Interview With
John Gottschalk
Former FWS Director

Interviewed by Steve Chase
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Steve Chase: Well welcome.

John Gottschalk: Well I am certainly glad to be here if, were on the tape and doing things.

SC: So I'll just start up here. You got your Bachelors Degree in 1934, and a Graduate Degree in Fisheries Biology in 1943. Can you tell us a bit about your school years and learning about Biology?

JG: Well, I will go to back before my school years. There was a very famous nature writer by the name of Jean Stratton Porter, who wrote " Girl of the Limber Lost" and some other famous stories back in the Teens and Twenties, who lived five miles from where I was born, Bern, Indiana. The Limber Lost was a large swamp on the tributary of the Wabash River. She became a nature fan and expert. Photographed butterflies and birds and a lot of things like that. Organized a group of women to come and participate, go on field trips and what not, those were the horse and buggy days ya know. She had a big camera that she took along, and my Grandmother got interested. Then out of that my Grandmother used to take an interest in educating kids in our little one horse town of Bern, Indiana, a small Swiss Community, and in the spring she would take us out, and identify the wild flowers and allow us to pick wild flowers, Trout Lilies, and Spring Beauties and Trilliums, and all that sort of thing. And, The birds she knew quite a few of the birds, the common ones that everybody knows. So I think my roots go back to when I was just a small child. Nothing came of that, however, until I got a job right out of high school, at Indiana Dunes State Park, as a life guard and "Ranger", put that in quotation marks, because when I arrived on the job, the first morning the Superintendent of the Park, this is Indiana Dunes State Park, up on Lake Michigan. Turned me over to the foreman, who handed me a bucket, a bottle of Lysol, a scrub brush and a

broom. My first job in conservation was scrubbing and cleaning the toilets at the Indiana Dunes State Park, and I have always said I started at the absolute bottom. However I was lucky that the second summer I was there that I was able to be placed as an assistant to a graduate forester from Purdue, who was studying animal depredation on willow plantations. I realized that you can make a living, out in the woods, as it were, and so I got interested, and when I entered Earlom College, it was a easy choice to make to, get a major in Biology and I got a minor in Geology. The day after I graduated I went to work again for the Indiana Conservation Department, as a nature guide, in the Turkey Run State Park. Where I was an assistant to the principle guide who was Dr. Frederick Test who later became the professor of Ecology at the University of Michigan. I won't pursue that anymore your getting more than you needed. But that led to a job with the Indiana Conservation Dept. and ultimately I became Superintendent of Fisheries, having the distinction of having the only degree in biology of anybody in the Conservation Dept., except the State Forester, and the State Entomologist. They were trained but everybody else in those days were just hired off the street, as it were. Usually based on their political affiliations. I was interested in the fisheries aspects, had done a little of that work at Earlom, with one of the professors, that's the fish business, and I decided that a job in a state like Indiana, as it was at that time, when many other states were operating on a strictly political basis. That the only way that I could pursue what I really wanted was to get into civil service, and get a job with the federal government, that's why I quit my job. Unfortunately it was poor timing because I left the Conservation Dept, in 1941, not realizing that the war was going to break out in December of that same year. So things were under a kind of strain, and after two and a half years, at the University I took a job with Shceindly(?) who had discovered a very potent brand of, strain I should say, of penicillium notatum (?), that produced literally a thousand times more powerful strain of penicillin than any pennicillium, that had been discovered at that time. And they were desperate for someone who could come in with a little scientific basis, and so I became the analytical laboratory director for Scheindly Laboratories and worked there until the war was over. I had a lot of connections with the Fish and Wildlife Service, in my previous job, so it was very easy to get a job with the Service right after the war and I went to work at Billings as a member of the old River Basins Studies Organization, as a fisheries biologist. Then, from then on, at least within the Service, the history of what happened is pretty well known I guess. Or maybe not…

S.C. : Who were some of the folks you worked with in Billings.

J.G.: Well our Supervisor was a man named Harold Mosebought, my roommate with whom I shared an office with, another fisheries Biologist, who had been with the Illinois Natural History Survey. He was named Bruno Von Limbauch, Bruno later became interested in promoting the studies of the genetics of fisheries and organized the fish genetics laboratory at Spearfish, South Dakota. Without going into a lot of detail that program was canceled at some point so he transferred, and was a staff person in the Division of Fishery Research, until he retired. Bob Bruel who became the Regional Director, in Minneapolis. Followed me in Billings, I had a very brief span as Supervisor of that office in Billings, between the time that I left there to take over the Dingell Johnson Program in Washington. Bob Bruel was a good friend, and a person that I got to know very well when he, I became the Director, he was still the Regional Director in Minneapolis. This could go on indefinitely, and I think it this is sort of boring.

