

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID OLSEN
BY STEPHEN BRIMM, APRIL 21, 2001

MR. BRIMM: Today is April 21, 2001. My name is Steve Brimm and I am the Director of the D. C. Booth Historic Fish Hatchery in Spearfish, South Dakota. I am a member of the Services' Heritage Committee. We are at NCTC this week for the annual retiree gathering. With me today, I have Dave Olsen who has volunteered to do an oral history with us. And without further ado, we'll start asking Dave a few questions today. Dave thanks for being with us. Let's start out with some personal information; could you share with us your place and date of birth?

MR. OLSEN: Sure, I was born on October 15, 1933 in Brooklyn, New York, believe it or not. You can't imagine a city guy taking a job with the Fish and Wildlife Service but I certainly did. My parent's names were George and Nancy Olsen. My mom was a housewife and my dad worked for International Telephone and Telegraph for something like forty-two years. He commuted into New York City. My early years were spent on eastern Long Island, New York. We were sort of away from the city. I guess at a very early age, probably at eight or nine years, as I look back at some of the movies that we have, I was given a bird book. It was one of Peterson's *Field Guides*. That, together with a couple of friends that I had, seemed to stimulate my interest in fish and wildlife. I had no interest provided by my parents, they were not outdoor kinds of people. They played tennis, but it seemed to be that book, and a couple of friends that I had who were middle aged at the time, that imprinted on me a love for the outdoors. The first thing that I did was bird watching. Then I did a little trapping as a teenager. I trapped Muskrats and Mink and Possums. I was always there for the first day of Trout season. And when I became old enough to have a gun, I remember that I got a single shot, twelve gauge shotgun which I shot in back of my house one day, and it was suburbia. Those were the early years, in terms of my interest. All summer long, I would be either fishing or skin-diving out in eastern Long Island, and when fall came I got very enthused about duck hunting. I started making my own decoys. I made lots of old cork decoys and used the old "scooters" or duck boats on Long Island. I spent many, many falls out there duck hunting. I also did all of the other bay kinds of things, like eeling, and jacking fish at night. The hobbies and most of the things that I did as a child were outdoor related. I did bird watching, canoeing, fishing and hunting. I did play some ball sports, like tennis. The question was asked, "What influenced you the most"? And it was probably two elderly gentlemen, one of whom was a trapper. He was probably in his fifties or sixties, and I looked up to him when I was a young teenager. I thought that that would be a nice kind of life to follow. I did the trapping and the fishing and hunting. I got a job in a Sporting Goods store. So every weekend I was out there selling worms and talking to all of the local sportsmen finding out where the fish were biting, and where the birds were flying. I

guess those are the things in the early years, which stimulated my interest in fish and wildlife.

There was question about what kind of a job I have as a young person. I think my first job was working in a bicycle shop and I really didn't have any interest in it. The next job was working in the sporting goods store. I probably worked six or seven years, through high school and part of college there. Every time that I had time off, I would be out there messing with fishing tackle or buying a gun. Those were the years when we had all kinds of bamboo rods, and I never thought that anything of buying a bamboo rod. Fiberglass was a big thing that came in then. It was the same with guns; I still have an old Model 12, three inch Magnum that I bought new, for ninety dollars, way back in those years. I still have some of the first fishing rods that I ever used. I went to High School in Freeport, Long Island. I graduated in 1951. Having graduated from High School, my question was what would happen then? I thought about all of my interests, and decided that I would move into something having to do with the outdoors. I went to an Agricultural College and majored in Animal Husbandry. After two years, I came out with an Associates degree in Dairy Cattle Management. But realized then that if I didn't have enough money to go out and buy a farm, or if I didn't stand to inherit one, or if I didn't see any prospects of marrying one, I'd never be a farmer. In those years it would cost like thirty-five thousand dollars to start a farm. So I came out of a two-year college not knowing what to do. And that was about the time when the draft was barking down my neck, so I went into the Army. I spent two years in the Army. Most of that time was spent traveling with a Rifle Team, up and down the east coast. I guess my best time there was shooting in all of the competitive matches at places like Camp Perry. I came back with all kinds of pieces of silver. It was closely akin to hunting and fishing so I enjoyed it. I was stationed at Fort Dix most of the time, and did quite a bit of hunting and fishing there. After those two years in the military, it was again, "What now, what am I going to do"? I took a job as with Household Finance Company for two years and really just couldn't take it. I was tailing bad debts and making loans, and things like that. Finally, I decided that I wasn't going to spend the rest of my years doing this. I sent off an application to Bridgewater College in Virginia. It was a school that my brother had gone to. I was accepted, and I quit at Household Finance, and went down there to pursue a degree in Biology. I loved it, and it opened up a lot of new areas of interest. One of my biggest mentors was a professor we had there. His name was Dr. Harry Jobson. He was an intellect and one of those old-time naturalists. You could walk through the woods, and he would know every sound, and would know what was under every rock. He stimulated my interest. With a degree in Biology, I asked myself what I was going to with it. I could have gotten a job with the State, but I wasn't really sure about it. I decided to go on and get an advanced degree. I sent off a couple of applications and had the best Assistantship from Southern Illinois University in Saluki country. I worked under Dr. Clemstra who ran the squirrel surveys. He was my advisor. I spent one year measuring Goony Bird bones for a guy by the name of Harvey Fisher, who also provided some guidance to me. Then, during the break between the first and second years, I saw an application for summer jobs. There

