Subject/USFW Retiree: Lowry, Gerry April 14, 2005 Interviewed by: Dorothy Norton

D. Norton:
Well Gerry, thanks for the good directions you gave because I almost did it without more but the one phone call. So now we'll just get busy and do the interview. First, I want to know where and when you were born.

Gerry Lowry:
Eau Claire, Wisconsin at Luther Hospital on August 15, 1935.

D. Norton:
Okay, you're a young guy. What were your parent's names?

Gerry Lowry:
Oliver Walker and Jenny Lucille Lowry.

D. Norton:
What were their educations and their jobs?

Gerry Lowry: My father was a high school graduate and my mother attended Teachers Training School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. My father worked as a manager for the U.S. Rubber Company in Eau Claire. He managed a team of women who made bicycle tires. My mother was a homemaker and held a variety of jobs off and on including retail clerk, ammunition plant worker, restaurant owner, and retail clerk.

D. Norton:
Did your mother teach school?

Gerry Lowry:
No, she married my father and married teachers were frowned upon.

D. Norton:
Where did you spend your early years?

Gerry Lowry: In the city of Eau Claire for the first 2 years, on a "one horse farm" for 7 years, in Altoona, Wisconsin for 4 years and in New Auburn, Wisconsin for 3 years. We moved quite a bit because of my fathers illness. He contracted pneumonia when he was 29 years old, and suffered severe cardiopulmonary side effects that made him an invalid for the rest of his life. After becoming disabled, we moved onto the 20 acre farm between Eau Claire and Colfax, Wisconsin, and that's where I spent the aforementioned seven years, in a very rural environment. My dad was in and out of hospitals, bedridden most of the time at home and not very mobile. My mom then would work off and on at jobs in Eau Claire, and later she worked at the WW II ammunition plant in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. My dad died at age 42 in 1945. Then we moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin. I was in the fourth grade at the time. I went to school there for part of a year, and then Mother

remarried and we moved to Altoona, Wisconsin. I was there thru my freshman year in high school. The person she married had been a cook in the Army during World War II and he always wanted a restaurant. He wanted to be a chef, so he bought a restaurant in New Auburn, Wisconsin which is where my wife Sandra was born and grew up. I spent three years in high school in New Auburn and graduated in 1953.

D. Norton:
That's called New Auburn High School?

Gerry Lowry: Yes, New Auburn High School. After that I went to college for a few months before I dropped out of college. I joined the Air Force in 1954 to get the GI Bill. I had learned that some money was required for college. Going to school and being hungry were not compatible!

D. Norton:
Okay. So while you were in the Air Force where were you based?

Gerry Lowry: Well first, of course, like everyone else, I went to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, and from there to Chanute Field and Air Force Meteorology school in Illinois. I was there for several months and then went to Ent Air Force Base near Colorado Springs, Colorado. I spent a few months there as a weather observer. I then went to Anchorage, Alaska for a mandatory overseas assignment. I spent a few weeks in Anchorage and then was assigned to King Salmon, Alaska, which was a remote weather station near the base of the Alaska Peninsula. I was there a few months and then came back to Anchorage for a few weeks and got reassigned to Shemya, Alaska, which is near the very end of the Aleutian Chain (within about 30-40 miles of Attu, the last island in the chain).

I and one other meteorologist set up a weather station on Shemya, which turned out later to be a base where C-119 cargo caught photographic capsules that were being ejected apparently from the first rockets used to take high altitude pictures. The C-119s would fly out with 1000-foot long metal or wire hooks to catch parachutes as they got dropped into the lower atmosphere. I stayed on Shemya for several months, and then Northwest Airlines made arrangements with the government to take over the island and used it as an emergency stop between Anchorage and Japan. I have no idea, but I think at about that time other technology may have come along to solve the problem of retrieving photographic material from rockets. We were on Shemya for about six months.