But thinking more in terms of some of the principles, we were a part of the Interior Department's staff working on the so called Pick Sloan Plan, which was the great plan to develop refuge, not refuge, reservoir possibilities in the West. The Corp. of Engineers was working on the flood control, navigation and power installations, and the Bureau of Reclamation obviously was working on irrigation and power. Many of these projects were multi-purpose. The Interior Department insisted on the establishment of a biological component in that program. That's what our job was in Billings, to represent Fish and Wildlife interest in the development of water resources in the Missouri River Basin. It was a fascinating job, we had a lot of opportunities and lots of frustrations. But I think, looking back on it , it was a real fine opportunity to get started in the Fish and Wildlife Service because in the process we worked with all the States very closely. So I made the acquaintance of all of the Missouri River Basin States, and other wise got aquatinted with a lot of other people. So it was a very good way, I think, to start in the Service.

When I became the Assistant Chief of Federal Aid for the DJ Program, that development, of contacts continued. And I at one time knew almost every fisheries biologist of any consequence and all the state fishery chiefs through out the whole country. It was my job and it was a wonderful opportunity and I think made my later activities as chief of the Division of Sport Fisheries which came about in 1956 with the reorganization of the Bureau one of the best jobs I ever had. And when I was asked to go to Boston as

Regional Director I did so really with great reluctance because I had just a wonderful job as really the principle fisheries person in the Federal Government, outside of Commercial Fisheries of course. I feel I have been extremely fortunate in respect to the kinds of assignments I have had that permitted me to explore new fields, and to develop new programs, and to work with a bunch of wonderful people, both in the Service and outside the Service.

S.C.: What new challenges did you find when you became the regional Director in Boston.

J.G.: Well, it was a challenge to take over all of the responsibilities of the Service, Wildlife and Administration, after having been a specialist in fisheries. There were a lot of people who had their fingers crossed at the idea that a fisheries man would even be a Regional Director, because to be honest about it the wildlife responsibilities of the Division of the Wildlife Service substantially outweighed those that related to sport fishing. When the Service still contained the commercial fishing element, that was a little different. Commercial people were very important at the high levels of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Regions and in the Washington office, but when we split off, and became just the Bureau of Sport Fishing and Wildlife, the fisheries part of the organization was relatively minor part. We had fish hatcheries a small research program and that is about all. So we had a long way to go to develop the fishery side and I concentrated on that almost to the exclusion of everything else. I knew very little about refuges, or the enforcement program or wildlife research, that is the details of what they were doing in wildlife research. The work in Boston soon put me in a position where I had to learn the Wildlife program in a hurry, or I was going to sink. There was no doubt about that. The New England States were extremely unhappy with the way we were handling the Black Duck situation, and in New England the Black Duck is the most important sporting bird, the Wood Duck population hadn't come back, the Scotpot population was not available to many sportsmen because it required a type of hunting that many just didn't participate in. The Black Duck was the bread and butter bird. The population had been dwindling and we had some very strict regulations to attempt to stem that decline, getting down to a two bird limit for Black Ducks, and a forty-five day season. It became necessary for me to become a duck expert in a hurry.

S.C. asks: Who helped you do that.

J.G.: The people at Patuxent more than anybody else, as well as some of the co-operative unit people. Particularly Dr. Howard Mendall, Howard, was the leader of the co-operative Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Maine. Howard was a specialist in Ring Neck Ducks, and ducks in general. He was a very compassionate sort of a person in the sense that he was willing to spend a lot of time doing what he loved to do… teach… as well as take you with him on his research projects. I depended a great deal on Howard as one of the principle sources of information on water fowl in that region. So that was extremely important.

The refuge program I think its fair to say, was somewhat lagging in that region, and I wont go into why I think so but, the fact is after I was there for two years, the man who was the supervisor of refuges decided to retire. I had met Tom Horn who was the manager of the Fort Peck Game Range, while I was stationed in Billings. I came to learn that he was a man who had very broad interests and had a much broader out look than many of the people I had run into in the refuge business, and it was very fortuitous that he was available to become the Refuge Supervisor. So we had some differences of opinion about how the refuge program ought to be run, Tom was a manager, he believed manipulating habitat to increase the utilization of refuges by birds, and to give you an example of how that can sometimes work, he planted one of the large pools, that what used to be called the Brigantine Refuge in New Jersey, to millet. That year according to the waterfall counts we had about 100,000 Black Ducks in the state of New Jersey. 90,000 of them were in the Brigantine Refuge where they could not be hunted. I got a call along about the first week of the waterfowl season from the Director of the New Jersey Department.
You want to ask a question?