was one for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which I had never really heard of, but it was up in Mud Lake, Minnesota. My wife had been a farm girl for years, and she said, "Yeah, that sounds good, let's go to Mud Lake, Minnesota"! We had never been to Minnesota. Anyway, we took a job, and it was in the northwest corner of Minnesota. That name has since been changed to Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge. There, we lived in a fur shed, talk about meager stuff. We lived thirty-five miles from town, with a little baby. We had a marvelous time up there. I went back to finish my second year of graduate work and after that was over, I was offered a permanent, full-time job. My thesis was involving Canada Geese, and the population that travels from the north down into Horseshoe Lake and Crab Orchard. I spent a lot of time working on that, and became somewhat of an expert with that Canada goose population. I finished my Masters and then went to work at Agassiz, or Mud Lake, and spent three years there. We spent three wonderful years there. There was another youngster, born while we there. It was really rural living, but my wife and I thoroughly enjoyed it. We then decided that maybe it was time to move on. Let me interject something here: Harvey Fisher wanted me to go out and work on Midway Island, and pursue a Ph.D., while I was there. I said that I had had enough school. For me, going through the Master's program was enough. I declined to pursue a Ph. D. and went with the Fish and Wildlife Service. I was hired by Audrey Berg have you ever heard of her? She was the Personnel Director. And there was Goody Larson.

MR. BRIMM: I have heard of Larson.

MR. OLSEN: They were the Personnel Directors in Region 3.

MR. BRIMM: Give us your wife's name, and yours kids' names.

MR. OLSEN: My wife's name is Annielaurie Daniel. She is from the mountains of Virginia. We met while she attending JMU, or Madison College and I was attending Bridgewater. She was my brother's old girlfriend. They just didn't hit it off too well. But she is a wonderful person and we keep all good things in the family. She has been a farm kind of person so she has thoroughly enjoyed it. She loves people, she loves the outdoors and wildlife and she has been a wonderful mate to have with me with the twelve or fourteen moves that I had within the Service. We thoroughly enjoyed northern Minnesota. And that was some tough cold weather. We had some temperatures down to forty-nine below zero. I think that was the toughest assignment. I went off to a Regional Conference in Minneapolis once, when she was exposed to forty-nine below zero. But we did very well up there. After about three years I decided that maybe I ought to apply for something else. I applied for a job in Lake Andes, South Dakota. I moved from being a Biologist-Assistant Manager to the Manager of a Wetlands district and a Refuge in southeast South Dakota. I spent three years there. It was the home of one hundred thousand Mallards, in the 1960s. It was a phenomenal place, with the Canada Geese and Mallards. I was running a big farming program in the southeast part of the state. But we

thoroughly South Dakota, where the temperatures got down to fifteen or twenty below, and up to one hundred and twelve. You know about those things don't you?

MR. BRIMM: I know it well.

