

REPORTING (ALMOST) TO OUR FIRST DUTY STATION

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When I graduated from Humboldt State College in January 1963, I had already worked for Fish and Wildlife Service three summers in Refuges' student trainee program (one summer at Stillwater Refuge in Nevada, and two summers at Sacramento Refuge in California). The Service was hiring a lot of biologists in those days (those were the days!) and, if you were in the student trainee program, you were pretty much guaranteed a job at graduation. You didn't get to choose where that job would be, but you did have a job waiting for you.

As graduation neared, I had a number of phone conversations with Gib Bassett, our Region 1 personnel officer. Sally was very much pregnant with our first child, and I was able to get a two month delay reporting for duty. There had been various rumors about where we might be going, but Gib warned me not to do anything until I actually had my transfer papers in hand. The papers finally arrived, and I found I had been assigned to the Merced Refuge in central California.

As a student trainee, I was a career-conditional employee, and had some financial coverage for our move. Unfortunately, I was only covered from my last duty station (Sacramento Refuge) to the new one, a distance of a couple hundred miles. To save some of the money that we didn't really have, we decided to make the move from Humboldt to Merced in our '51 Ford sedan. We thought we could probably do it in two round-trips, paying only to have our (very limited) furniture moved by truck.

Even though Sally was eight months pregnant, we loaded up the car, and drove the 500 miles down the Redwood Highway and through the Bay Area to Merced. I had never been to refuge headquarters, but had worked six months for California Department of Fish and Game on their wildlife area at nearby Los Banos, so the territory was familiar. Another assignment in the Central Valley hadn't been our dream, but as we drove Sandy Mush Road, we saw the obligatory refuge coot, and felt like we were "home."

That feeling changed quickly as we entered the refuge office. Don White, the manager, was there by himself. (I don't think he had a clerk, at that time.) He asked, not particularly cordially, as I recall, who we were. I said, "I'm your new assistant manager." "I don't think so," he replied. "I better call Mac."

"Mac," Ken McDonald, was Region 1 refuge supervisor. He was pretty liked and respected, I think, but he liked to move his field folks around, sometimes on fairly short notice. We stood in the office, and listened to Don's half of the phone call to Portland. Mac was obviously doing most of the talking. When the call was over, Don turned to us, and said, "Mac says you're not coming here." He paused. "Mac also says that I'm not staying here."

We climbed in our still-loaded Ford, and drove back to the Redwoods. A month later, with a 9 day old baby boy, we were headed for Minidoka Refuge in southern Idaho. Don was also on his way north, to Bowdoin in Montana.

NOTE: My FWS career ran from 1960 to 1994, beginning with Refuges (Regions 1 and 4), moving to Research (Patuxent field staff), then to Region 1 Endangered Species, and finally back to Region 1 Refuges. – Sandy Wilbur, 4367 S. E. 16th Street, Gresham, OR 97080. E-mail: symbios@ix.netcom.com