After that I went back to Anchorage and spent a week or two and then went up to Fairbanks to Ladd Air Force Base for short time, and then was assigned to Galena, Alaska, for the remainder of my tour of duty in Alaska. Galena was another weather observation station along the Yukon River, between Nome and Fairbanks. I stayed at Galena for about 4 1/2 months. From there, I was reassigned back in the U.S. to Malmstrom Air Force Base at Great Falls, Montana. I was there for about nine.months.

I then was selected to go to the National Air Force Weather Center at Suitland, Maryland. I was assigned to Andrews Air Force Base, but Suitland was my duty station away from the base. Periodically, we would go down onto the Washington Mall when the Soviet Union had nuclear tests and plot the weather following the drift of nuclear fallout material around the globe. Also, while I was there I went to an exercise called Operation Alert in 1957 for a week where we went to a mountain, probably Raven Rock, to test what would happen in the event of an attack on the U.S. That was very interesting because we went inside a mountain and had all of our weather apparatus there as part of the exercise. I was discharged from the Air Force in November of 1957 at Andrews Air Force Base a couple of months early to start college in January of 1958.

I began at what was called Wisconsin State College. Now it's considered the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire. I attended school there for a year and a half in pre-science. In 1959, I applied and was accepted in geology at the University of Montana at Missoula. I went there for one semester and decided that I would prefer to study conservation, so I transferred to the University of Minnesota at St. Paul. I was perhaps influenced by my girlfriend, now my wife Sandra, who was from New Auburn, Wisconsin. I started at the University of Minnesota in January of 1960, and graduated with honors in March of 1962. Before I graduated, I made one application for a fellowship that paid as much as a job offered in a letter from Fish and Wildlife Marine Research at Gulf Breeze Florida (I think it was a GS-5 job probably) to start as a biologist. I got a letter from Oregon State Game Commision offering a fellowship in fisheries that would pay the same as the FWS job, plus I could get a Masters Degree in Fisheries. I naturally accepted the fellowship at Oregon, and began at Corvallis in the summer of 1962.

Sandra and I were located on a 50,000-acre Georgia-Pacific plantation near Toledo, Oregon, studying trout migration, reproduction and food. I did a two year study on cutthroat trout as a pre-logging baseline study that was part of a longer study of the impacts of three different kinds of logging. There were three small streams, and I made population estimates and did food and production studies on cutthroat trout over the two year period. Other graduate students were studying different aspects of the longer term study. After I left, Georgia-Pacific harvested using clear cut and two other different kinds of logging on two of the watersheds. The effects of that were studied over a period of many years under Professors Don Chapman and later Jim Hall. I published the results of my studies in Transactions of AFS and Journal Wildlife Mgt. Other results were eventually published and contributed better understanding of the impact of logging. I was awarded a Masters degree in Fisheries Research in March of 1964,

I was selected for a fisheries research job in Wisconsin Conservation Department, now the Department of Natural Resources at Seven Springs Hatchery near Madison, Wisconsin.I worked on warm water fish research at Cox Hollow Impoundment west of Madison. Then I got more interested in trout research, and was able to shift from warm water research to trout research. I was transferred to the Lawrence Creek Research Station at Westfield, Wisconsin. Bob Hunt was conducting a long-term study of brook trout production and life history and the impacts of different kinds of stream improvement techniques. My main task was to do field work and finish some data collections on McKenzie Creek in northwestern Wisconsin started by Ray White. I published the results of that study in 1971 as Research Report # 70, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. While I was there, I got acquainted with the folks at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. They offered me a job teaching biology. At the same time, I also applied for a job with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service as field biologist for part of northern Wisconsin. I did teach for a part of a semester at UW Stevens Point, and then took the field biologist job for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service at Ladysmith, Wisconsin. So, beginning in about the very late fall of 1965, I started working for the Federal Government.