MR. OLSEN: We really enjoyed South Dakota. I probably had the finest Pheasant hunting there, that I have had in my life. I live back on the memories of some of those wonderful hunts that we had in South Dakota when we first acquired some of the Wetland tracks. After about three years, we were driving back from Virginia one summer, and I stopped in at Ottawa Refuge in Ohio. The Manager there said that there was a job in Hawaii, and that I should apply for it. I asked my wife what she thought of this. We never knew anybody that lived in Hawaii, or had been to Hawaii. She said, "Sure, we're young, let's try it for a couple of years"! I sent my application in. It involved not only the Hawaiian Island Refuge, but also everything else that was being done in Hawaii, including work on Midway Island where I had spent a lot of time doing bird bone measurements and things of that nature. I understood something about the Hawaiian ecosystem. We applied for the job, and I never really thought too much about it. But one day, I got a call, and there were two gentlemen on the phone. The first one was Forest Carpenter and the second one was Lynn Greenwalt. Forest Carpenter was the Regional Supervisor of Refuges at that time, and he called up to tell me that I had been selected for the Hawaiian job. He told me that he really didn't think that I should take it. He told me, "We have bigger things planned for you in Region 3, so I think you ought to deny it". Lynn Greenwalt got on the phone, he was working under Forest, and he said, "Dave, let me tell you something. You could turn this job down but just think how broadened you would be if you ever went out to Hawaii and spent a couple of years out there. You are young enough, and it would broaden your horizons tremendously". They told me that there was only one Fish and Wildlife Service person there, and that he was going to be retiring in about a year, and that I would be "Mister Hawaii". So we decided that we would go ahead and do it. So there was a move from South Dakota, where the temperatures were really high, down to Hawaii, where we knew no one. It was traumatic. We spent there for a year or two. I was a GS-11. Then the Endangered Species Act came through and they decided to hire a few more people. While I was out there, I was a Game Agent. I did all of the River Basins work, and I did all of the rest of the Service work, including the expeditions out in the remote, uninhabited islands. It was a wonderful experience. The family learned how to surf and swim and we mountain climbed and did all of the wonderful things that you can do in the outbacks of Hawaii. After three years, it just got bigger and bigger. And after five years, I wondered how much longer it was going to last. I was nominated by Lynn Greenwalt to go back and take a job in Washington. That was after four years in Hawaii. I declined it. I said that I still loved Hawaii. After the fifth year he again came after me, he said, "We'd love for you to come in to the office". Lynn Greenwalt at that time was the Chief of Refuges, I believe. So we decided to do it. We moved back into Washington. We were back there for nine years.

Back when I was in South Dakota, I went into the Departmental Training program. I had six months in Washington, in the Departmental Training Program. When I was finished with that, I came back out into the field, and I said, that I would “Never, never, never, go back in to Washington”. The Biologist at the field station said, “I bet you will”. And I said, “I bet I won’t”! We made a wager. And the wager was that within five years, I would be in the Washington office. The winner would receive a case of shotgun shells from the loser. Dangling in my head, when we moved out to Hawaii was the thought that I would never, never, never go in to the Washington office. Well, it was five years and two months later, when I moved in to the Washington office. So I got the case of shotgun shells, I won the bet. We had a very interesting experience in those nine years in Washington. I had a series of different jobs; everywhere from a staff biologist job to budgeting. Those of course were the years when the kids were growing up and going through High School. They were years that I wanted to spent with the family, as well as pursue my career. There were also times when you a lot of disruption at the higher levels of the Fish and Wildlife Service with Administration changes. It was people like Lynn Greenwalt being asked to leave one afternoon, and some very, very dramatic things happened in those years. After I moved from Refuges to PDW or Program Development Wildlife I was in charge of the wildlife budget under Bill Mieshack and Duputch [names sic] for a while. This was the time when the Area Office concept was being established and I was given the opportunity to go to Jackson, Mississippi and two or three other places. I turned them down. Finally, after nine years, in my last year I worked for Jansen and Hester. They put the pressure on my to come up and work as a Special Assistant to the Director, which I did. I did that for one year. There were long hours. I came in early and staid late in Washington. But it was an exciting job, just to see how the Service runs. You get a much broader perspective. After that year, there were a couple of opportunities that came open. There were two Deputy Regional Director positions open. One was in Portland, Oregon, and the other was in Alaska. I said, “Anybody can go to Portland, but not anybody can go to Alaska”! Since I love hunting and fishing and the outdoors, I wanted to do that, just for a couple of years. So we did. We sent our last child off to college. We brought them up to college, and then we moved. We took lock, stock and barrel and moved up to Anchorage.

MR. BRIMM: What year was that?

MR. OLSEN: That would have been in the mid 1980s. We moved up there, and that was the time when the Alaska economy was booming. The oil business was just going wild. They told us to go ahead and by a townhouse because the prices were going up. There were only one hundred thousand dollars at the time and surely they would double. I had cold feet about that. I felt like something was going to happen so we rented for five years. During those five years, those people who had bought townhouses for one hundred thousand dollars saw them go down in value to twenty thousand. We hit the peak of that, and never did enjoy the benefits of making money in Alaska, but we had a marvelous job up there. My wife worked at the University of Alaska. She finished her

Master's degree up there. The kids came up to visit us there too. I could go on for hours and hours talking about the hunting, and outdoor wildlife experiences up there. And I did it all. We lived on Salmon and Halibut, I didn't catch big Halibut, and I think the biggest one I caught was one hundred and nineteen pounds. But that is a pretty good-sized fish.

MR. BRIMM: That is a lot of good food.

MR. OLSEN: There was more Salmon than I would ever want to eat. There was also a lot of Caribou and Moose. We had a marvelous time, and met a lot of wonderful people up there. I got involved in everything as a result of being Deputy Regional Director. I went back to a couple of training sessions: these were the years when Dunkle came in. You remember Dunkle don't you?

MR. BRIMM: Oh yes.