S.C.: Oh, yes tell us how you went on to become the Director of Fish and Wildlife Service.

J.G.: In 1964, in the spring we had successfully established the Great Swamp New Jersey, National Wildlife Refuge. This was a very co-operative program that involved a tremendous effort by the citizens up there. Because the New York Port Authority had decided to build another large International Airport at a place called Great Swamp in New Jersey. This

part of New Jersey, not the swamp itself, which was only partly swamp much of it was just moist deciduous forest land, but around there were a lot of expensive homes and a lot of rich people, and a lot of people who didn't want a lot of noisy airplanes flying over their property all the time. So the citizens there started a program to try to find some other alternative for this area, than a airport. It wasn't long before they came up with the idea that maybe they could get a wildlife refuge there. Well we already had a small refuge that we managed called Troy Meadows, in one of those pothole areas of North Jersey. I knew a little bit about that part of the country, having spent a quite a bit of time down there learning about the Wildlife situation in New Jersey. A delegation from down in New Jersey came up one day and we worked out a deal. They agreed that they would try to raise money to purchase the land and I said when you get enough money for 3,000 acres, I will be willing to commit enough money out of the migratory bird fund, to buy 3,000 acres making a 6,000 acre parcel, and we all agreed on that. We still had to sell it a lot of people including the Secretary but it worked.

So in the fall of 64 my predecessor Dan Jantzen had come up to spend a few days with me in the region, and on the way back we stopped at Great Swamp for the dedication of that refuge. Stuart Udall flew up, with some other people from Washington, we had the congressman Freilinghousen, there and a nice turn out at the very posh estate of one of the descendents of the Dodge fortune, Hartley Dodge was his name, and he had married one of the Rockefeller Daughters, they had all kinds of money, and when it came to raising funds to acquire the 3,000, acres that the local people were going to get. Hartly Dodge and his wife put in over a million dollars to foster this project. So we had this celebration at his country estate, the main building of which was a replica of a Alpine hunting lodge. After Udall arrived in a helicopter from the Newark Airport, he came over and said hello to Director Jantzen and myself, and got me off to one side and said John where is the men's room. I said I will take you there, it is up on the second floor at the other end of this Swiss Chalet so we went up to the men's room, and while he had his back turned relieving himself, I was standing over by the door or by the window looking out just waiting. He said by the way John did you know that Dan has indicated that he would like to retire. I said no as a matter of fact I didn't know that. He said yes and I am looking around and I wonder if you would be interested in the position. I can still remember what I said, which was well we are having a great time in Boston. It has been a big challenge but things are going very well, I have no particular desire to leave, but I must confess that I spend a lot of time in my career criticizing

the way the Service has been run and if I have an opportunity to take it over and be the Director I can't turn it down. So he said good, when you get back call my secretary and set up a date I'd like you to come down so we can have a little chat. So I have always said I was the only Director appointed as a result of a privy… a privy… What did I used to say… a privy counsel. <laughter> I have used that several times including when Udall retired, he did not know whether to laugh or not, everyone else did.

To be honest about it the man who proceeded me in Boston, was a sportsman, he had been a Game Management Agent, but he just was totally uninterested in managing anything and the Regional Office was a shambles. I wont go in all the detail but it was a terrible problem, we had something like 3,000 vouchers in arrears when I arrived there that hadn't been processed. He simply had paid no attention to that aspect, and had nobody there to run it. And was not willing to make the fight to get more staff people on the job to take care of that kind of a problem and you can see what that would do to the field personnel who could not buy anything because people, the purveyors of what ever they needed were not getting paid for things they had bought a year ago. That was only a part of it. The morale was just terrible, and it was a challenge but a wonderful opportunity. I remember that one of the men told me afterward, John when you left we were approching greatness. Which was about as high a complement that anyone could get. We just turned that whole situation around, had developed a great Esprit D'corps, had a good staff I had a wonderful letter from my Secretary when I left to go to Washington, which said I was the only person in her thirty year career who made her feel like she was a integral part of the organization. Because I depended on her to do the things that a secretary ought to do. Before that she was just a stenographer or something like that, ya know. But it was a good training ground to have to go to Washington.