My territory was basically north of a line from Eau Claire to Green Bay, Wisconsin. I traveled with a canoe on top of a government car and did a lot work with landowners, designing fish ponds and developing plans for the enhancement of deer, grouse, and other wildlife on private lands. One of the most interesting things that I did during that time was to expand my work to the area of recreation specialist. I designed a campground at Washburn, Wisconsin on Lake Superior for example, and did analyses of recreational potential and also economic feasibility analyses. But probably the most fun thing that I did during that time was to get involved in writing canoe trail guides for Wisconsin. I wrote canoe trail guides for northwest, north central and also northeastern Wisconsin. The northwest and north central ones were published by independent canoe trail organizations. These were all done under the Food and Agricultural Act of 1964, which authorized something called Research Conservation and Development Projects. Under the auspices of those programs, the work was done by the Soil Conservation Service, taking air photos and making maps of the rivers, and then I would write the narratives. While doing that, it became necessary, of course, to travel many of the

rivers with a canoe so that I had first hand knowledge. But for northeastern Wisconsin, the canoe trail organization decided to cut a deal with Howard Mead of Wisconsin Tales and Trails. That guide was published as a for-profit venture by Wisconsin Tales and Trails. I found it an amusing example of human nature that when Howard Mead got a hold of my narrative, he edited it lightly and then took credit for its creation. *Human, All Too Human* as F. Nietzsche would say.

After that I became more interested in management and earning more money. We were having children at the time and, as often is the case, people once they get to be thirty and realize that there is something called money decide that it might be a good idea to have a higher paying job. I was selected to be the manager of the Resource Conservation and Development Project and did that for a couple of years. Later I was selected by the Soil Conservation Service for their Executive Development Program at one of six universities. I was sent to Syracuse University for a year to get a Masters degree in Public Administration. It was a delightful year, both I and Sandra went to school. We had four kids, lived in student housing and saw no one from our agency for a year. USDA paid our full salary and all the costs of going to school as well as relocation allowances. It was just a wonderful time, and we enjoyed Syracuse. However, it was sort of like *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, at the end of that time they informed me we were going to go to Washington. We weren't real happy about it because we had been living in Spooner, Wisconsin. I always like to think it was like looking through the telescope from one end and then somebody grabbing it and turning it around and saying, "Here, look through the other end for awhile". It was a completely different situation, and we weren't really thrilled about it, but we naturally we went there because in to go to school, I had to sign an agreeement that I would work anywhere that they wanted me to for at least two years.

It turned out that Washington D.C. was really a most interesting and enjoyable assignment except for the commuting. Like many families with children, we lived out in Fairfax, Virginia in a place called Greenbriar. It was about an hour and thirty minutes commute to work (it was before metro). It was always very heavy traffic and the last ten miles was pretty much bumper to bumper, so the commuting was no fun. But, I found that the Soil Conservation Service, now called the Natural Resource Conservation Service, had many very bright and interesting people in Washington. When I got there in 1975, it was near the height of the environmental movement, so it was a fun time for an environmentalist and conservationist. One had the opportunity to write regulations and speeches for people and feel that you actually influenced environmental activities of the agency and, to some extent, the public and politicians nationwide. My principal accomplishment was to prepare a new National Guide for Environmental Assessment for SCS. So, it was a fun time. At the end of the two years I decided that I wanted to get out of Washington, so I applied for a job as the Midwest Regional Biologist at Lincoln, Nebraska for the Soil Conservation Service. I was selected for it, and in late 1977 we moved to Lincoln, Nebraska and I assumed my duties at the regional office as Midwest Regional Biologist.

I found that regional offices, quite frankly, in Soil Conservation Service by that time were becoming redundant. Lincoln was a great place to live. The people in Nebraska were the most friendly people we have ever encountered, but I found the job just kind of boring. By then, Sandra and I had moved many times with school and jobs. So we decided we would really like to get somewhere and stay. I would have had three more transfers in the Soil Conservation Service before I could have gotten the position I was looking for. I wanted to be in Minneapolis, and I wanted the kids not to have to move, the oldest one was going to be a junior in high school. So we started applying for jobs with Fish and Wildlife Service in Minneapolis. I got selected for one. I had to take a two grade cut to get there, but I was sick of transferring and I wanted the kids to be in one spot.