MR. OLSEN: He was the one that came in and fired my boss, Bob Gilmore. He yanked him out and said, "I want you out of here in a matter of days". Some other strange things happened in those years. But I staid on there, I was working under Bob Putz who was the Regional Director. Then Gilmore came in, and when Gilmore left Walt Stiegelt, whom I had worked with for a number of years came up as the Regional Director. So we staid in Alaska for five marvelous years. I wouldn't trade them for anything. I think it was the best place we ever went. Then, Dunkle came back in, and I had been through the NCS training program and he wanted me back in the ARD for wildlife. So I took the job as Assistant Director for Refuges and Wildlife. I spent five years there in the NCS position. I then retired from that position and have since moved to Roanoke, Virginia where I treasure the memories of a wonderful thirty-two years that we have had in the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

MR. BRIMM: What year did you retire?

MR. OLSEN: I retired in 1994.

MR. BRIMM: Let's spend a little time on some of the Fish and Wildlife Service issues that you might have been involved in.

MR. OLSEN: Most of the training that I received was on the job training. And the hours that I worked very varied. In the early years, in the Fish and Wildlife Service, people never worried about hours. You just went out there and you banded ducks early in the morning and you worked late at night, whatever was necessary. No one ever kept track of those things. That kind of dedication really attracted me, and it was tough to see the change occur that I have seen in the last few years where there is no longer quite the dedication that there was when I started. There are people worried about forty hours and not quite so worried about getting the job done. That's one thing that has been a little bit

tough in terms of changes in the Service. The other thing is that when you first started, you got to know just about everybody there was. The Fish and Wildlife Service was more of a family kind of thing. It was a close-knit, family and people were concerned about other people. Personal lives were taken into consideration and adjustments were made for them. Toward the end, when life became more complex and decisions had to be made based on the economics and those kinds of things, that's how they were made. So things are a lot different than they were in those years.

There was a question: "Did you witness any Service inventions or innovations?" [Reading from a questionnaire] I guess that some of the legislation that came in. I wouldn't call them innovations, but I started my career before the Endangered Species Act. When you take a look at the implications of the Endangered Species Act on the Service, they were dramatic in terms of our methods of operations, our budgets, in terms of what people did on field stations and what the emphasis was. I think that the whole world better as a result of having the Endangered Species Act. There are some times when it may have gone too far, but still, the Endangered Species Act was a major stepping stone in preservation of our natural resources. I was very much involved in land acquisition. I would hate to think of how many millions of dollars I was responsible for signing off in terms of land acquisition. The Wetlands Program, and many new Refuges came in while I was involved. That was one change that I feel really good about.

Another one of the questions was, "Did you work with animals?" I have to laugh because the most rewarding jobs that I had were the ones with hands-on experience. I really enjoyed banding ducks, and banding geese and doing those kinds of things. I also set cannon-net traps and things of that nature. You could see what they did. On the other hand, as I began to question why we did some things people said "We don't need you out in the field anymore. We'll move you to a higher position". I guess that the experiences that I had in the field paid off in terms of my judgment, later on in my career. But, they were not as rewarding. They were not as fulfilling and personally rewarding. A good feeling was when you won a million or two million dollars in a budget battle, but it's hard to see the impact of something like that. You do know that somebody out in the field is going to benefit from in. But in terms of personal satisfaction, it just didn't have it like it did, when you are out in the field.

"What is your feeling towards animals?" [Reading from questionnaire] I love them, and I hunt them and I eat them, and that hasn't changed at all over the time.

MR. BRIMM: What about support from outside groups? How did they feel about the Service during your career?

MR. OLSEN: I think that early in my career I was frustrated by the fact that people did not know the difference between the State and the Federal agencies. They would say, "He works for Fish and Game." And I would get really perturbed by that because Fish

and Game is not the same as The Fish and Wildlife Service. I was very provincial early on in my career, and then as you become older, and little more mellow it doesn't really matter that much. The competition should not be there as long as your goals and objectives are similar, and as long as you are trying to do something for the natural resources. I think as you become older and wiser, you become a little more tolerant of some of the changes like that. In some places where we have worked, like in Hawaii, we had major differences between the State and Federal agencies in terms of managing the Fisheries resources and what we felt should be managed in terms of the Refuge resources. We had some of that in Minnesota, and we had it while I was in Washington. I was the Chairman of the Migratory Bird Regulations Committee, and that's a prime of example of where the Feds say, "These are what the waterfowl populations are. This is what you should take". And you have fifty States in there saying, "That's not enough". So, trying to balance State requirements with resource needs is a tough one. Anybody that sits on the Regulations Committee appreciates that. Then, you further add to it the political aspect where you've got high-powered political people who feel that "Louisiana has done a lot for this Administration, we want a bigger duck season". When you add that flavor to it, it makes it even more difficult. But as you become involved in these positions, you recognize what power politics has. I think a prime example is the building that we are sitting in today. [NCTC] I remember when we talked about having a training center. I said that my vote was to have it located somewhere in the center of the State. [He meant country] My suggestion was to have it at someplace like Crab Orchard, somewhere where you've got a lot of land that you didn't have to pay for, and it would be centrally located. Or, at some place close to an airport so we could fly in and out. This training center is wonderful, but it doesn't have those things. It takes you a long time to get here from wherever. That is the power of politics. I think that the Fish and Wildlife Service did well to recognize the power of Mr. Byrd and utilize it. Hopefully the efforts here will prosper. It is certainly a marvelous Center, but it is a typical example of the pork barrel kind of stuff. It is not the kind of facility that you would see in most Fish and Wildlife Service stuff. But that's what politics is, and you have to play it for what it is worth. That is a change that I think that you see in people when they go from the purist, as a wildlife biologist, or a fisheries biologist and you're working with fish populations, then all of a sudden you see the impact of politics on this. As you mature, you realize that you don't fight politics, but you have to use politics to further the resource issues that we are dealing with.