Although I didn't run into the same kind of a problem at all in Washington. What I did encounter of course, shortly after we got there was the strictures enforced upon many agencies, civilian agencies, by the escalation of the Vietnam War. I have always said that President Johnson assured the country that we could have both guns and butter. But that was not true in the Fish and Wildlife Service our budgets were cut, along with the fact that we had to pick up our part of the "Great Society" program that he was espousing and this put a tremendous burden on us in the sense that we had to pick up a lot of the cost. At the same time our budgets were not going up at all. Without

going into detail as to how it happened, we had received a 20 million dollar construction appropriation to plan the development of a national aquarium. This was as a result of the work of a very powerful Congressman who was very much interested in seeing an aquarium in Washington. We hired a very outstanding designer, planer, and had a beautiful concept, all this before the war started, before we really got deeply involved in the Vietnam War. Had a detailed plan worked out, and a staff working on promoting a national aquarium in Washington down on Hanes Point. The only way we survived was to use that money that we got, the 20 million dollar construction appropriation for operational cost. Other wise I think it would have been a very, very difficult time we would have had to lay off a lot of people, as it was we were under terrible stricture to reduce our costs. Probably nobody in recent years has ever heard of a program which got the nickname of "Ratchet One", the very first staff meeting that I had at our annual meeting, which we had in those days. With thirty or forty of our top people in a conference room with a call from the Assistant Secretaries office to come over immediately. I was dragged out of that very first day of that meeting to go over and see what was happening, and what was happening was that, McNamara then Secretary of Defense, had convinced President Johnson that every agency had a lot of useless activities that they could get along without. He had demonstrated that he had cut out all of these useless activities in the Defense Department. Johnson said if you can do it in Defense with all of your problems and the war, every other agency ought be able to do the same thing. The word came back that we were to eliminate 10 hatcheries and 10 refuges, and I had to provide the names by the end of business that day. This was hard on morale you know, just to get an order like that, how can you do it with out any kind of planning and thought, to decide what criteria you'll use in eliminating 10 refuges and 10 hatcheries. Fortunately all the Regional Directors were there, and as soon as I got this order, and it was like you do it, or else. I called those men out of the conference all five of the Regional Directors course I had just come down from Boston, so I had a pretty good idea what would be our lower priority facilities there. The next morning at 8 o'clock I turned in a list of 10 refuges and 10 hatcheries, that we would recommend be closed if any had to be closed. Well what happened of course was that Congress refused to allow us to close them. That meant that the money that we would have used was not appropriated for those functions, on those 10 hatcheries and 10 refuges, so we had to swallow the cuts. Another words further pressure budget wise. The next year we had "ratchet two" it was the same thing all over again. 10 refuges and 10 hatcheries to be closed. It was a hard thing to handle

administratively, the fact is of course that many of those areas that we did try to close were never closed. Some of them were actually turned over to the States, several hatcheries as a matter of fact that I considered to be obsolete, even though there were a lot of people that loved them and did not want to see them go. We did transfer to the States and so we did reduce the hatchieries program to some degree, the refuge division, the refuge system however did not suffer. All the refuges that were proposed to be closed were never closed, the effectiveness was reduced substancially because, again our budget was reduced by the cost of operating those by now 20 refuges. That was a very difficult time for everybody.

S.C.: At that same time you were facing budget restrictions, and as the war was intensifying, there was still a fairly ambitious conservation agenda in the Johnson administration wasn't there? In Congress we had new laws like the Wilderness Act and others coming into being<interjection… Land and Water Conservation.> <speaker unknown>What was the mood like in conservation at the time. Was the progressive spirit of the "great society" rapidly eclipsed by the war or did you all feel like you were really able to make some progress in conservation in the mid Sixties.