That is how I came to the Fish and Wildlife Service in Minneapolis, as an environmental specialist for the Refuge System at the regional office in Minneapolis. That was in 1978. I enjoyed that job, but within a

couple of years, was encouraged to apply for a vacancy as assistant regional director when Ray St. Ores retired. I was selected for it, and that would be my job for the next ten years. The name and function got changed to some degree, and when I retired, was called the ARD for Environment, for Region 3, USFWS. I retired in 1990, at the age of 55.

My general philosophy about jobs is that it's best if you could be at each job for just three years. The first year, if it's a challenging job, you're kind of bewildered, the second year you get it down pat, and the third year you make some contributions. After that, it tends to become kind of pro forma and not too exciting. I considered the ten years that I spent at ARD for Environment as a fun job with lots of interesting people, but not very exciting. So when it became possible for me to retire at 55, I accepted the opportunity and left the Fish and Wildlife Service.

In the meantime, we were living in Hudson, Wisconsin, which is just across the river from Twin cities, Minnesota. My wife Sandra had gotten a real estate license in Nebraska. and after we moved to Wisconsin got a license there. Sandra started working as a real estate broker, first with a small company and then Century 21. After about six years, she decided that she wanted to work by herself, and formed Lowry Real Estate in Hudson, Wisconsin starting in 1988. Long before I retired from Fish and Wildlife Service in 1990, I had gotten a brokers license so that she and I could talk about the business she was in. When I retired, she wanted to continue the business. I worked with her doing showings and helped her in the management and the business execution side of the real estate until about 1997. At that time we sold our property in Hudson and moved to a lake cabin on Loon Lake, about forty miles north of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. We had built the cabin by hand starting in about 1985. It initially was a weekend hobby where we would de-stress from our jobs. We put up a row or two of logs each weekend. Slowly, over a period of a couple of years, we built the cabin which became our home.

Gerry:
At this point I asked, "Dorothy, what else are you interested in?

D.Norton:
Well, you didn't need any training when you came to us because you already had all of this other experience, but did you ever work with any animals or anything?

Gerry Lowry:
When you say animals, you mean...?

D.Norton:
Any of them, wildcats....?

Gerry Lowry:
No, my degree at the University of Minnesota was Fish and Wildlife Management with an emphasis in fisheries. Supplementing that with the

Masters Degree at O.S.U. in Fisheries Research made me pretty much a fisheries guy for a while. When I worked as a field biologist for the Soil Conservation Service, we worked with fish and wildlife for private landowners in northern Wisconsin. When you do that you're developing management plans, it's not hands on work with live animals or research with them. The direct work with animals I did was the research work at Oregon State University with fish, and then later with warm water fish and trout research for the State of Wisconsin, where you're actually netting fish, tagging them, weighing them, releasing them, recapturing them, and estimating populations. In this sense, emphasis in my career was in fisheries in terms of working with animals hands on.

D. Norton:
Were there any major issues that you were involved with that you had to deal with, or were they all major issues?

Gerry Lowry: Well, that's an interesting question. I guess I don't think of it that way. You know, you go to work, you do your job, and whatever comes up, you do the best you can, whether it's major or minor.

D. Norton: Okay.

Gerry Lowry:
I would say nothing really stands out.

D. Norton:
So you spent all of your career then at the Minneapolis Regional Office?

Gerry Lowry:
Yes, that part of my conservation career with the Fish and Wildlife Service was spent in Minneapolis.

D. Norton:
Who were your supervisors?

Gerry Lowry:
My first supervisor was Wayne Weir

Gerry Lowry:
When first I went there I worked for Refuges, as a technical specialist.

D. Norton:
Okay, okay, John Eadie?

Gerry Lowry: Not sure.

D. Norton:
Okay, Harold {Benson}.

Gerry Lowry:
Harold was a later ARD for refuges.