MR. BRIMM: Give us some of the highlights of issues that you were involved with, or some of the ones that caused you the biggest headaches.

MR. OLSEN: I think that being the Chairman of the Waterfowl Regulations Committee puts you under a tremendous amount of pressure from all of the State Representatives. Each one of them would be trying to get their way with the Season. And then with the political pressure coming on, that is a tough one. They caused me to gain a few gray hairs. The other issue that has always been tough is law enforcement. I was a Supervisor

in law enforcement and in undercover operations you became very much involved in following the operations to determine when was enough. We had law enforcement agents, and I am not being critical, who would spend their whole career working on one case, trying to make it bigger and bigger. Our job was to try and determine “When is big enough”. And “When should we close down on some of these operations?” I think that the other frustrating that was when you could see a need for some of the resources, and they just wouldn’t come. That was very frustrating.

MR. BRIMM: I would like to spend a moment or two on some of your Supervisors, or folks that mentored and helped to share your career.

MR. OLSEN: Some Supervisors you learn positive things from. There are other Supervisors who you learn negative things from. One of the first Supervisors that I had, I won’t mention his name, but he was a Refuge Manager. He was always cutting corners. It was in northern Minnesota. I think he is still alive. We used to go fishing up in Ontario and he would say, “We’ll just take the Federal boat and motor. Put a set of temporary license on that thing and haul it down to go fishing”. We did, we didn’t know any better as GS-5 and GS-7 employees. I think of things like that, that he had done, and the favors that he gave, when he had his deer hunting buddies going out on the Refuge and killing deer and we had to take our weasels and snow machines out there and haul those deer in, it was totally inappropriate. Those kinds of things, I learned from. I felt that those were the kinds of things that I will not do when I become a Manager. We had negative things like that, as well as some people who walked the narrow line. Lynn Greenwalt was probably one of those individuals who I have respected for years and years. Forest Carpenter was one, who passed away not too long ago. John Gottschalk has passed away. And those individuals were leaders, and they were able to provide some contagious enthusiasm for new directions for the Refuge. That is the kind of leadership that I really remember. I think that we still have some of those kinds of people, including Dale Hall. [Mr. Hall enters room]

MR. BRIMM: Hey! Hi, there Dale!

MR. OLSEN: We were talking about leaders. I mentioned your name.

MR. BRIMM: Yeah, he’s a rusty leader too!

MR. OLSEN: He looks a little skuzzy, but other than that...

MR. HALL: You don’t mind if I sit here do you?

MR. OLSEN: No. But anyway, those are the kinds of leaders that I felt were good. They had contagious enthusiasm and vision for the future. And within the Directors of the Fish and Wildlife Service, as I think back; I used to try to think which one were

managers, and which ones were leaders. We had some managers, and I love them dearly, like Dick Smith. He was not a leader, not at all. He was a manager.

MR. HALL: Just pretend that I am not here.

