



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
National Conservation Training Center

USFWS History Committee

2022 Annual Report



Message from the Chair



This Annual Report from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) History Committee documents our careful return to normalcy. The Committee met in person for the first time in more than 2 years—gathering at the remarkable D.C. Booth Historic National Fish Hatchery and Archives in Spearfish, South Dakota. There, we crafted a new strategic plan, outlining and prioritizing our activities for the next 5 years. We formed a new Communications Subcommittee to provide clear messaging and focus to our work:

To share U.S. Fish and Wildlife history in transparent, ethical, and relevant ways that promote thoughtful discussion and cultivate an understanding of our agency's evolving mission.

We continued to gather oral histories from our retired staff and partners. At D.C. Booth Historic Fish Hatchery, we saw, first-hand, how the preservation

and interpretation of our conservation artifacts captivate the public and help tell an important part of our nation's fish and wildlife conservation history.

The work of the History Committee helps us reflect on our agency's legacy. By looking back, we can see our place in conservation history more clearly. And, as I come to the end of my own Service career, I am comforted by knowing that the Service is in your hands, the hands of a new generation of passionate, dedicated and highly skilled conservationists. I look forward to seeing your contributions to our future history.

—Charlie Wooley,
*Regional Director, Great Lakes Region
(Retired)*

On September 28, 2022, NCTC hosted a blessing for a total pole installed in The Commons Building with House of Tears Carvers of the Lummi Nation. Housed at NCTC, the carvers presented the totem pole to Interior Secretary Deborah Haaland. View the blessing on YouTube at [Sacred Sites Totem Pole Blessing Ceremony — YouTube](#).

USFWS

2022 in Review

In June, the History Committee met in person in Spearfish, South Dakota, coinciding with the Association of Retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Employees (Association) retiree reunion. We honored our 2021 and 2022 USFWS History Award winners. And, in addition to continuing our work through the Oral History and Artifacts Subcommittees, we created a new Communications Subcommittee. Here are our accomplishments.

Oral History Program Accomplishments

Preserving our heritage through the voices of our people

The important work of preserving our conservation history through the words of our retired and active-duty employees and conservation partners continued in 2022, although at a pace that had not rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of the Oral History Subcommittee conducted and recorded interviews, and National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) staff and Subcommittee members drafted and/or finalized transcripts. Since the Oral History Program began in 1999, we have completed more than 1,500 interviews and more than 600 written transcripts.

Conservation scholars from around the world comb through these transcripts to learn more about our conservation history, and these oral history transcripts are and will continue to be a treasure trove of information about the work we do and how it evolves over time. Just as importantly, these oral histories capture the personal nature of the work we do. The transcript becomes almost a mini biography, helping friends and family members better understand how and why their loved one worked so hard and took so much pride in their career! These transcripts can become a cherished memorial for the families of interviewees who have passed.



Nita Fuller at San Andres National Wildlife Refuge with an endangered Desert Bighorn Sheep (Ovis canadensis Mexicana) circa 1980. USFWS



Nita Fuller, August 2019. Deborah Holle

A terrific example of this can be found with the oral history of Nita Fuller, one of the first women and Native Americans to work in the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) and a mentor to many. Nita retired in 2009 after a long and accomplished career, starting at Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma,

and then working in positions of increasing responsibility within the NWRS at Bosque del Apache NWR Complex, Santa Ana and Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuges, as Refuge Supervisor in Region 2, as Deputy Chief of the Division of Refuges in Headquarters, as Assistant Regional Director in Region 3, as Assistant Director for Refuges and Wildlife in Headquarters, and lastly as Regional Refuge Chief in Region 3. After her retirement, Nita returned home to Oklahoma, where Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge remained one of her favorite places. Nita passed away last year in the summer of 2022. Because Nita narrated an oral history, we were able to give her closest friends and family copies of her oral history transcript when they visited the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge last fall to celebrate her life. They were deeply moved and extremely appreciative to receive the gift of Nita's story of her experiences in a lifelong career in the Service.

In 2022, members of the Oral History Subcommittee:

- Conducted 9 oral histories, including 3 that focused on international conservation.
- Conducted 1 panel interview to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge, located in Newington, New Hampshire. The first refuge manager (Jim Halpin), first administrative officer (Peggy Hobbs), and the first biologist (Kate O'Brien) described the formation and early management of the Refuge. Current refuge complex biologist Nancy Pau brought us up to date on recent management activities.
- Began documenting former History Committee Chair John Blankenship's distinguished Service career. John had agreed to do an oral history interview



Rachel Carson on the telephone during a meeting at the Department of the Interior. USFWS

but passed away before it was conducted. So, in 2022, we interviewed several retired employees who worked with John over the years. Interviews continue into 2023. All reminiscences will be compiled into 1 document in the coming year.