D. Norton:
I never worked in Refuges, so it's just.... Okay, than after he was...?

Gerry Lowry:
When I was first selected for the job of ARD for Environment (the later title) the Deputy Regional Director was retiring within just a few months. As I recall, the Regional Directors job was vacant at about hat time. Harvey Nelson got that job and later Gritman came in as Deputy.

D. Norton:
Right, because they.... Okay, but when you retired, who was your supervisor?

Gerry Lowry: I worked for four conservation agencies, two state and two federal. The two federal were the Soil Conservation Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service. I worked in middle management in both so I got a good exposure to the management systems of the two agencies. It was a fascinating contrast. The Soil Conservation Service was started by a fellow named Hugh Hammond Bennett during the Great Depression. It was established as the result of the dust bowl and other pressing and obvious conservation problems. It was established under the auspices of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who brought many gifted, sophisticated, well-trained people into government at that time. As a result, the Soil Conservation Service was blessed with a relatively sophisticated, professional and simple line and staff management system with a director in Washington and an agency head in almost every state which facilitated coordination with state and local organizations. There were six regional technical support offices. It was relatively, "clean" and operated much more efficiently, compared to what I found at FWS.

I was somewhat chagrined and shocked to discover that FWS was an agency whose management system apparently had been cobbled together over long periods of time. It was a much older agency and had functions added and subtracted to it over the years. Exacerbating matters, it was cursed with a management system that mixed line supervision with program management. At certain levels, you always had two supervisors-the executives who controlled the money(program management) and the executives that were

direct supervisors. These often were different people. So, field office supervisors, for example, had split loyalties. Which master should he or she be trying to serve most and best? Should it be the one that allocates funds or the one that does your day-to-day supervision or month-to-month as it may be, that does your performance reviews and is going to have a big influence on what you can do and can't do in the future in the agency? So, at any given moment, you might be more responsive to one, the other, neither, or both! Also, additionally, the tradition of management in the Fish and Wildlife Service was relatively unprofessional, even chaotic. I likened it to almost like a "cowboy" management atmosphere. For example, I had a deputy regional director that actually said to me, "Here I am, the Deputy Regional Director, and I've never had a single management training course!" That's a direct a quotation. This gentleman violated almost the most simplest and basic rules of management. One that always stuck in my mind was, good managers praise people publicly and reprimand them privately. This one small example of good management was rarely practiced.

The Soil Conservation Service's efficient management system was largely a fortunate accident, because it was formed intact at one time.It had a well established professional management culture. The Fish and Wildlife Service had a chaotic management culture, and was cursed a tangled system of financial and line authorities. So when you asked me who my supervisor was, it brings up the interesting question, supervisor for what? Money or performance reviews? As assistant regional director my supervisor was the regional director. In practice, the regional director pretty much delegated the management superivision to the deputy regional director, who, for much of the time that I was ARD for Enviroment at Minneapolis, was a fellow named Gritman, and then later on it was a fellow named Moriarty.

D. Norton:
James Gritman was probably the regional director when you retired?

Gerry Lowry: Yes.

D. Norton:
Well, we're getting kind of close here. You're doing a wonderful job, thank you. What was the high point in your career with Fish and Wildlife?

Gerry Lowry: In conclusion, just let me say this, as long as we've done this interview. I feel like I'm probably one of relatively few FWS employees that worked in somewhat comparable middle management situations in another federal agency, in my case Soil Conservation Service, now the Natural Resource Conservation Service. I feel obliged, and to the extent that it might be useful to comment on the distinct differences between these two agencies. The Soil Conservation Service was started in 1935 under the aegis of very highly educated and sophisticated people that came in with Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the New Deal. As a result, that agency sprang into life fully formed with relatively few changes after that, and it had a management structure that was very efficient. There was a director at Washington, regional offices that were mainly for technical support (not in the line as such) and then a state director much in every state although a few of the smaller states were combined. It was a very simple line and staff, program authority, funding and also supervision was essentially in this single line. It fostered a very strong tradition of competent, professional, and sophisticated management. Fairly early on, SCS developed a pattern of sending perspective executives from its ranks to half a dozen of the major management schools in the United States including Michigan, Syracuse, Harvard, Yale, and perhaps a couple of more over the years. As the years went by, SCS drew many of it's state directors, upper managers and Washington staff from graduates of that program. I spent twelve years in that agency, two years in the Washington office and a little over a year in the regional office, and got

exposed to the entire management structure and how it operated. I kind of assumed when I came to Fish and Wildlife Service, without looking into it, that it would also have a very competent management culture. So I was really kind of surprised when I got to Fish and Wildlife Service and found otherwise.