MR. OLSEN: I am. But he was a manager. There was a guy who worried about the nuts and bolts, but he did not provide the inspirational leadership. Guys like John Gottschalk and Lynn Greenwalt; although I loved Lynn Greenwalt very much, sometimes I would have a very difficult time wondering what he said. But you always got up and cheered him because he shed light on where the Service ought to be going. And you always felt like, "Boy, I want to be part of that. I'm not sure what it is, but I want to be part of it". So, I would say the Greenwalt and Gottschalk were two that I remember from my career that were some of the best leaders that we had. Certainly, Dunkle was a bad excuse for a Director, he really was. He was vindictive. He did not provide the example for leadership to others. Then, we had other ones like Jansen. Some of these political guys that came in who were not really leaders, they were sort of like managers. Then, we had guys like Gene Hester, who I worked for personally for years. There was a guy who came out of Research, and he really didn't have a vision for the future, but he was a fair manager. Bob Putz, in my estimation was not a manager like Dick Smith. But he got up and had the troops behind him because he set a stage like; "This is where we're going to go folks." He involved people in decision-making, and asking "Where are we heading, and how can you help us get there"? What we need in the Service, the best balance is to have a Director that is a visionary, like Lynn Greenwalt who can testify well on The Hill, and represent our budget. Then we need a "toughy" like Dick Smith. I don't see that many. As a matter of fact, I sat down with Putz one day and I put all the names of the Directorate on a piece of paper. I said, "Which ones are leaders, and which ones are managers". Most of them were managers, but the guys like Rick Coleman; There is a guy who can walk into a room, and sort of take charge. He brings everybody together. He's got some leadership characteristics that not many folks have. Some people can't survive under someone who wants tight control, and he didn't. But what we really need is that kind of spirit and leadership. I don't think that it is necessary for the leader to come out of Fish and Wildlife Service. I think that you can get some leadership kinds of people from somewhere else. John Turner was inspirational; he was not on the level of Greenwalt and Gottschalk, but he was the sort of inspirational person that was not that much of a manager.

MR. BRIMM: Leaders like Lynn or John; how would they have done over the last ten years, under changing Administrations and processes?

MR. OLSEN: Lynn and John would have done wonderfully. They really would have. Then, we've got some of the Assistant Secretary guys like Ray Arnett. I wonder how in the world he ever got in that position. But we've also got guys like Haden, who was an ex-Governor. Now there's a guy who had a zest for leadership. He could set the charge.

He could get in there and say, "That's where we are going". He was a leader. He was a smart, political leader. But unfortunately, we don't always end up with those smart, political leaders in the positions we have. Ray Arnett is a prime example. And Don Barry, he may be a lawyer and that kind of stuff, but he just doesn't have the kind of stuff you really need. I think what the Service has got to do, and I am probably getting off of the subject...

MR. BRIMM: Oh, you are doing well.

MR. OLSEN: The Service has got to identify, at a younger age, some of these people who have some leadership characteristics. And try to develop and use these people. I think that I was one who had been through the Washington office and feel very strongly about Washington office experience. I think it is a kind of experience that broadens one, and puts things in perspective. It makes people realize that the Fish and Wildlife Service is not everything is the world. If you walk onto a plane and ask the people if they have ever heard of the Fish and Wildlife Service, ninety-five percent of them will have never heard of it. I think that if you pick your people early, and try to bring them in to the Washington office and give them a broader experience, that's really what we need. Unfortunately, we've got people who are always aspiring for higher positions. They start early. I can think of a couple that said, "Boy, I want to be the Director", early on. And they just didn't have what it took. From the first Refuge Manager training school... What are you going to do with this?

MR. BRIMM: We are eventually going to write a book of the history of the Service.

MR. OLSEN: But if I say something derogatory about a person, you won't use the name will you?

MR. BRIMM: You can tell us what to use and what not to use.

MR. OLSEN: I can remember Hal O'Connor. He was Assistant Director for Wildlife or something like that. But I was in the early training program with him, back when we were both GS-5 and GS-7s. This guy, from his early career, would work twelve hours a day, and would spend all of his time, rubbing shoulders with the highest individuals; brown-nosing them and just trying to get where he wanted to be, because he wanted to be a Director. He never made it, but he sure stepped on a lot of people trying to get there. You don't need that kind of people. It comes up to "Where is the Service going"? I have been out of it for five or six years, but I just wonder where do we go from here. I think that the answer is to try and identify some of these younger people. Look at a guy like Dale Hall, he has been around for a while, he probably knows who some of these folks are. We need to try and groom them to be our next array of leaders. Although most of my experience has been in Refuges, I don't really care who is the Director or the Regional Director. It doesn't matter that they have experience in Fisheries or Refuges or whatever,

but if they have a broad understanding of natural resource kind of issues, and can listen to issues from both sides; that's what we need, people with leadership skills like that.

MR. BRIMM: What about some of the highest points or lowest points of your career?

MR. OLSEN: I am not sure that I had one really high point. My whole career was on a high. There were some low points when you have to work for a guy like the guy I have to work for in Hawaii, and when I had to work for Dunkle. I could see some of the things that were being done. I didn't have any really low times. Most of my career was very high. I was always very positive about it. Some of those people that I worked with, I couldn't quite get along with all of the time, but I really didn't have any lows. I never aspired to be where I ended up. I aspired to be a GS-11 Manager at Swan Lake. I never got there, but I never aspired to be too high. I guess my philosophy was, "Hey, have a good time. Work hard in what ever position you're in, and whatever comes down the road will come". I never aspired to end up in a SCS position but it just sort of happened.

