the money, Slade Gorton had quite a bit to do with that I think.

JW: Who did, sorry?

RE: Slade Gorton, a senator from Washington... a republican senator. He was actually our Attorney General, the attorney general during the Boldt decision [laughs] and he's not in favor of much to do with tribes [laughs] yeah, he uh, he didn't like...his main reason he said is the hat he didn't want the consideration that is now being done of removing Snake River Dams.

JW: Really?

RE: Yeah.

JW: That's where I'm from too, the Snake River Area.

RE: Yeah we actually had a biologist from U Vic and she came down here and says 'You know, I want to figure out how to do this on the snake, my dad is a farmer in Idaho [laughs] and he knows that I want to get this done and he knows there are railroads there that can take that traffic and it might cost, probably cost them more but he said he knows there are other ways that getting that, you know, other than those dams and those reservoirs.' Get stuff out of Idaho, so I was impressed by the young ladies family for still supporting her you know, and looking at you now, over, even though they knew it would cost them money.

JW: I think that's an issue too, is people don't look into the future and think about it's going to impact the people...

RE: Well you know, I can tell you if I had a farm right on the river, I would be thinking alright, resort [laughs] a fishing resort, [laughs] that's an easier way to make money than working out in the fields for fourteen-sixteen hours a day.

JW: Definitely, so you guys are hoping, do you think that sometime in the future, in the next twenty or thirty years that the river will become something that the tribe can use...

RE: Oh no, we expect to start harvesting, you know, in the first five years of some level of the moratorium being over, definitely, we're hoping that you know, that somewhere between the fifteen and thirty year period of time it will be full restoration... will be accomplished on the river

JW: You'll be getting those three hundred thousand salmon back in the river?

RE: Yeah, pink around the years, about twenty thousand, thirty thousand on non-pink years. But, yeah.

JW: That'll be good.

RE: [Laughs] Oh it will be, there's, you know, I've done fisheries, commercial fisheries and I've commercial fished at the mouth of the river, and I've caught like three-hundred Coho a day at a buck and a quarter a pound, but they were a ten pound average, so that's twelve fifty times three-hundred, so, thirty-six hundred bucks you can make in a day with the mouth. And that was with only five thousand Coho coming back, five to eight thousand Coho coming back. You have thirty-thousand coming back, much better than that, if you have thirty-thousand kings coming back, that are twice the size and worth twice the amount per pound, you know, there is going to be quite a financial impact on the tribe, and then we get to harvest half. And the community is gonna just be greatly enhanced by the because the Coho run in October and then the, well, the chum and the pinks aren't so much, but there will be a small sockeye run and then there will be a steelhead run, and there will be some harvest for the sports too, because we will be insisting on some harvest if there is harvestable amounts for the tribe, and so they will be able to match that for the sports fishery. It'll be carefully controlled though, because they are an endangered species. That's, I think it's a little bit sad, but the Elwha is the at the edge of the endangered species listing, even though we knew we could bring them all back, genetically they are tied to the rest of the sound...close enough they made it the edge of the endangered species listing for both steelhead and Chinook.

JW: Really?

RE: So, even if we get harvestable amounts back we still have to run all of our fisheries through NOAA fisheries because they are under the endangered species listing, instead of just throughout the state... instead of just working our agreements out with just the state. And they are generally more cautious [laughs].

JW: Yeah, I can imagine, well that's amazing there are a whole bunch of things that I learned that I did not know about the stuff that I've researching quite a bit about, the dam and the removal but I hadn't really looked into the fish, necessarily, aspect of it, but that's...and having more money coming in for the tribe is always ...

RE: Oh yeah, that's gonna be great you know, if we can do it you know...we haven't been real successful in our economic involvement efforts. I know that if we did it right, we could take good advantage of this too, especially in only two and a half miles of the river, but I wouldn't want to predict something on that range.

JW: Anything though, right?

RE: [Laughs] Yeah.

JW: That's good are you involved in any other department in the tribe, do you work with any other...

RE: Well, I'm on the hunting and fishing committees of the tribe, that's the tribal advisory committee for hunting and fishing.

JW: Do you know how many tribe members are enrolled currently?

RE: About 1,000

JW: 1,000.

RE: Yeah.

JW: Ok, well I will let you go swim.