In fairness, there's substantial justification for this situation because historically, the Fish and Wildlife Service was assembled over a much longer period, some of its functions were combined from elsewhere and it lacked a strong "grass roots" natural constituency. Also, because of politics, it is difficult to change agency structure when it involves significant staffing changes.

Elimination of area managers in the mid-1980s was helpful. It would have been preferable to have had all authority under one individual at each level. In my case, funds were allocated out of an assistant director in Washington. The performance reviews, mentoring and general supervision was from the regional director, but in practice delegated to the deputy regional director. As a result, at any given moment, you might be trying to please the money guy or the person that did your performance review. You might also think of it at any given moment as trying most to do the best job you could for either the one, the other, neither, or both. Compounding it, the people that tended to gravitate to a higher management in the Fish and Wildlife Service tended to be flamboyant and given to grand gestures rather than demonstrating quiet contemplative management, looking far ahead, seeing the big picture and not just reacting to the issues of the moment. For management structure, the Fish and Wildlife Service would have been much better served if it had a simple line and staff with regional offices mainly for technical support(one in the west that served Alaska and the western part of the U.S. and one in the east that served the eastern part). Management authority and funding authority would be from D.C. to field directors, one for each state or groups of small states. At the field level, instead of having people that were in ecological service offices, refuge offices and fisheries locations; one manager would be in charge of all FWS functions in that state. The lesson from the "abortive area manager attempt" should have been, if you're going to do go to a more pure line and staff structure, commit to it fully---no halfway measures.

I do not want to end this discussion or leave it with the idea that the Fish and Wildlife Service did not have many dedicated and loyal employees. During the time I was ARD for Environment, there were numerous hard working, competent, thorough people doing the best they could. Unfortunately, the awkward management system was, frankly, an unnecessary and counterproductive burden to accomplishing the agency mission efficiently. As a final word, allow me to cite the Native American proverb, "It is easy to be brave from a distance."

So, I guess Dorothy, unless there is something else, let's go to lunch.

D. Norton:
Thank you very much, thank's for the time Gerry.

Gerry Lowry:
You bet. I would like to add a book recommendation: *A Short History o*f *Nearly Everything* by Bill Bryson, an absolutely splendid book, you simply have got to read it, everybody!

D. Norton: Thank you.

Key Words: Fellowship in Fisheries, cutthroat trout study and the impacts of pre-logging baseline study, Major Professor, Don Chapman, Jim Hall, Masters Degree in Fisheries Research, Wisconsin Conservation Department, Department of Natural Resources, Seven Springs Hatchery near Madison, Wisconsin, Cox Hollow Impoundment, warm water fish research, trout research, Lawrence Creek Research Station, brown trout, Stevens Point, University of Wisconsin, U.S. Soil Conservation Service, field biologist, Hugh Hammond Bennett, recreation specialist and designing campgrounds, writing canoe trail guides for rivers in Wisconsin, Food and Agricultural Act of 1964, Research Conservation and Development Projects, Howard Mead of Wisconsin Tales and Trails, Executive Development Program, Syracuse University, Masters degree in Public Administration, environmental movement, environmentalist, conservationist, Midwest Regional Biologist at Lincoln, Nebraska, environmental specialist for the Refuge System at the regional office in Minneapolis, Ray St. Ores, Assistant Regional Director for Environment, ARD for Environment, Regional Office, Minneapolis, Fish and Wildlife Management B.S., University of Minnesota, John Eadie, Harvey Nelson