MR. BRIMM: Do you wish you had done anything differently?

MR. OLSEN: Not really. I think that if I had it to do all over again I probably ...

[End of tape. The following is the beginning of side B]

It's memories and anticipation. Those of us who have had a full career in the Fish and Wildlife Service have a wealth of memories beyond recall. The problem is that when you get to be 67 years old, what do you have left to anticipate? And time is running out! You don't have the physical body that you once did, and some of those goals that you set early on. So you have to anticipate other kinds of things. But I really like that statement about "All you've got are anticipation and memories". All of life, at this point is nothing but lots of fond memories.

MR. BRIMM: Isn't that great. Did you have any moments in your career that were fairly dangerous in any of your assignments?

MR. OLSEN: Oh, I've got one, how about politically dangerous?

MR. BRIMM: Yeah.

MR. OLSEN: When I was in South Dakota, I was young and a purist and a hard charger. The Wetlands program had just started and the terms of the easements were: "You shall not burn, drain, or fill the Wetland". We had one person who decided that he didn't care about these regulations. So he was out there pumping out of his Wetland, and draining it. These were the early years, when the Fish and Wildlife Service didn't know what to do when they had a violation. I went up and observed him, and had a trainee go out there to

record days, and times, and how much how pumping he was doing. I would report this into the Regional office, and I would say, "We need to have law enforcement come down and stop this. We have to take this guy to court". It was like writing to the Washington office. [All laughing] I finally got fed up with it and I said, "I'll fix these buggers". So we had a big Sportsmen's Club meeting down in Brookings in Sioux Falls, I went in and gave a program on the Wetlands Program. There were fifty or sixty people there. After they program, they thought it was great and that we were doing wonderful stuff and they said, "Is there anything that we can do to help you?" I said, "Well, we've got at least one individual that is just flaunting these regulations in front of us, and outright violating the regulations." He said, "Well, what do you think we can do"? I whipped out a letter, and told him that he could send this letter to his Congressman. The letter said what was going on, and it would have been good to have a working Sportsmen's Club sign it. They said that this sounded like a good idea and that they would help me out. Those suckers went and took my letter. Senator Munt was the Senator at the time. They sent it to him and said, "Dave Olsen from the Fish and Wildlife Service came around and spoke to our group about Wetlands violations and he did an excellent job. But he asked that we send this in to you." If you've been in Washington, you know what happened next. I got a reprimand. This is not the way to do business. They told me that I may have an issue, but this was not the way to solve it. I had a really severe reprimand early in my career. That was probably a downer at the time. In fact, they told me that I should be more like Bob Fields. [All laughing] That was a downer, and that was probably politically dangerous. You learn that you don't do dumb things like that. I had some other things happen that were politically dangerous. One time in Alaska, we had the White Mountains on fire and it was probably an eight or nine hundred acre or maybe a five thousand acre fire, which is not uncommon in Alaska. The fire was burning, and the policy of the Service and BLM was "unless it is destroying personal property, let it burn." There are hundreds or thousands of lightning strikes happening all of the time in Alaska and you just can't afford to put them all out. I was Acting Regional Director, and I got a call from one of the elders from one of the Eskimo villages. He said, "Mr. Olsen, the smoke is so bad up here". I had told them, "Don't put it out". He went on to say, "The smoke is so bad, our elderly people can't breathe, and it's a very serious situation, you are going to have to do something about it". Our guy said that the smoke wasn't bad. I started thinking about adding the political implications of all of this stuff. I am thinking of the newspapers coming out saying that there were "two village elders who died as a result of the Fish and Wildlife Services". And I am also thinking about Senator Stephens, who is a prime benefactor of some of the major budget increases, like Byrd here. All he has to do is call.

I said, "Put that fire out". I had BLM in turmoil, and Fish and Wildlife in turmoil. "He has overruled us!" I don't know how many millions of dollars it cost to put that fire out but we had the smoke jumpers and the bombers and all of that come in there. I alienated myself with the Fish and Wildlife Service, but it was one of those decisions that sometimes you have to make when you are in that kind of position. I guess the funny part about it was, and we hired all of the local Eskimos to fight the fire; when I left