J.G.: I would say the later is true. Such things as the Wilderness Act for example. I must give, and I can't name, names right now, but the refuge system responded to that call in a very dynamic way. Every region appointed someone who knew the characteristics of the refuges within those regions. We got a task force together, actually we were the first agency in the Interior Dept. to complete its survey of potential wilderness areas. We really worked on it. Nobel Buel <name unclear> was the assistant director for wildlife he took a personal interest in it. Everyone of the Regional Directors appointed a special wilderness coordinator. We had special teams going out to evaluate the wilderness potential of every refuge, of course we eliminated a lot of them because of the road situation , right off the bat. But I would say that our performance was really outstanding <energy> <not quite clear>, no body could hear us talking, it was a very confidential way to do business. But we both thought it was the right way to do it at that time because there was just a lot of back biting. Both on the part of the users typically the forest industry, and others, and we had one of our worst problems with the U.S. Forest Service, because they didn't think that we had any areas that we suitable for being classified as wilderness. I remember a 8 hour hearing before the House Committee on National Parks and what not, not our Fisheries and Wildlife committee, but another subcommittee, went

on for 8 hours. Most of the time I was being challenged as to why I thought refuges, would have areas that would be suitable for inclusion in the wilderness areas. There was a general opinion in the Forest Service and in the minds of a lot of the Western Congressmen, that a wilderness area had to be something like Yosemite Park, or something like that ya know. Filled with beautiful trees and great scenery and all that sort of thing. I remember the Senator From New Mexico called me up one day on the telephone. This had to do with the Bosque del Apache Refuge down south of Albuquerque.

S.C.: interjects. . . it's a premier Refuge today…

J.G.: At that time the waterfowl potential had not been developed. There were 40,000 acres back to the east of the Rio Grande, that was all dry land. This Senator, can't think of his name right now, maybe I mentioned it a moment ago, can't remember, called me up and said Mr. Gottschalk how can you want to put Bosque in as a wilderness area, there is no wilderness area there that's just dry grass land. I said Senator do you remember the story about Jesus Christ going to the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, and he said "Yes", and I said what kind of a place do you think that was in that dry parched part of Palestine, where there wasn't a plant practically alive it was all desert. That was a wilderness Senator… He said" Is that how you feel about this", and I said a wilderness does not have anything on it at all, there is nothing in the law that suggests that there needs to be a plant on a wilderness, there might be, but it would be a desert plant, and that's just as good as a mammoth redwood tree in the Sierra Nevada. Well, he got to be a good friend, Clinton Anderson, Senator Anderson he got to be a good friend, and was a strong supporter.

It took a complete 180 degree turn of his mind to understand what the refuge system, um, the wilderness system in the refuge system ought to look like. I'll put in one other little comment about the wilderness program, that little refuge at Great Swamp in New Jersey. Was the first refuge, the first wilderness area established by Congress they were able to put a lot of muscle behind it. They got everything, the Regional Office, got every thing put together and submitted the area for designation as a wilderness area, before anybody else could get around to it, and it was passed and signed by the President and that was the very first wilderness area. In which we took a lot of pride.

S.C.: Were going to have to keep you on schedule, so we have to wrap up, I think we could go on all day

J.G.: interjects: Well you could.

S.C.: Let me ask you one more question. We are sitting here in the National Conservation Training Center, in 1965 the first refuge manager training program or training academy was established. What was your goal in that?

J.G.: Nothing…

S.C.: <Interjects> Nothing?

J.G.: As I told you I had very limited contacts with the Wildlife part of the Fish and Wildlife Service and I was interested in Refuges, I am a bird lover and a botany lover and all that sort of thing, so anytime I had an opportunity either as Regional Director or subsequently, or even before, if I got near a refuge, I would go visit a refuge, so I had some ideas about it. I didn't, I hadn't been into it long enough to understand the value of a formal training program. I had participated in a couple myself but they were just one week short term things. I would have to say that the refuge people themselves take the full credit for getting the training program going. I can't remember the name of the man who I appointed as Director for a long time, he was Director for a long time, but he was enthused about it. After I went to a couple of them I could see the benefit, and I began to look around for a pre cursor, to this beautiful establishment here. We looked at several places on refuges where we had managed to acquire a large building, a home or some other kind of a building, with the idea that perhaps we could convert one of those to a training center facility. It never really worked out so we continued at Arden Hills then moved to the training center that the Bureau of Mines had in West Virginia, and had the training center there.

About that time I was gone so I did not keep up with what was happening after that. But it soon became apparent to me that the training program was absolutely vital to the future of the organization. I think the fact the everybody now realizes that you can't just keep operating on the basis of the knowledge that you had when you started, ignoring the progress that is made by others in other fields and expect to make real progress at your own agency. We soon learned that and I think this is a manifestation of the validity of that whole idea. It is more than just a monument to Senator Byrd,

it is a monument to the idea that people do need to be refreshed and retrained, and stimulated to maintain the optimum intellectual output in their careers.

S.C.: Well we will continue this discussion at another time. Thanks very much……