- Transcribed 17 oral histories, which were then reviewed by staff and subcommittee members then sent to narrators for their review and comment. We completed 9 of these transcripts. At the close of 2022, the rest were under review, to complete in 2023.
- Continued working with the [USFWS National Digital Library](#) as they prepare to launch a new digital management system, which features an oral history “collection.”
- Established an outreach subgroup, which developed a rack card to promote the Oral History Program at meetings and reunions.
- Continued working with the Association to provide supplies to interviewers and provide reimbursement for interview-related expenses.

For more information about the Oral History Program, please visit the [USFWS Oral History page](#).



This Calusa canoe was found at National Key Deer Refuge, circa 1957, during excavation of a canal to service the Refuge headquarters. Originally stored at the Refuge, it was later given to the Florida Keys Land and Sea Trusts Museum at Crane Point Hammock. Deborah Holle

Communications Subcommittee Accomplishments

Telling our stories

The History Committee established the Communications Subcommittee during our June 2022 meeting in Deadwood, South Dakota. We decided it was essential to focus on communication, both internal and external, to achieve the Committee’s goals, garner Service leadership support, expand visibility among Service employees, and reach new audiences. The Subcommittee purpose is: To share U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service history in transparent, ethical, and relevant ways that promote thoughtful discussion and cultivate an understanding of our agency’s evolving mission.

Within its first few months, the Subcommittee defined its purpose and piloted a 21-question History Needs Assessment with November *Discover the Service* (Foundations) students. Repeated over time, responses will inform a work plan.

Artifacts Subcommittee Accomplishments

Every field station has its story, its heritage

The Artifacts Subcommittee met virtually periodically and in person in June during the Retiree Reunion in South Dakota. We discussed a heritage challenge outreach contest called “Treasures of the Service” to solicit iconic artifacts and stories from regions and programs. We also supported Museums Mondays outreach via social media, 3 distance learning webinar series, detail opportunities at Service archives and repositories, and the potential accession, curation, and conservation of a Calusa canoe from the Florida Keys. In June, we drafted and finalized artifacts components of the History Committee’s Strategic Plan including these collection activities:

- Coordinate collection activities with Service Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources staff to ensure work is complementary and targets priority resources.
- Assist in the identification and protection of artifacts from a wider diversity of employee experiences and community cultures.
- Provide resources and contacts to Service employees to better guide and support artifact collections.

USFWS History Award Winners

In Spearfish, we honored the 2021 and 2022 USFWS History Award winners. The award is our agency’s highest for recognizing historic preservation efforts. We recognized Jerry Grover, as the 2021 awardee, and Craig Springer as the 2022 awardee.

Jerry Grover was the recipient of the 2021 USFWS History Award. Jerry was an active member of the national History Committee for more than 2 decades. As retiree liaison, Jerry organized numerous retiree reunions, carried out a dozen or so oral histories, and was part of a small team that helped create what eventually became the retirees association.

Craig Springer received the 2022 USFWS History Award. Craig was the longtime editor of the Service’s *Eddies* journal. In that journal, Springer combined history and current fisheries work into one of the finest publications ever produced by the USFWS. In 2021, Springer edited the mammoth anniversary book, *America’s Bountiful Waters: 150 Years of Fisheries Conservation and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*. Craig has been the agency’s unofficial fish historian for many years sharing our rich heritage with a variety of popular journals in addition to his Service publications.



FWS Historian Mark Madison presenting awards to Craig Springer (top) and Jerry Grover (bottom).

On the Horizon for 2023



History Committee Members at DC Booth History Hatchery and Archives, Spearfish, SD (left to right): Alexandra Henry, Jamie Stoner, Tom Worthington, Libby Herland, Cindy Barry, Matt Perry, Mark Madison, Deborah Holle, Maria Parisi, Paul Tritaik, April Gregory, Ernie Clarke, Peggy Hobbs, Jerry Grover, Charlie Wooley.

The History Committee will reconvene in November at the NCTC, coinciding with the Association's 20th Retiree Reunion November 26 to December 1.