Alaska, one of the gifts that they gave me was a letter from the citizens of Stephens Village. They said, "Dear Mr. Olsen, We the citizens of Stephens City are very upset about the fact that you are leaving. You made a wonderful call last summer during the fire and if it were not for your call, none of us would have been able to buy snowmobiles, drink the rest of the winter. We are sorry to see you go." That was sort of funny. The only other one that was physically dangerous was when I was leading an expedition of scientists on a tour of the Leeward Islands. It's between Honolulu and Laisan [sic?] Island. They are uninhabited islands. I did about three or four of these trips a year. There was a vessel that was about one hundred and twenty feet long. We had people from Scripts; all of them "fancy" scientists. They would go with us and check the marine life. I would go and band seals and turtles. We came to an island called Neccer [sic]. It is about one hundred and forty-three acres and about one hundred and seventy-five feet tall. We went around to where we would normally land, and there were swells in the Pacific of about twenty feet. It was a situation where you wait for the swell to bring the boat up, jump off, and the swell would take the boat back down. It was very dangerous. It was too dangerous, and I decided that we should not disembark there. I told everyone that if they really wanted to get onto this island, we would have to go around to another place called Shark Cove, where I had never landed at before. We went around to the back end of this island and pulled in at a place that looked relatively calm. There was a sandy bottom about eight or nine feet deep. We pulled in there and just as we did a whole school of sharks, like forty sharks, came right in and circled the boat. I said, "This doesn't look like a very good place to go". In just a few minutes, they all left. [The sharks] I said that I would jump in. I had a mask, snorkels and a twelve-gauge "bang-stick". I said that I would jump in, and if there were no problems, the rest could follow. I jumped in and make a quick spin around. There were no sharks. I started swimming, and I had to go about sixty feet. I got about thirty feet from the boat and all of sudden six sharks came full speed at me. There I was with my single-shot bang-stick with six sharks coming at me. They went right underneath me. Then they came by me again. I wasn't sure exactly how many sharks there were, so I kept on moving to the shore because I thought I was pretty close. I got right up to the shore, I grabbed onto a rock, and a swell knocked me back into the water. The second time, I stood up there. I scampered up on to the edge. I was really scared. I counted forty shark right there in front of me, just swimming around. Then they went right back out to the boat as if to say, "Send us another one, he's too big"! I motioned the boat to come in, and I made a flying leap into it and we were out of there. That was very scary in terms of physical danger. We've had a lot of bear attacks in Alaska that were critical. One lady was banding and running a bait station. We sent them all through a week of bear training. But she got out of her tent, and she was alone. She walked about seventy-five feet and decided that she ought to go back and get her shotgun. She got back down to the bait station that was maybe one hundred feet away. She got pretty close and heard a noise and turned around and there was big Grizzly running full speed at her. She had enough time to raise that shotgun and get one shot off. She was not an outdoor person. She got one shot off and nailed that bear, right between the eyes! It landed five feet from her. She said that there had to be divine guidance in that

bullet because there was no way in the world she would have gotten that shot otherwise. Can you imagine trying to hit a running bear? That was a tough one. There were a lot of incidents. Ships sunk and people were lost. There were a lot of experiences out in Alaska that have been dangerous. I hope you can get some of these people who can talk about some of their Alaska experiences. Some of there are pretty hairy.

MR. BRIMM: Is there anything that you would like to tell folks about your career, or about the Service? Are there any changes that you have seen? Maybe you could get us some perspective into your thoughts of the future and where the Service should be headed?

MR. OLSEN: Some of the changes were that the Service has changed from a kind of a family organization to now one of technological advances that almost eliminated the human kind of caring that we once had. But the technological advances that we have had are absolutely unbelievable. When I think of what email has done, and what GPSs do, and the kind of work and research that we can do, it is just marvelous. I just wish that we had some of those tools in the earlier years. I think people treasure fish and wildlife resources, endangered species, clean water more now than they ever did. The reason is that these things are being threatened more than they ever were before. People are beginning to understand that there is a constant conflict between economic development and preservation of our natural resources. They all know that we've got too many people on this Earth. Hopefully, we will elect politicians who will be able to sort out where we are going to go. I think that land acquisition has been very good. In my career, people always wanted to know when it was going to stop. We never really had a good answer for land acquisition other than the fact that they are not making any more. But sooner or later, it has got to go down. We have got to try and take advantage, and take care of some of the lands that we have. As far as my career goes, I would not have changed a bit. I worked with wonderful people and some not-so-wonderful people. We have had some down days, but it's always been a really wonderful career. I wish you excellent luck in transcribing all of this stuff, and trying to pull out of it what is meaningful. I am sure that if you get to people who have a lot of experience in the Service, a lot of field experiences, that it would be very good.

MR. BRIMM: Well, you are part of our family. We are trying to save our heritage and we appreciate your time with us for this oral interview. You'll have an opportunity to review the transcript when it gets transcribed. If there are parts of that that you prefer not be public knowledge, you can identify such, so they won't be used in a book in the future or something like that. We'll honor your requests in that matter.

MR. OLSEN: I don't mind the positive references to names like Greenwalt and Gottschalk. But the negative references to Dunkle and the like would not be appropriate. And let's go turkey hunting!

MR. BRIMM: We thank you for that. And we'll get our turkeys calls out here. [Has a call and uses it to make a turkey noise] We've a guy right over here that can do that! Thank you very much, it has been a pleasure!