Oral History Subcommittee

2023 will be a great year for the Oral History program. Not only will the National Digital Library migrate all completed transcripts to their new digital management system, but many retired Service employees have indicated an interest in giving an oral history interview. We are matching interviewers with our willing interviewees. And, we'll make a concerted effort to complete more interviews in 2023. This will involve more travel by interviewers to meet with interviewees, and hopefully more interviewees will attend the Association and law enforcement reunions, where we conduct numerous interviews.

We'll continue working on special projects, including the Partners for Fish and Wildlife oral history project. We're also supporting a rather unique, new, set of semi-structured interviews—focused on

current work on climate change. In January 2023, we'll interview more than 50 of the Service's leading experts on climate change adaptation participating in a Resist-Accept-Direct (RAD) initiative. This small-scale study intends to capture stories and insights about this pivotal moment in the Service, and the conservation field more broadly, with regards to climate change. Each session will be transcribed for historical record keeping for the USFWS Museum and Archives.

Artifacts Subcommittee

Two priority projects for 2023 are:

- Implementing the Heritage Challenge by soliciting iconic artifacts and stories from all Regions and Programs. The Subcommittee will recognize winners with heritage challenge coins, social media, features in an issue of Conservation History journals, posters, monthly Visitor Services newsletters, the Service's cultural resources newsletter, an NCTC broadcast, and/or developing 3-D view options online—intending to scan all winners' artifacts to start a 3-D collection for the Service.

- Resolving the accession, curation, and/or conservation of a Florida Keys Calusa canoe in consultation with Native American Tribes.

Communications Subcommittee

We plan to define the Subcommittee's scope of work, update the History Committee Needs Assessment and expand the audience for the questionnaire, and develop a 2023 annual workplan.

History Committee Members

As chartered, members represent geographic regions and key positions, including active and retired staff. The Service Director appoints the Chair, Regional Directors appoint their regional members, and the Association coordinates with the History Committee to appoint retiree representatives. We thank Charlie Wooley for serving as Committee Chair, and we wish him well in retirement.

Questions?

Please contact your regional History Committee member, or contact the USFWS Historian, at history@fws.gov or 304/876 7276, for questions or to request copies of History Committee products. For additional information, see the [USFWS History Committee page](#) and follow the "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service History" and "National Conservation Training Center" Facebook pages and @USFWSHistory on Twitter.



Role/Region	2022 Committee Members	
Chair	Charles Wooley, Regional Director, Great Lakes Region	
R1	Vicki Finn, Science Applications	Cindy Uptegraft Barry*
R2	Amber Zimmerman, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge	Deborah Holle*
R3	Lynn Cartmell	Tom Worthington*
R4	Ernie Clarke, Gulf Restoration Office	Sandy Tucker*
R5	Peggy Hobbs, Parker River NWR	Libby Herland*
R6	Nick Starzl, Gavins Point NFH	John Cornely*
R7	Debbie Steen, Regional Office, Visitor Services	Debbie Corbett*
R8	Vacant	Mendel Stewart*
Headquarters	Mark Madison, USFWS Historian	Mamie Parker*
At Large Retiree	Jerry Grover*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Retirees Association	
Ex-Officio	<p><i>National Conservation Training Center:</i> Steve Chase, Director Nate Hawley, Manager, Creative Resources Division Maria Parisi, History and Partnerships Team Lead Steve Floray, Curator Alexandra Henry, Transcriptionist Jamie Stoner, Museum Archives Training Technician Randy Robinson, Instructional Systems Specialist</p> <p><i>Cultural Resources:</i> Eugene Marino, USFWS Federal Preservation Officer and National Curator</p> <p><i>D.C. Booth Historic National Fish Hatchery and Archives:</i> Carlos Martinez, Director April Gregory, Curator</p> <p><i>National Wildlife Property Repository:</i> Elisa Dahlberg, Wildlife Repository Specialist</p> <p><i>Research Emeriti:</i> Dr. Matthew C. Perry* Dr. Richard Coon*</p> <p><i>Fish and Aquatic Conservation:</i> Dave Miko, Division Chief, Programs Holly Richards, Outreach Specialist Bennie Williams, Fish Biologist, Communications and Partnerships</p> <p><i>National Wildlife Refuge System:</i> John Schmerfeld, Acting Division Chief, Visitor Services & Communications Paul Tritaik*, Project Leader, J.N. "Ding" Darling NWR Complex</p>	
Emeritus	Jim Kurth* Dale Hall* John Blankenship* Rick Bennett* Patrick Leonard*	*Retirees

**U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service History Committee**

<https://fws.gov/history-of-fws>

304/872 7276

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